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Sexual Violence in Armed Conflicts: The Case of Tigray, Ethiopia (2020- 2022)

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M-IR

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Declaration

I, Franklina Aku Mifetu, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature.....Date.....

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I would like to thank my supervisor, Kirsti Stuvøy, for her guidance and advice throughout this writing process.

I would also like to say 'akpe' to my family, especially my dearest father. Thanks for your constant support and always believing in me.

Lastly, I am grateful to God for His unconditional love, compassion, and strength. For in Him I live and move and have my being.

Abstract

Conflict-related sexual violence is as old as war itself. It has been extensively discussed in feminist international relations since the end of the Cold war. Over the years, feminist international relations scholars have provided varied explanations as to why rape is perpetrated. This thesis seeks to study sexual violence in the Tigray war while using feminist theory as a theoretical framework and an analytical tool to understand the perpetration of sexual violence. I find answers to the question of how the war reporting explains sexual violence as a by-product of war, weapon of war, or/and continuum of gender inequality in pre-war Ethiopia. To answer this question, I draw on reports from the United Nations, international organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. I gather data from Ethiopian as well as international news sources.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ASF – Amhara Special Forces

BiH – Bosnia and Herzegovina

CRSV – Conflict-related Sexual Violence

DMF – The Denis Mukwege Foundation

EDF – Eritrean Defense Forces

EHRC – Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

EPRDF – Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front

HRW – Human Rights Watch

ICTR – International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda

ICTY - International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia

IR – International Relations

OLA – Oromo Liberation Army

OHCHR – Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

PM – Prime Minister

PP – Prosperity Party

TPLF – The Tigray People's Liberation Front

TDF – Tigray Defense Forces

UN – United Nations

Chapter 1: Introduction

Two years after war broke out in Tigray, there seems to be a glimmer of hope. On 10th November 2022, the African Union succeeded in brokering a truce between the warring parties in a bid to halt this war which has over six hundred thousand lives and displaced millions of people. (Pilling & Schipani 2023; Waal, 2022). Since this ceasefire was reached a few months ago, the northern part of Ethiopia appears to be slowly returning to normalcy. Telecommunication services have been restored, Mekelle airport has reopened, and some internet services have also been partially restored (Tackett & Anthonio 2023).

Despite this ray of hope, the memories from the war are still fresh and atrocities, still very vivid and agonizing for Tigrayans. Many are still dealing with and slowly recovering from losses be it human, mental, emotional, physical, or financial losses. For some, Tigray will never be the same ever again after the events that transpired in November 2020.

The war started on the 4th of November 2020 when Nobel Prize award winning Ethiopian Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed instructed a national military attack to oust regional forces from the Northernmost part of Ethiopia, Tigray (Walsh & Dahir, 2022).

To a large extent, the root of this civil war can be directly tracked to disagreements surrounding the political system of government in Ethiopia. (Cobb, 2022). The Tigray People's Liberation Front was a political party that dominated the Ethiopian Political scene for almost thirty years. From 1991 to 2018, the party had a stronghold of the Ethiopian government of which Mr. Abiy, the current Prime Minister was a part of. However, upon becoming Prime Minister of Ethiopia in 2018, he went on a mission to reshuffle his government by taking out major leaders from the Tigrayan Government and setting up a new party called the Prosperity Party (Bader, 2022).

This action produced high tensions on the political scene in Ethiopia and sadly led to the war. The seemingly end of the war in itself has attracted a considerable media and international attention in recent times even though the war has suffered a relatively low coverage in comparison to the ongoing war in Ukraine.

Just like any other war, there have been several reports of human right violations during the war and sexual violence is one of those violations. Unfortunately, this is no surprise as most wars are usually understated with human rights violations especially that of sexual violence against women.

Sexual violence has been one of the most popular of such human rights violations especially targeted towards women.

Sexual violence has existed since time immemorial. It occurs both during times of peace and during times of armed conflict. There have been efforts on both scholarship and policy fronts to understand why it happens and how it can be averted. Despite extensive research and efforts by policymakers to bring it to a halt, the problem persists.

On the scholarship front, women have not always been incorporated into the conception of security in international relations (IR). In both theory and practice, the study security in international relations has always been dominated by men. However, the development of feminist international relations has aimed to change this narrative. This work has indeed been impactful and challenged how the international is understood. Feminist international relations scholars contend that the way power and security is defined or conceptualized goes a long way to impact the position of women in peace time and makes them even more vulnerable during wars (Cockburn, 1998; Elshtain, 1987).

Sexual violence has been a major concern for feminist international relations and its study has evolved over the years. For feminist international relations scholars, sexual assault has always been a prominent concern, and its research has changed throughout time. Sexual violence during armed conflict has evolved from being viewed as a seemingly uncontested by-product of war to a topic that is closely examined from a variety of perspectives (Wood, 2006; Cohen, 2013; Rafstedt, 2015).

