

The Ethnic Federalism Paradox of the Civil War in Ethiopia (2020-2022)

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Abstract: Paradoxical ethnic cleavages is manifesting with multiple complexities in the Civil War in Ethiopia (CWE). Ethiopia operates an ethnic-federal system principally predicated on language and culture. The specific objective of the study is to evaluate the CWE in the light of ethnic-identity cleavages and to identify the non-conformity to the norm. In accordance, the study is guided by three research questions. Primordialism is the theoretical framework while the qualitative method is the research methodology of the study. The paradox in the raging CWE is that Oromo – the ethnic state of Prime Minister Abiy is at war against the government of Ethiopia under the leadership of their son. A greater paradox is that the Amhara ethnic-State is at war with the Oromo. Atrocities are being committed by the Amhara against the Oromo and Abiy is in a dilemma because of the paradox. The alliance of Eritrea is the greatest asset of Abiy. Paradoxically, Eritrea and Tigray speak the same language indicative of same ethnicity. In conclusion, the CWE reveals that the quest for political and economic empowerment trumps over ethnic-cleavages as causal factors of conflict. The study recommends that economic and political benefits should not be treated with levity.

Keywords: Ethnic-Identity, Paradox, Civil War, Ethiopia, Abiy.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a manifestation of paradoxical ethnic cleavages in the Ethiopian Civil War. Ethiopia operates an ethnic-federal system with eleven regional states principally predicated on language and culture. The civil war which began in the second quarter of 2021 as a degeneration of the Tigray Conflict that began on the 4th of November 2020 has engulfed most of the ethnic-States. Paradoxically, the Oromo ethnic-State has joined forces with Tigray to fight the Federal Government of Ethiopia (FGE) under the leadership of Prime Minister Abiy who is Oromo in ethnicity. Another paradox is that the Amhara ethnic-State is at war with the Oromo ethnic-State with attendant atrocities. The Oromo are fighting to pull down the regime of their own son while the Amhara are fighting the Oromo to protect the regime of Abiy the son of their adversary.

The militia of different ethnic-States has aligned with the major warring parties. The atrocities committed by Eritrea against Tigray in their support of the Abiy led FGE is another paradox. The Republic of Eritrea was at a time part of the Republic of Ethiopia. Eritrea and Tigray belongs to the same geopolitical unit and have Tigrinya as their language which depicts same ethnic-identity. By the logical deductions of existing conflict theories, Eritrea ought not to be at war with Tigray and ought to support Tigray against other warring ethnic-State(s) in times of conflict.

The specific objective of the study is to evaluate the Civil War in Ethiopia in the light of the ethnic-identity cleavages and to identify the non-conformities or paradox to the norm. In accordance, the study is guided by the following **research questions**. What is the nature of the Civil War in Ethiopia? How is ethnic-federalism paradox manifesting in the Ethiopian civil war? What are the political undertones of the Ethiopian Civil War?

Primordialism is the theoretical framework of this study. Primordialism holds the view that ethnic conflicts are fundamentally caused by disparities in ethnic identities [1, 2]. Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Johann Gottfried Herder are the major proponents of Primordialism. From the point of view of these

great scholars, there is a symbiotic relationship between language and thought. In the same manner that each language is learnt in community, so do the reasoning or thinking process of each community vary and creates a fixed nature over time on communities or ethnic groups [3]

The Primordialist theory revolves on the orbit of ethnic identity or cultural differences that is said to be a natural phenomenon inherent in human nature [1, 4] Ethnic identity as the major causal factor of conflicts is assigned at birth and genealogically passed on from generation to generation. The members of an ethnicity have a group consciousness which emanates from their common history, language, tradition and culture. Ethnic consciousness, get consolidated over the years through symbols and myths, that are passed from generation to generation. Thus, as the ethnic group's language was passed down from generation to generation, so was the group's ethnic spirit passed down to this present generation [4].

There is an in-group that shares a common blood, feeling of cooperation and patriotism to themselves. Conversely there is an out-group that are antagonistic and dreaded because of ancient antipathies and conflicts which creates mutual fear and mistrust that degenerates into perennial conflicts [2, 1]. Primordialist proffer that members of the in-group enjoy hospitable, friendly and peaceful relations with themselves. Conversely, hostilities and conflicts abound between the in-group and the out-group [5, 1]. Ethnic conflicts inevitably occur because of the ancestral or ancient misgivings and hatreds arising from the quest and fear of domination and suppression between the in-group and the out-group [1].