The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), which began in 1992 and ended in 1995 set the pathway for the reconceptualization of wartime rape (Salzman, 1998). It was the first war in which sexual violence received a lot of immediate attention. This war showed that the explanation of wartime rape as a mere by-product of rape was not exhaustive. It then resulted in the argument that sexual violence can in fact be utilized by combatants for a variety of reasons. The argument that sexual violence can be employed as a weapon of war was born out of this war (Crawford, 2013).

The Rwandan Genocide, which occurred between 7 April and 15 July 1994 was not only characterized by rape, but also with sexual mutilation and several Tutsi women who were sexually abused by Hutu militias were eventually killed. Before the Rwanda Genocide, it was largely

assumed that rape was a means by which combatants forcefully impregnated women based on ethnic lines, in a bid to ‘diffuse’ a particular ethnicity. The roots of this theory came out of the BiH war. However, the revelation from the Rwanda war approved but also contested this theory (Bijleveld et al., 2009). It led to feminists probing more in a bid to understand the motivations behind rape.

After the BiH and Rwandan wars, sexual violence has been studied in several other wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Sierra Leone and Burundi and “significant progress has been made the past twenty years in understanding the motivations for sexual violence” (Rafstedt, 2015, p.60; Skjelsbæk, 2010).

This thesis aims to investigate the case of sexual violence in Tigray. Sexual violence in international relations has rapidly evolved over the years. In the early years of sexual violence being studied in international relations, the sole attention was on women mainly as victims of rape and men were considered perpetrators of rape. Recently, however, the focus has been shifting from women-victim narrative as there has been several reporting of men being raped as well.

Considering explanations as to why rape happen, feminist international relations scholars have come up with several explanations as to why rape happens. Over the past 20 years, substantial advancement has been made in understanding the causes of sexual violence. The stark variations between how sexual violence manifests itself in diverse conflicts, however, have just recently come to light. (Rafstedt, 2015, p.60). There has been the mention of rape as a by-product of war and this explanation suggests that the reason why rape occurs is that there is the need for sexual release especially for men thus, rape is not strategic in any way (Baaz & Stern, 2009). Other explanations of rape point to gender inequality and weapon of war. Gender norms and power relations that exist during peaceful times would eventually influence decisions war (Cockburn, 1998). Sexual violence as a weapon of war shows that it can be used as a tool to win war (Buss, 2009)

As discussed, or mentioned earlier, sexual violence has been prevalent in the war in Ethiopia in several forms including, mutilation, insertion of foreign objects and rape. This war, which some have classified as an ethnic one, begets questions concerning why sexual violence is prevalent, especially against the people of Tigray. How do we make sense of or understand the perpetration of sexual violence in the war in Tigray using feminist theory? To answer this question, I have

drawn on a plethora of reports from the United Nations, international organizations, local (Ethiopian) and foreign news media as well as feminist academic literature.

This thesis will answer the question:

How does the reporting of sexual violence in the Ethiopian war (2020-2022) explain the phenomenon as a weapon of war, by-product, or a continuum of gender inequalities in pre-war Ethiopia?

There have been several explanations as to why sexual violence happens in war. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I will limit my analysis to the three explanations mentioned above. Thus, this research question will map out the reporting of sexual violence in the Tigray way to feminist international theory.

The five major reports I draw on are as follows:

- 1) “Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by all Parties to the Conflict in the Tigray Region of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia” by EHCR and OHCHR.
- 2) “I Always Remember That Day” Access to Services for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence in Ethiopia’s Tigray Region by Human Rights Watch
- 3) “Understanding Conflict Related Sexual Violence in Ethiopia Research Report 2022” by the Denis Mukwege Foundationa and UKaid.
- 4) “We Will Erase You from This Land” Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing in Ethiopia’s Western Tigray Zone” by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.
- 5) “Weaponized Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Tigray” by OMNA Tigray

Several other open access sources have been utilized as well.

1.1 Thesis Outline

A total of six chapters makes up this thesis. The first chapter is the introduction which introduces the reader to the subject matter of the thesis, the objective as well as the research question.

The second chapter introduces readers to feminist perspectives on sexual violence in armed conflicts. I present important concepts which I believe are important in the examination and analysis of sexual violence in armed conflict. I explore gender relations and historical theorizing of rape mainly based on the Bosnian wars and the Rwandan Genocide. Chapter three presents the historical background of the war in Tigray. It discusses its root causes as well as the parties involved. The fourth chapter, which is the methodology chapter, presents the methods used in this study. I justify the use of my research design and discuss some limitations of this research as well.

I present my analysis in chapter five. I present the concerns of sexual violence and the forms identified in the war. I also make sense of reporting using feminist perspectives and understanding the motivations behind the perpetration of violence.

The last chapter of this thesis is the conclusion.

Chapter 2: Feminist Perspectives on Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict.

The following outline provides the theoretical framework for this thesis. In this way, I provide insight into earlier research on the topic of sexual violence in armed conflicts in the discipline of international relations (IR). The first section will delve into the conceptualization of conflict-related sexual violence. The next section will discuss the various understandings feminists have provided for wartime rape. The last section will look at the historical theorizing of rape, that is exploring how feminists have theorized rape based on previous war with particular attention to the Bosnian wars and the Rwandan Genocide.

The discipline of IR has changed significantly in the years following the end of the cold war. Feminist international relations (F-IR) scholars have strived to integrate feminist thought into the field of international relations. Approaching the end of the 1980s, the feminist school of thought started to question how gender affected IR theory and practice (Buskie, 2013, p.2). It has questioned IR's presumptions and conceptions and put forward fresh questions. (Tickner, 2004, p.45). F-IR theorists contend that conventional IR theories only offered a constrained perspective that did not accurately capture the entirety of the narrative of global politics (Buskie, 2013, p.2). Similar to mainstream international relations theory, there is not only one approach to explaining feminist theory. The feminist method for thinking about global affairs is not a single, unifying theory but rather a distinctive paradigm made up of various alternative theories (Smith, 2018). Therefore, there have been several angles to the feminist theory, however, the principle remains the same. Generally, feminist scholars have questioned the exclusion of women from global politics. Since its inception, F-IR has questioned women's absolute exclusion from mainstream IR theory and practice. The exclusion of women from national and international policymaking, as well as the notion that women's everyday lives are not impacted by or irrelevant to global affairs, are stark examples of this absence (Smith, 2018). Due to IR's early obsession and sole focus on masculinity and manliness, it created an atmosphere which led to virtually no one paying any attention to the egregious atrocities committed against women during wars.

2.1 Conflict-related Sexual Violence

The words "conflict-related" and "sexual violence" together differentiates sexual assault during a time of peace from that which happens during wars (Koos, 2017). While there are similar reasons for sexual assault in times of war and peace (such as gender inequality and social views), they are exacerbated by divisions along ethnic, religious, or ideological lines that enhance the amount of hostility and cruelty (Koos, 2017, p.1936). The breakdown of institutions and political systems during wars also encourages perpetrators to go ahead with rape knowing that they are likely not to ever be punished for their actions.

According to Cohen and Wood, chances of gang rape are remarkably higher in times of armed conflict (more than 70%) compared to times of peace (2-27%) (2016). This points to the fact that there might be other motivations as to why rape happens especially during war. Also, rapes committed during war are usually connected to more heinous rapes, including those committed in public places, using tools and cruelty. There seems to be varied 'motivating' factors as to why soldiers/combatants rape. Rape in war is usually perpetrated by combatants against non-combatants, who have no means of defending themselves. Since the military is very much masculinized, men are usually on the perpetrating side of rape with women not having any real means to protect themselves thus leaving them vulnerable.

Conflict-related sexual violence is elucidated by Wood as "sexual violence committed by armed groups during armed conflict" (2014, p.458). Wood further expounds that the military, police, and government-sponsored militias are examples of state forces, as are non-state entities (rebels and militias) (2014). Rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancies, forced sterilization, and any other kind of sexual violence of equivalent intensity are all considered to be sexual violence (ibid).

2.2 Understanding Wartime Rape

Wartime rape is argued to be as old as war itself (Brownmiller, 1975). In the course of history, rape has been considered an anticipated and unavoidable phenomenon when it comes to war (Baaz & Stern 2009). While studying rape from the victims' perspective is necessary, it is also essential to understand the perspective of the perpetrator (Baaz & Stern, 2009, p.496). Understanding rape from the perspective of the perpetrator brings about a holistic approach to the reporting and

analysis of wartime rape. This is because, when examining why rape happens in a more holistic way, policymakers are now able to identify the core problems and tackle them head-on. I should also point out that just because research into understanding perpetrators motivations is encouraged does not imply that victims of rape would be ignored entirely. There is more than enough academic and media room to accommodate both research in the discipline of IR. The key point here is that it is crucial to comprehend rape from the perspective of the perpetrator in order to better assist the victims and this research can be a useful tool for government and international bodies in making policies to prevent such atrocities in the foreseeable future and in peace times. Thus, analysis of reporting and multiple perspectives regarding sexual violence, femininity and masculinity is very crucial (ibid).

Rape is considered as having multiple purposes, that is, it symbolizes the "spoils" of war, sends a message of domination to the defeated (male), and has an impact on all women (Card, 1996, p.11). There is the issue of heterosexuality and masculinity when discussing rape. Baaz and Stern argue that "beneath these accounts underlies an understanding of men's (hetero)sexuality as a driving force, which, when unleashed by the climate of warring in which "normal" societal controls are suspended and the rules of warfare reign, easily results in rape" (2009, p.498).

The understandings of sexual violence against women build on various concepts and situate the motivation for rape in a tangled system of antecedents, including specific interactions between spirals of violence, a sense of dominance, 'unrestrained access' to weak women, suspended societal norms, aggression, and power, and sexual desire (Nadelson, 2005; Horwood, 2007; Baaz & Stern, 2009). Among the explanations as to why men rape during war is the point that the characteristic of men's biology is to be blamed (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000; Paglia, 1993).