Ethnic conflicts are common-place phenomena and abound in multiethnic societies [6]. Primordialists are of the view that ethnic conflicts occur because of past atrocities that resonates when there are minor disagreements which inevitably rekindles hostilities, aggression and more conflicts [4]. It is normal for a rival ethnic groups to battle with each other for purposes of achieving their conflicting goals [7].

There is a close link between the discourse of Max Weber concerning the primordial foundations of society rooted in kinship with the biological heritage of the primordial theory of ethnicity because it has a natural genetic tincture which evolves from the ancient [8]. Primordialists are of the opinion that people have just one ethnic identity which is ineffaceable or unchangeable and subject to exogenous historical processes [9].

In the context of the Ethiopian Civil War, the theory of primordialism has adequate explanatory power on the Oromo ethnic-State and the Amhara ethnic-State but grossly deficient in explaining the atrocities of Eritrea against Tigray despite having Tigrinya as their language. It doesn't also explain why the Oromo ethnic-State would join forces with Tigray ethnic-State to fight the government of Ethiopia under the leadership of an Oromo Prime Minister Abiy. It is deficient in adequate explanatory power on why the Amhara ethnic-State would be at war against the Oromo, the ethnic-State of the Prime Minister Abiy as part of the efforts of protecting the regime of Abiy who is of Oromo Ethnic State.

There is also the critique which is centred on the high premium attached on ethnic identities as predicated on language and culture as the paramount causal factors of ethnic conflict. Implicit in this thesis is the fact that homogenous societies will be peaceful and in contrast heterogeneous societies will be conflict prone. Rwanda was a homogenous society (one language and culture) but experienced major conflicts that culminated into the Rwandan Genocide. On the other hand Cameroon and Botswana are heterogeneous societies but enjoy high latitude of cordial inter-ethnic relations [2, 1].

Finally, ethnic identities can change and are not absolutely permanent as was the case in Rwanda. Tutsi and Hutu as ethnic labels were the creation of Belgian authorities when they colonized Rwanda for purposes of polarizing the population of Rwanda as a divide and rule tactics. This artificial creation has come to stay with all the negative consequences [10]. The implication is that people may have more than one ethnic identity and that ethnicity is not permanent but may be swayed by social influences and travails or social constructivism in popular parlance [11].

No doubt, ethnic identity is a major trigger of conflicts. This is especially so when there are memories of atrocities between these ethnic groups and if there are agitations that orchestrate common efforts or desires to mitigate in the face of past experience of human sufferings, and sacrifices predicated on

disparities in ethnicity [6]. The Civil War in Ethiopia reveals that the quest for political and economic empowerment can overwhelm ethnic-identities and create intra cum inter ethnic conflicts with multiple complexities.

Qualitative Method is the research methodology of the study. It consists of content and documentary analysis whereby data was gathered through mainly secondary sources like text books, journals, newspapers, internet materials etc. The gathered data was reviewed and critically analysed. The article is divided into five sections. We are already in the first section which is the introduction. The second is the Civil War in Ethiopia; the third section is on Ethiopian ethnic federalism paradox; the fourth section is the political power undertones of the Ethiopian Civil War and section five is the summary of findings, conclusion and recommendation.

2. THE CIVIL WAR IN ETHIOPIA

The Tigray Conflict that began on the 4th of November 2020 is gradually degenerating into a full-blown Civil War in Ethiopia. “An Oromo uprising has developed in parallel to the Tigray war” [12]. Several resistance movements and militia groups have coalesced with key belligerents in the conflict. The militias simultaneously develop strategic alliances and intersecting tactics in tandem with the key combatants thereby entangling the broad mass of the population of Ethiopia in the Civil War [13]. The FGE and TPLF are the major belligerents of the war predicated on their “opposing visions of what the Ethiopian polity is and how it should be configured—based on either devolved power and regional political autonomy or centralization” [13].

The belligerent alignments of the Civil War in Ethiopia are such that there is the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF), the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF), the Amhara Regional Special Forces and Fano Militia on the one side while on the other side are the Tigray Defence Force (TDF), Tigrayan militias, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), the Sidema ethnic group etc [14]. “Prime Minister Abiy is contending with conflict from Tigray in the north, bitter opponents via the Oromo in southern and central Ethiopia - not to mention calls for autonomy by the Sidema ethnic group in southwest Ethiopia” [15].