This explanation to wartime rape considers rape as a "regrettable side effect" of war (Seifert, 1996, p.36). Rape is considered to be a side effect of war, though a more nuanced one that also involves "violence, aggression, humiliation", and power, mixed with 'sexual need and desire' (Baaz & Stern, 2009, p.498). In this sense, rape is only considered a by-product of war. Thus, the occurrence of rape is only linked to the biologically natural sex drives of men. This explanation to rape seems very convenient. There is a possibility that the occurrence of rape in certain circumstances might be solely linked to biologically natural sexual drives of men. However, data from the Bosnia war and the Rwanda genocide points to a different reason. Some scholars also point to the fact that the

use of increased intake of alcohol and drugs adds to why they commit the act (Kassimeris, 2006). Enloe contends that the justification for this form of rape stems from a belief in heterosexual men's biological desire and need for sexual release—a belief that undoubtedly underlies the high prevalence of “prostitution rings around military bases throughout history and in a various international context, including UN peacekeeping missions” (Baaz & Stern, 2009, p.500; Witworth, 2004; Higate, 2004).

2.2.1 Rape, a tactic of war?

The rape in the Bosnia war attracted attention to rape as a tactic of war. Reports show that there was a conscious effort by Serb militias to rape Bosniak Muslim women (Enloe, 1998). Rape camps were set up with Bosniak Muslim women repeatedly raped to impregnate them (Weitsman, 2008). Since then, rape has been considered a war crime and is therefore punishable in the sense that it now has significant legal impact (Buss, 2009). The explanation of rape as a weapon of war brings the focus from it being a mere by-effect or by-product of war to the fact that it is an instrumental tool used by combatants during armed conflicts. Before the breakthrough conception of rape as a weapon of war, some feminist scholars were of the notion that rape had no real, tangible connection to armed conflicts (Arcel, 2001). The claim was that rape would still happen in the absence of wars and that combatants did not utilize rape as a weapon to win battles or wars. However, over the years the narrative has evolved tremendously (ibid). In current times it has been established that, rape is indeed used as a tool against women in both war and ‘peaceful’ times, however, in the time of war, rape is used both as a tool to attack young girls and women and the male enemy (Brownmiller, 1975). Brownmiller also infers that rape “‘is a message passed between men—vivid proof of victory for one and loss and defeat for the other’” (1975, p.13). Elshtain propounds that within nationalist ideology, women are, in effect, the “‘symbolic representations’” of the body politic, to be protected during war as the very nation itself (1987, p.67). Elshtain further explains that women thus become the embodied boundaries of the nation-state, and as such, are targets for violence directed against a national group” (1987, p.67; Buss, 2009, p.148).

This explanation would in part support the argument of the masculine tendencies imposed on men as protectors of the people especially ‘their’ women. In patriarchal societies, women are often raised to be vulnerable and look up to men for protection. On the other hand, men also take pride

in being able to protect ‘their women’ thus, an attack on women is in effect an attack on the ego, strength and personality of men. A pattern was seen in the BiH war during the 1990s, where violence aimed at non-combatants seem to have confirmed feminist ideologies of the “vulnerability of women in nationalist conflicts” (Buss, 2009, p148). Furthermore, the war in BiH was characterized by acts of brutality and sexual assaults particularly towards women (ibid). International and local observers have described rape in the Bosnia war as an organized effort to decimate or evict citizens from one group out of a region or territory held by another (Gutman, 1994). Buss contends that to intimidate the native populace, women from precise cultural or national communities were raped in public, time and again. This evidence backs up the argument of rape being used a weapon in BiH (2009).

Niarchos offers some explanation to rape as a weapon of war. She explains that in considering rape as a weapon of war, we recognize that rapes do not constitute mere or “random acts but appear to be carried out as deliberate policy” (1995, p.658).

Sexual violence during wartime has a standardized, widespread, or formally organized feature (Buss, 2009). The functioning of gendered nationalist narratives gives systematic gang rape (which occurred in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bosnia and Rwanda) the appearance of being a tool of widespread fear and institutionalized oppression (Stiglmayer, 1994). Systematic gang rape during periods of war can be viewed as an especially efficient way to degrade opponent males by defiling "his" women and territory and demonstrating that he is an insufficient protector (Goldstein, 2001). Due to women being regarded as the bearers of ethnic and national identity due to their function as the community's biological, and cultural reproducers, sexually violating the opponent's women seeks to tear apart the fundamental foundation of that ethnic society (Stern & Nystrand, 2006).

In as much as the theory of rape as a weapon of war has gained a great deal of interest in recent times and rightfully so, there are still reservations from some feminist scholars. Granted that rape, especially mass or gang rape can be used as part of strategy by combatants to win war, it does not necessarily point to the fact that rape reporting during war should only be considered as a tactic of war. Wood argues that “rape by armed actors—even when it is frequent—may occur as a practice, by which I mean a form of violence that is driven from “below” and tolerated from “above” (2018, p.2). According to Wood, she believes that the frequency of rape during wartime

is largely influenced by the commander's attitude against rape and his response to it that is punishing offenders or inculcating norms (2018). This means that rape will become more frequent if the commander in charge overlooks it. Thus, though it might not necessarily be a war tactic, it will become rampant and might seem like a weapon of war but not necessarily so.

2.2.2 Gender and Power Relations

It has been argued that Cynthia Cockburn was the first scholar to have conceived the term 'gendered continuum of violence' in the year, 1998 (Smith, 2018). The term implies that a knife-cutting contrast cannot be made between the occurrences of rape in peace times and war times (ibid). This is to say that gender norms and power relations that exist during peaceful times would eventually influence decisions war. Cockburn puts it swiftly when she writes that, "the correlation between gender inequality and all that it entails during peace and war are 'like linking a thread' (2004, p.44) between 'the bedroom and the battlefield'" (Cockburn, 1998; Smith, 2021, p.5). Thus, just trying make sense of rape only during war is not enough to fully understand why it happens. However, having the understanding that gender norms and their expressions during peace goes a long way to affect rape tendencies during war. Thus, understanding rape only by means of war does not give a holistic explanation as to why rape happen. Gender norms and expressions during peace time matter to the study of war time rape. The "OHCHR states that harmful gender stereotypes, rigid constructions of femininity and masculinity and roles are the root cause of gender-based violence against women" (OHCHR, as cited in Smith, 2021, p.6). When entwined with other power structures that contribute to the culture of gendered violence that is intrinsic to militarism and war, misogynistic narratives may be what motivates rape—become more virulent and ubiquitous. Furthermore, studies across a range of locations (and eras) demonstrate unequivocally that militarized sexual assault must be viewed in the context of international discourses that define militarized masculinity and heterosexuality (Baaz, 2009). For the logic of militarism to function, the masculinities that are promoted and, in the end, accepted within the army have well defined boundaries and have provided certain interpretations (ibid). Women are typically seen as a category of people who require men's protection desperately and who are tranquil, which contrasts with the stereotype of masculinity that is primarily dominating, defending, and combative (Enloe, 1990). What this masculinity and femininity dichotomy does is

that is renders women and girls extremely vulnerable to sexual violence as they are not raised up or are in no position to the 'logics of rape' (Baaz 2009, p.499). In the United States army, there has been several reported counts of violence and rape within the military itself (Wood, 2018).

Wirworth argues that all aspects of femininity are considered destructive to the necessary militaristic masculinities. As a result, violence is also directed inwards toward the "others within"; soldiers in certain instances would or rape the women in the military in order to uphold the myths of military manhood (2004). Thus, in an attempt to live up to certain masculine expectations, women sometimes commit rape or aid in the commission of the act. Thus, it is not surprising that even female soldiers can sexually assault in ways comparable to males. This is because the military, to a large extent is created through the construction of a specific male (heterosexual) violent masculinity (African Rights, 1995).

It has been argued that patriarchy and power dynamics play a role in the prevalence of rape. "Patriarchy is a social and political system where men are in control and have the power to maintain their role over other groups, namely women" (Rikheim, 2022, p.25). Power is popularly defined as the ability of someone to get another to do something, usually against his or her will (Dahl, 1958 as cited in Lukes, 2015). According to feminist analysis, power is a relation that establishes the framework and pattern for how relationships between men and women develop (Kelly, 1988). Thus, in explaining sexual violence against women, critical F-IR scholars argues that sexual violence refers to unequal relations of power between women and men (Kreft, 2020).

Therefore, according to critical F-IR scholars, systemic gender disparities and the power given to men to rule and oppress women (and some cases, men) are the root causes of sexual violence (Rikheim, 2022). In this sense, rape is defined as "the primary mechanism through which men perpetuate their dominance over women through force" (Brownmiller, 1993, p.9).

In a patriarchal society, due to the uneven power relations between men and women, sexual violence is predominant because women do not have the rights and means to protect themselves as they are largely dominated by men.

2.3 Perpetrators of rape

Media accounts of war frequently concentrate on the military's successes and losses of wars and occasionally, on the effects on the general civilian population, which includes death and relocation (Fiske and Shackel, 2014, p123; Palmieri et al., 2012). Baaz and Stern argue that the majority of studies and reporting on gender and armed conflict, particularly, in Africa center on women as rape and war victims. These reports also get their reporting and data only from the “women victim” (2009, p.496). Surprisingly there has not been sufficient attention on the ‘perpetrators of rape, themselves, understand their violent crimes’ (ibid, p.496). As the popular adage goes, there are two sides to a coin. Investigating simply from the perspective of female victims only offers one side of the story, which is insufficient. It is nevertheless crucial to hear the perpetrator's account to move toward genuine development and to be more effective during peace negotiations or even when rape is being prosecuted as a war crime. There is only so much that a victim's narrative can reveal about the complexities of wartime rape, so knowing more about the other persons involved is also helpful. It is risky to merely hear from one side of the coin because victims occasionally do not even remember everything that occurred to them.

2.4 Feminist Historical Theorizing of rape

Much of feminists’ theorizing of rape is based on past wars with the war in BiH and the Rwandan Genocide spearheading the discourse. I will talk about both wars because they have been very instrumental in the way feminists study wartime rape. They have been crucial standpoints over the years pointing to why rape happen in war and has helped feminists to better theorize and helped understand much better the concept of rape.