Amhara have long joined forces with the FGE in the civil war and made incursions that captured Western Tigray etc. The July 2021 TDF offensive liberated western Tigray from the forces of Amhara [16]. Alamata and Korem communities in southern Tigray were also captured. The Tigrayans went from defensive to offensive on Amhara by crossing the Tekezé River and capturing the Amhara communities of Mai Tsebri and Tselemti thereby arousing vicious ethnic animosity [17]. In partnership with the ENDF, Amhara militias in the summer of 2021 rebuffed the offensive of TPLF and committed retaliatory atrocities against the people of Tigray [12]. “The Amhara–Tigray conflict is primarily a territorial war over contested historical homelands” [13].

The Oromo ethnic-State is at war because of fundamental grievances that revolve around the threat on Ethiopia’s ethnic federalism, the alignment of Amhara with the Prime Minister Abiy’s government to achieve this goal and historical border disputes. Several Oromo Militias coordinated by the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) which is the armed wing of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) engaged in fierce battles. They have committed atrocities against their opponents including raids, kidnappings, executions and ethnic-based wanton destruction of life and property. This have reignited insurgency by the Amhara under the auspices of the Fano and allied militias who have embarked on reprisal attacks against the Oromo resulting into the killing and maiming for thousands of people [12].

On 11 August 2021 the OLA coalesced with Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) for an alliance in the raging civil war in Ethiopia. There were also talks with other militia groups to form a grand alliance whose fundamental objective is to topple the Prime Minister Abiy’s led FGE and form a coalition government reminiscent of the EPRDF [18]. As at April 2022 the OLA were controlling a lot of territories including some within 60 miles of Addis Ababa – the capital of Ethiopia [12].

The Amhara ethnic group have raised alarm over the aggressive violence against their people and are accusing the FGE under the leadership of Prime Minister Abiy of not doing enough to deter the aggression [19]. Ethnic and communal alignment is the common denominator of the conflict. Accordingly, an official of the US State Department has informed the US Congress that “Increasing intercommunal and interethnic conflicts across the country are putting Ethiopia’s unity and territorial

integrity at risk” [20]. Also officials of the United Nations are of the view that the civil war has generated alarming level ethnic intolerance, violence, and stigmatization [19].

The reappearance of civil war has uncovered the profound, old fracture in Ethiopian statehood. The ethnic-State federal structure was created and engrained in the Constitution of Ethiopia by the victorious coalition of the civil war that ended in 1991 as a way of preserving the unity of Ethiopia and forestall further disintegration [13].

3. ETHNIC FEDERALISM PARADOX IN ETHIOPIAN CIVIL WAR

Ethiopia operates an ethnic federalism system with eleven regional states which are: (1) Afar (2) Amhara (3) Oromia (4) Somali (5) Benishangul-Gumuz (6) Gambella (7) Sidama (8) Tigray (9) Southern Nations Nationalities and People Region (SNNPRI) (10) South West Ethiopia Peoples Region (SWEPR) and (11) Harari. There are also two chartered cities and they are: (a) Addis Ababa – the capital of Ethiopia and (b) Dire Dawa. With 35% of the population, Oromia is the largest ethnic-federal state in Ethiopia, this is closely followed by Amhara with 27% of Ethiopia’s population. The people of Tigray are just 6.1% of the population of Ethiopia hence relatively a small ethnic-state demographically [21].

Sharing common sets of language, culture, tradition, religion, ancestry, history etc. are the major attributes of ethnicity [11]. The regional states were created by the (EPRDF) as part of the process that restructured Ethiopia into a federal state from a unitary state. The restructuring as enshrined in Article 46.2 of Ethiopia’s constitution is predicated on identity, language, settlement patterns, and consent of the people [13].

The paradox in the raging Ethiopian Civil War is that the ethnic state of Prime Minister Abiy is at arms against the government under the leadership of their son. A greater paradox is that the Amhara ethnic state which is the military stronghold of Prime Minister Abiy is at war with the Oromo ethnic state – the home state of Prime Minister Abiy. The Amhara ethnic-State has over the years being the adversary of the Oromo people who fought against the dominance and oppression of Amhara during Ethiopia’s imperial period. Ironically, in the raging civil war the Amhara have joined forces with the federal government of Prime Minister Abiy to fight the Oromo and Tigray.