The instances of rape in armed conflict that have been used to understand gender in international relations are by no means novel. Bassett argues that feminists have talked about rape for years. However, the spotlight that has been shone on wartime rape by the international community since the BiH war was a start of a new conversation when it comes to rape. International perceptions have significantly changed since then (Bassett, 2005). An increasing sense of urgency about the magnitude and necessity of addressing sexual violence against women in war has emerged among the public and among government and judicial officials, at least since the establishment of the International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and Yugoslavia (Fiske & Shackel 2014, p.125)

Regardless of the reality that rape was not specifically referred to in either of the statutes establishing these courts, the International Criminal Tribunal for the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) and Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) were the first to bring charges against perpetrators of rape and other kinds sexual violence committed during times of war, such as “forced marriage, forced prostitution, sexual humiliation, and forced pregnancy” (Fiske & Shackel 2014, p.125; O’Connor, 2012).

“Rape is included in the Rome Statute (2002), establishing the International Criminal Court, as a war crime (Article 8), a crime against humanity (Article 7) and, in certain circumstances, as genocide (Article 6)” (Fiske & Shackel, 2014, p.125). Several human rights organizations and private individuals applaud the efforts being made by the international community to combat the culture of lawlessness that surrounds rape in war and to put a stop to the practice, by supporting and they are supporting efforts to both legally outlaw and prosecute rape as a war crime (Human Rights Watch et. al., 2014).

The public prosecution of rape in court presented a great deal of evidence showing that rape does not always result from men needing to satisfy their sexual needs. It also disproved the claim that rape only occurs because women are considered as the prizes of war, or that women were given to men as compensation for the "hard work" during war. Investigations into the rape of Bosnian Muslim women during the BiH war have shown that rape occurs for reasons other than men's need for sex, and they also suggest that rape can be used as a "strategy" to win war. This means that rape can be employed as a tool of war.

It has been argued thereon that when soldiers (male) rape women and forcefully impregnate them, these male combatants view women as merely a reproductive body they can use to produce ‘their’ babies. Feminists have also established that this analogy from the soldiers point to the fact, in a patriarchal society, men are the only people who give children their identity. In this sense, there is not much a woman can do to give a child an identity (Weitsman, 2008). This reinforces patriarchal structures and points to the fact that wars affect women differently or war affect women different during the Bosnian war. Thus, the rape of women in Bosnia, pointed to the fact that society is constructed in a way that men are seen to be dominant and superior to the woman, so it is the man who gives identity to children. Weitsman argues that Serb soldiers, while impregnating Bosniask Muslim women believed that the “newly born existence would be dominated by paternal identity”

(2008, p.571) In other words, even while the “offspring was genetically 50% hers and, if raised by her, culturally 100% hers, a woman had a passive role in imparting identity” (Ibid, p.571).

The Rwandan genocide was a brutal war that occurred along ethnic lines. The Hutus, who are greater in population massacred and sexually violated several women and men. On November 8, 1994, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda was founded to investigate all the atrocities that went on during the war and to also prosecute all the persons who were involved in perpetrating these atrocities. The public prosecution of these persons brought to life new perspectives to theorizing wartime rape. The Rwandan genocide brought a new dynamic in the theorizing of rape. Several of the women who were raped in Rwanda and even those who became pregnant were nonetheless shot dead. Additionally, there have been numerous instances of women being tortured by genital mutilation and the introduction of foreign items into their privates.

Feminists contend that these horrifying crimes demonstrate how men simply view women as objects to be played with and that they are free to treat women anyway they see fit (Weistman, 2008). Also, women have long been considered a custodian of community and lineage in patriarchal societies thus, the humiliation of women would cause them not to go ahead with their ‘work’ as this will interrupt their work as custodian of the community (ibid). The Rwanda genocide also brought into the picture that women are not always the victims of sexual violence.

Chapter 3: Historical Tensions Leading to the Tigray War

This chapter presents the historical background for the purpose of this thesis. Due to the low attention paid to this war, I find it necessary to present a historical background. This chapter also helps in understanding the dynamics of sexual violence in this context. The events leading up to the war are thoroughly discussed as well as the alliances and personalities involved.

3.1 The TPLF's historical journey to power

Ethiopia has been a decentralized state since 1991 until 2018 (Lee, 2013). The TPLF led that fight against the Derg and Marxist leaders before 1991 (Young, 1996). Many historians consider Tigray to be the cradle of Ethiopian culture, human civilization, and religion (Stewart, 2018). The primordial Aksum kingdom, the precursor state that would later become contemporary Ethiopia, was positioned there (Berhe, 2004). Therefore, Tigray has perpetually been at the heart of the developing Ethiopian state. Its ruling class contested for the crown as Negus with “feudal lords from Gondar Shewa and other Amhara-speaking” regions (Tronvoll, 2022, p.164). However, during the 20th century, the Shewan-Amharic elite gained control of the Empire and began a process of centralizing power. Elites in Tigray felt disenfranchised and betrayed by the royal court. In 1943, the Tigrayan people renewed their support against the center in response to the Emperor Haile Selassie's revived “modernization and centralization” programs, which were put into place in the early 1940s and resulted in a major revolt throughout the region (ibid). In the 1960s, the advent of higher learning and the development of student movements led to a rise of a literary elite that expressed profound economic, social and political frustrations within the state which according to them, resulted from Marxist-Leninist ideologies the emperor at the time believed in (Zewde, 2014). After the emperor was overthrown in 1975 and the Derg military junta was established, the Derg Junta government was toppled who eventually separated to become present-day Eritrea (ibid). In 1975, the Tigrayan student body's political representatives formed the organization that would later be called the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) (Tronvoll, 2022). The newly formed TPLF regarded Ethiopian societal issues and inconsistencies as the result of the ruling party or state upholding and defending what was thought to be Amhara's culture and not necessarily that of Ethiopia. They believed that cultural values, historical narratives, and language of other ethnic groups or tribes were stifled, overlooked and not taken into consideration while that of Amhara was the pillar of the nation.