The support of Eritrean Defense Forces is the greatest asset of Prime Minister Abiy in his battles with Tigray. Paradoxically, Eritrea and Tigray speak the same language and share other attributes indicative of same ethnicity. Eritrea and Tigray are highlanders in topography and Tigrinya is their language. They also share similar culture, tradition, religion etc. To this end Eritrea and Tigray ought to be the same ethnicity but there is protracted animosity and political dichotomy between them.

Antagonism between Oromo and Amhara has a long history but intensified with the establishment of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The OLF launched an armed struggle against the repression of the Amhara controlled central government of Ethiopia at this time; seeking for secession as an independent Oromia state. In the alternative, the OLF was fighting for a greater control of power through the ballot box as the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia [13].

Predicated on vast and varied grievances the Amhara and Oromo militias have been fighting themselves in an orgy of violence and targeted killings. They have committed acts of atrocity against each other in a manner reminiscent of a cycle of retaliatory violence since August 2021[12].

Aggression and incursion into Oromia state territories by the Amhara is a major causal factor of the conflict. Prime Minister Abiy may not necessarily support the Amhara incursions into the territories of Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz but he is apparently in a weak position and dilemma. On the one hand the life and property of Abiy’s Oromo ethnic-State ought to be safeguarded against the incursions of the Amhara; on the other hand his stay in power and survival is to a large extent hinged on the Amhara insurgents who have joined forces with the Federal Government to fight the TPLF [13].

The Amhara pro-government militias are also systematically grabbing land by displacing the residents of the eastern border city of El-Gedaref but as we earlier stated the Prime Minister Abiy may not have the will power to call them to order because he is “relying on these same tribal militias to counter the

TPLF since he has lost confidence and support from his own ethnic community, the Oromo, who constitute the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia” [15].

The Prime Minister Abiy led FGE started to develop confidence in Amhara ethnic state when the dominant political power there joined his Prosperity Party coalition. In sharp contrast the dominant party of the Oromo ethnic state joined forces with the dominant party of Tigray to oppose the Prosperity Party vision and reforms aimed at scuttling the prevalent autonomous ethnic-State system. The alliance with Amhara became more cordial as Amhara militias partnered with Abiy’s led FGE in the Tigray Conflict. Amhara militias not only joined forces with the FGE to fight the TPLF but became the formidable force that rebuffed the TPLF’s summer 2021 offensive [12].

Conversely, the Oromo ethnic-State under the auspices of Oromo Liberation Army have joined forces with Tigray ethnic-State under the auspices of the TPLF to fight the Abiy led FGE and the forces of Amhara. Ideologically, the dominant political party in Oromo and Tigray are in tandem and attach very high premium on the political autonomy of Ethiopia’s ethnic states. They joined forces to pull down the Derg government and formed the EPRDF coalition that ruled Ethiopia for close to three decades. The EPRDF drafted the ethnic federalism system of government that is enshrined in the constitution of Ethiopia [13, 23]. “Coordinating with the Oromo Liberation Army, Tigrayan forces have advanced towards Addis Ababa” [23].

Evidently, the Oromo people played a major role in the emergence of Abiy as Ethiopia’s Prime Minister. Beginning from 2014, there were a series of massive demonstrations against the TPLF led EPRDF by the Oromo youth movement which culminated in the emergence an Oromo as Prime Minister for the first time in the history of Ethiopia. Invariably, Oromo youth protesters paved the way for the ouster of TPLF-led coalition and the take-over of power by Prime Minister Abiy. The emergence of Abiy aroused great elation and optimism among the people of Oromo with respect to their aspiration of controlling the center of a multinational federal system. Unfortunately, Abiy shattered their hopes and aspirations by introducing reforms meant to scuttle their highly cherished autonomous ethnic-States for a unitary State [13].

These reforms “have dissolved once-hopeful sentiments among Oromo activists” [12]. There is “the deep-rooted sense of dissatisfaction felt by many young people in Oromia. They were the main participants in the protests that propelled Abiy to power in 2018” [24]. Advocates of Oromummaa now believe that Abiy will not fulfill their aspirations of genuine Oromo representation at the center of politics in Ethiopia [13].