3.1.1 Formation of EPRDF and its contending issues

The Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), an alliance of ethnic groups encompassing the Oromo, Amhara, and southern Ethiopian peoples, was birthed by the TPLF after taking hold of Tigray in 1989 (Selassie, 1992). Its goal was to march on Addis Ababa and overthrow the Derg regime which it eventually did. The EPRDF took power from when the Derg collapsed (Young, 1996). After almost two decades of struggle, the EPDRF, led by the TPLF seized Ethiopia's central power in 1991, with Meles Zenawi being its leader from 1991 until his untimely death in 2012 (Tronvoll, 2022). Upon gaining central power, the ruling EPRDF consulted with other movements and went ahead to substitute a unitary system of government with a federal one based on ethnic lines. Each federal state theoretically had “full political autonomy to its nations, nationalities and peoples” (Tronvoll 2022, p.164). In as much as the EPDRF was essentially purported to have supported and introduced multiparty democracy, opponents of their policies and ideologies were not allowed to have a say in political matters. Political observers argue that the introduction of multiparty democracy was more of a façade (Abeje, 2013). It existed in theory, but it was never the reality for Ethiopians.

The TPLF retained authority over the formulation and execution of policies under the ideological tenets of pioneering democracy despite Amhara, Oromo, and southern ethnic factions being constitutive and integral members of the EPRDF (Tronvoll, 2022). The TPLF, under the leadership of Meles Zenawi had so much influence on the political scene in Ethiopia (Gebregziabher, 2019). Two years after his passing, there were several waves of protests against the EPRDF coalition as mainly, TPLF leaders were accused of serious human rights abuses (such as wrongful imprisonment) and for rigging elections. The government failed to control these protests thus, the leadership of the coalition was put under immense pressure. The Amhara youth movement later joined the Oromo youth movement, which had been leading the protests. They demanded real political representation at the national and local levels, demanded that leaders who had engaged in management errors should be punished accordingly. Among their demands was also dealing with perpetrators of nepotism and corruption (Tronvoll, 2022). Following over two years of demonstrations spearheaded by the Oromos, Ethiopia's biggest ethnic community, and by the Amharan people, who happen to be second-biggest ethnic group, Prime Minister Abiy's election ensued in 2018 in reaction to increasing demands on the coalition, EPRDF (Blanchard, 2021). These demonstrations were triggered by long-standing complaints, political oppression, and

widespread arrests. Abiy, the first Oromo leader of the EPRDF, vowed to liberalize Ethiopia's political and economic systems. His administration eased restrictions on the media and civil society, pardoned political prisoners, and delisted opposition organizations as terrorist organizations. Top security officials were replaced, and an unusual and historic number of women were appointed to positions of authority (ibid).

Nevertheless, concerns over the transition's course grew for Abiy. During his presidency, ethnic strife in Ethiopia grew along with reforms, leading to displacement. According to U.N. officials, recent years have seen a frightening rate of ethnic violence in the nation, and stigmatizing particular ethnic groups has significantly fueled ethnic intolerance (UN, 2020). For instance, members of the Amhara ethnic group have expressed concern over violence measured against their community; others claim Abiy's administration has not taken sufficient action in confronting the issue. Some also claim that interethnic tensions have been exacerbated by the government's approach to ethnic clashes.

Abiy led the unification of the EPRDF's ethno-regional parties and affiliated parties into a new Prosperity Party (PP) in 2019, effectively dissolving the EPRDF alliance and denouncing what he dubbed divisive ethnic politics (Blanchard, 2021). The TPLF disapproved of the new party and declined to join it. Several Oromo Democratic Party members equally disagreed with the unification, claiming it was hasty and lacking deliberation. The establishment of a new party that consolidated decision-making was seen by some supporters of "Ethiopia's ethnic federal system and greater cultural and regional autonomy" as a hint that Abiy eventually intended to abandon multinational federalism in favor of a unitary, centralized state (ibid, p.4).