The yearnings of the broad mass of Oromo population is in tandem with their strategic location as the ethnic-State that surrounds Addis Ababa the capital of Ethiopia as well as having the vantage position as the most populous ethnic-State comprising 35% of all 120 million population of Ethiopia but historically deficient in access to the political power and material resources of Ethiopia [13, 12].

The conflict in Ethiopia is in part a product of the opposition to the political reforms of Prime Minister Abiy with regards to ethnic-federalism. The reforms are geared towards curtailing the looming ethnic chauvinism and tensions precipitated by the multifaceted ethno-lingua administration that has been in vogue for nearly three decades [21, 19].

There has been a complex and dynamic ethnic political system in Ethiopia since 1991 when the EPRDF took over power. Under the auspices of the TPLF the EPRDF in consultation with other members of the coalition especially the Oromo Liberation Front replaced the unitary state structure with ethnic-federalism which literally granted political autonomy to the federating units of Ethiopia. This was eventually enshrined in the Ethiopian constitution of 1995 as a devolved federal state model with member states defined in accordance with language, ethnic and regional parameters [13, 25, 26]. “By granting full political autonomy to the country’s many ethnic groups, it was argued, trust in the central government could be restored” [13].

This political model promoted diversity but diametrically increasing organized conflicts hinged on the politics of ethnic identity. The Ethiopian conflict that began in November 2020 has worsened the pervading antagonistic propensities and barbaric violence which intensified with the gruesome raids of TPLF on Amhara communities, leading to the wanton killing of people and destruction of property and means of livelihood [25].

The FGE's response to the Tigray war has incited the emergence and remobilization of ethnic aligned armed groups to fight for perceived grievances and orchestrated political violence. Invariable multiple ethnic militias groups have resorted to take up arms to address perceived injustices [12].

4. THE POLITICAL POWER UNDERTONES OF THE ETHIOPIAN CIVIL WAR

The desire to acquire and consolidate power is the most prominent causal factor of the Tigray Conflict that commenced on 4th November 2020 and degenerated into the Ethiopian Civil War. It is a reflection of a power struggle between the Federal Government of Ethiopia (FGE) under the leadership of Prime Minister Ahmed Abiy and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) who dominated Ethiopian Politics before the emergence of Abiy [19].

A product of the 1970s, the TPLF was originally formed with the objective of actualising self-determination but in a noteworthy twist, the TPLF ultimately found itself at the apex of Ethiopian national politics as the leading force of the Ethiopian People's Revolution Democratic Front (EPRDF). The EPRDF was an alliance of ethnic political parties under the chairmanship of the TPLF leader Meles Zenawi who became Ethiopia's Head of State in May 1991 and remained in power until his death in 2012. The TPLF continued its dominance of Ethiopian politics until the ascent to power of Abiy in 2018 which is about three decades [27, 28].

The TPFL became the most powerful political entity in Ethiopia after a series of battles in the 1970s and 1980s with the Derg – the brutal Marxist military regime [19]. The Derg took over power in Ethiopia on September 12, 1974 through a bloody military coup led by Lieutenant Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam who adopted a communist system of government. The communist government was financed by the Soviet Union and assisted by Cuba. The government was highly totalitarian and brutal – killing thousands of suspected Derg oppositionists. Socialist government in name but military regime in style [29].

Meles Zenawi of TPFL played a major role in the ouster of Derg military junta and became Ethiopian Head of State under the banner of EPRDF coalition. It was alleged that the Prime Minister Zenawi led Ethiopian government gave undue preferential treatment to Tigrayans thereby making them to control disproportionate positions of high authority in the military and in government [21]. The TPLF's dominance persisted when Hailemariam Desalegn became Prime Minister at the demise of Zenawi in 2012 but resentment to abuse of power and disproportional dominance broadened and intensified [19].

There were considerable developmental strides and economic progress in Ethiopia under the watch of Zenawi led EPRDF government but the regime increasingly became autocratic and despotic. More importantly the TPLF led government did not practice fiscal federalism but excessively controlled the funds and revenues for the different regions thereby making the financial autonomy of the regional governments a mirage and the marginalisation of some regions. The marginalisation generated tensions which intensified when Hailemariam Desalegn took over as President at the death of Zenawi and started weakening TPFL's grip on power [21].

The discontent, grievances and tensions morphed into protests by the different regions especially the Oromia and Amhara regions over what they painted as 27 years of repression by the TPFL led EPRDF. The intense pressure mounted by the broad mass of the Ethiopia population made Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn to announce his resignation as both chairman of the EPRDF and Prime Minister of Ethiopia on 15 February 2018 [30]. The non-TPLF members of the EPRDF took advantage of the turmoil to elect Abiy Ahmed of Oromo ethnic region as Chairman of the EPRDF on 28 March 2018 and eventually elected as Prime Minister by the Ethiopian Parliament on 2 April 2018; making him the first Oromo ethnicity person to occupy such an exalted position [31]. Abiy Ahmed – a former military intelligence officer and the first Oromo, Ethiopia's most populous ethnic group person to head the EPRDF – a coalition of four ethno-regional parties dominated by the TPLF since 1991 [16, 19].

Abiy Ahmed was the Chairman of the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO) until his emergence as prime minister [32]. His emergence was at the expense of TPLF powerbase. Invariably the emergence of Abiy was not the design of the TPFL who lost control of EPRDF and were not able to install their favourite candidate as Prime Minister because of the commotion arising from the massive antigovernment protests [21, 33]. The more than two years protests were orchestrated by state

violence, repression and abuse of power which most Ethiopians specifically attributed to the TPLF leadership of the EPRDF. Mass arrest and some outstanding historic grievances orchestrated the protests movements [19].

The mass protest earnestly began in 2016 on allegations of manipulation of election and wanton abuse of human rights. The protest was spear-headed by the Oromo Youth Movement and the Amhara Youth Movement. Government forces attempted to quell the demonstrations to no avail as the protesters called for regional autonomy and genuine political representation at the regional levels as well as the federal level. The protesters also condemned nepotism, corruption, land-grabbing and abuse of human rights [13].

Comprehensive reforms encompassing the economy, judicial system, foreign policy etc. was made by Prime Minister Abiy as he took power in 2018. Abiy declared commitment to a transparent political system and to open-up the economy for development. The Prime Minister Abiy government released political prisoners and liberalized the media as well as loosened civil society restrictions. Political dissenters in exile were invited to return, and some integrated into the new government while most top security chiefs were replaced. Abiy's liberalization agenda made him to advocate peace deals with insurgent groups in Ethiopia as well as initiating a rapprochement with Eritrea which formally brought to an end the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The great reforms and peace initiatives made Abiy to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019 [19].

As part of his political reforms Prime Minister Abiy disbanded the EPRDF and formed the Prosperity Party a few days after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize. The four ethno-regional parties that constituted the EPRDF coalition and other affiliated parties from other regions were invited to join the Prosperity Party. The formation of the Prosperity Party (PP) in December 2019 was part of the reforms of Abiy to salvage Ethiopia from ethno-centric political system. As solicited a majority of the former EPRDF members joined the new PP [13, 34].

The TPLF refused the invitation to join the PP and opposed the party's formation, describing it as part of the grand plan to derail Ethiopia's prevalent federal system in substitution for a unitary state. The leadership of the Oromo Democratic Party – Abiy's ethnic party also objected to the creation of the PP and refused to join on ground that the merger was hasty and lacked due consultation process [35, 36].

The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) was a coalition of four parties under the auspices of the TPLF [37]. Most of the political parties of Ethiopia have ethno-regional colouration. Some scholars are of the view that the disbandment of EPRDF was because "the new prime minister sought to limit the power of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) — the dominant party within the EPRDF — and to reorganise the coalition" [38].

TPLF officials as voiced by Hailemariam Desalegn – former prime minister of Ethiopia, were worried that the reforms have the propensity of defeathering the socio-political and economic standing of Ethiopia ethno-federalism [39]. In a similar vein, "TPLF chairman Debretsion Gebremichael declared that the process establishing the new ruling party was illegal" [13].

The dissolution of the EPRDF further frayed and already strained relations with the TPLF and the Abiy led government of Ethiopia. Tigrayans were generally disenchanting with the policies and actions of Abiy which they perceived as excessively targeting them as manifest in his reforms and rapprochement with President Isaias Afwerki who nursed bitter grudges against the people of Tigray etc [19].

The reforms were apparently a discriminatory campaign against the TPLF by Abiy who sort to reduce their influence in government and the armed forces. Some TPLF officers in Ethiopia National Defense Force were removed or demoted on flimsy grounds and sometimes charged with human rights abuses or corruption. Tigrayans elites were made the scapegoat for the ills of Ethiopia in the fight against corruption by the Prime Minister Abiy Administration [21, 19].

The people of Tigray ethnic nationality felt increasing unsafe and alienated and this culminated into the withdrawal from federal government position of TPLF members in late 2019. Reconciliatory attempts were made but the disparity between the ideology of the Progressive Party with regard to a unitary *Ethiopiawinet* was in sharp contrasts with the prevalent multiethnic federal order [13].

On account of the systematic downgrading of the influence and power of TPLF in government, armed forces, ruling party and other areas they became disenchanted. The ultimate exclusion from the central government was regarded as an existential threat for which the TPLF started mobilising for rebellion [21].

The TPLF leadership was forced to withdraw to the Tigray region and began to resist the orders of the Federal Government of Ethiopia (FGE) as well as engage in some overt and covert activities to undermine the FGE. “When the TPLF leadership withdrew to the Tigray region, signs pointed to a coming armed conflict” [38].

The October 3, 2020 aggressive action was the climax of the actions to undermine the FGE and became the *casus belli* for the Tigray Conflict which degenerated into another civil war in Ethiopia. “The current civil war in Ethiopia is largely the result of the subsequent power struggle between the Abiy administration and the TPLF” [21].

Invariably, some of the radical reforms of Prime Minister Abiy are becoming counterproductive because of the conflicts it is generating. The initial reform that pursued peace in Ethiopia and beyond was applauded nationally and internationally as manifest in the Nobel Peace Prize. This legacy may be undermined by the democratic backsliding of Abiy wherein his quest to consolidate power is precipitating obnoxious actions and heavy-handedness. Critics are of the view that Abiy is backsliding towards authoritarian rule as manifest in his arbitrary arrests, renewed restrictions, harassment of journalist and opposition party members etc [16, 41].

5. SUMMARY CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The civil war in Ethiopia is a continuation of the Tigray War which is broadening and overlaying with further conflicts; including the insurgency of Oromo which is the ethnic state of Prime Minister Abiy. The government of Prime Minister Abiy is facing rising political misgivings, heavy security threats and insurgency from the Oromo people. Other militia groups are collaborating to form a grand alliance whose fundamental objective is to topple the Prime Minister Abiy’s led FGE and form a coalition government reminiscent of the EPRDF to protect Ethiopia’s nascent ethnic-federalism.

The paradox in the raging Ethiopian Civil War is that Oromo - the ethnic state of Prime Minister Abiy is at arms against the government of Ethiopia under the leadership of their son. A greater paradox is that the Amhara ethnic state which is the military stronghold of Abiy is at war with the Oromo ethnic state – the home state of Abiy. Atrocities are being committed by the Amhara against the Oromo and Prime Minister Abiy may not necessarily support the atrocities but is in a dilemma because of the paradox. The alliance of Eritrea is the greatest asset of Prime Minister Abiy in the war with Tigray. Ironically, Eritrea and Tigray speak the same language and share other attributes indicative of same ethnicity.

The demonstrations of the broad mass of the Oromo population paved the way for the emergence of Abiy as Prime Minister. They became disgruntled when the reforms of Abiy scuttled their political and economic ambitions. The leadership of the Oromo Democratic Party – Abiy’s ethnic party refused to join the Prosperity Party of Abiy because of the inclination to introduce a unitary state at the detriment of the prevalent ethnic-Federalism in Ethiopia. Ethnic-federalism was highly cherished by the Oromo who yearned to adequately benefit from the political and economic largesse of Ethiopia in tandem with their vantage population and strategic location.

In conclusion, the raging Civil War in Ethiopia reveals that the quest for political and economic empowerment trumps over ethnic-cleavages or identity as causal factors of conflict and can create intra cum inter ethnic conflicts with multiple complexities which challenges the theoretical foundations of primordialism.

The theory of Primordialism proffer that members of the in-group enjoy hospitable, friendly and peaceful relations with themselves. Conversely, hostilities and conflicts abound between the in-group and the out-group. Language and culture are the fundamental attributes of an in-group and distinguishes an out-group.

The study recommends that economic and political benefits of people should not be treated with levity because they are stronger than ethnic-cleavages in mobilizations for conflict as manifest in the

paradoxes of the Civil War in Ethiopia. Also, Prime Minister Abiy should not destroy the prevalent ethnic-federalism in Ethiopia for purposes of given a sense of belonging to the different ethnic groups

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