3.2 Tensions leading to the Tigray conflict

The TPLF, a party that represents one of the ethnic groups in Ethiopia had at some point in history dominated the Ethiopian political scene for almost thirty years (Burke, 2020). The TPLF was a key player in the EPRDF coalition up until Abiy Ahmed became Prime Minister in 2018 (ibid). Despite their long stay in power, the TPLF have not always gained popular interest or report from the people of Ethiopia as the party has been accused severally of power abuse and the use of arbitrary power during their entire stay in power. Due to the TPLF being the lead in EPRDF coalition, some Ethiopians have attributed these abuses of power solely to the TPLF and the Tigray

community even to this day. This has led to a hatred spurred toward Tigrayans as an ethnic group (Blanchard, 2021). By the time 2015 elections was taking place in Ethiopia, the ERDPF was considered undemocratic to a large extent and seemed intolerant of democratic processes. Nevertheless, the EPRDF managed to win a hundred percent of parliamentary seats on the 2015 elections in Ethiopia whereby Abiy Ahmed was selected as leader of the coalition (France-Presse, 2015). In response to the unrest that spiraled as a result of the election of the EPRDF, Prime Minister Abiy, now leader of the coalition, pledged a transition to multiparty democracy. Some have pointed out that political tensions rose even more due to this very conflicting ideology as Tigrayans felt Prime Minister Abiy was undoing a cause that their political leaders had fought for. This disagreement results from competing ideologies as to what kind of system of government or political process is best suited for Ethiopia that is if either centralization or decentralization of power and regional political autonomy is ideal. The current Prime Minister has shown interest and made defining decisions and policies in support of a centralization approach to governance and this has not been received with delight, especially Tigrayans. Abiy vowed a metamorphosis to multiparty democracy when he was elected as the head of the EPRDF in response to public demonstrations and instability (Tronvoll, 2022). After reconciling with the neighboring Eritrean government, Abiy was lauded as a political reformer during his initial year in office and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in the year, 2019 (Blanchard, 2021). Since then, his leadership has come under fire amid worries about reform backsliding, an armed conflict escalating in Tigray, and brutality in other parts of the nation.

During Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's reign, one of the insurgent factions that banded together to overthrow the Derg, the TPLF, predominated the EPRDF. Members of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's Tigrayan ethnic group—approximated to make up seven percent of the total Ethiopian population—maintained a substantial portion of high-ranking positions in the government and security under his leadership (Blanchard, 2021). Zenawi was the TPLF chairman who ruled Ethiopia for 20 years before passing away in 2012. During Meles' successor Hailemariam Desalegn reign, the TPLF maintained its control in the alliance, and the government's abuses of power caused discontent among Ethiopia's general populace (ibid).

Abiy's decision to dissolve the EPRDF caused already tense relations with the TPLF to worsen. Whereas many Ethiopians applauded efforts at holding former leaders accountable for wrongdoing

and purported corruption, the TPLF saw the anti-corruption allegations as disparately attacking TPLF-affiliated corporate entities and Tigrayans, and it increasingly saw the TPLF faulted for the country's problems (Rahman 2018). As this was going on, ethnic Tigrayans reported that they felt their security breached. Since then, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed who was used to be a military officer and top intelligence official has been criticized for allegedly attempting to reassert control and lead Ethiopia back into authoritarian rule.

The TPLF criticized Abiy's federal administration for delaying the general elections which was scheduled to take place in August 2020 and extending Prime Minister Abiy's term in 2020, citing COVID-19 concerns (Ishiyama, 2021). Amid objections from the federal government and warnings from both the executive and legislative arms of government, the TPLF-led regional government went forward with elections for Tigray's regional state council in September (ibid). Due to the election issues, both federal and regional governments questioned the validity of the other, with the federal government cutting financial assistance to the area and the regional administration of Tigray claiming that the federal officials did not have any legal standing (Tronvoll 2022).

3.3 The Tigray Conflict

Ethiopia suffered yet another tragic civil war. The parties involved disagree on the root causes of the war. The national government posits that the war was started by a shocking assault by forces loyal to the regional government on its army's bases in the northern region of Tigray (Zavis & Nick, 2020). The Tigrayan government claims that the attack was carried out in self-defense in retaliation to an operation that had been started in the early hours of that day when a squad of troopers had been flown in by federal officials to apprehend the regional leadership. Most international observers agree that the cause of this war has been brewing all along or bubbling up all along with some referring to it as the most foreshadowed war in the history of Africa (ibid). The war has not only affected Tigray, but it has also severely damaged Afar, Amhara, and to a lesser extent, Oromia in addition to Tigray Regional State (Tronvoll 2022).

On 4th November 2020, following a TPLF attack on a military installation that, according to Prime Minister Abiy, led the federal government into a military confrontation, the federal government announced the start of military operations in Tigray (Blanchard, 2021, p.5). His administration

labeled the military's actions as "law enforcement operations" and classified the TPLF attack treasonous (ibid). Since then, the TPLF has been charged by federal authorities with inciting conflicts in an effort to render Ethiopia anarchic. In May 2021, the party was labeled as a terrorist organization however, as of March 2023, the party has been taken off that list.

Even though most observers, especially the International Crisis Group, purport that TPLF may have attacked first, there is reason to believe that the federal government would have started the war anyways. The reason being that there are several press reports that suggest that the Ethiopian troops had already started moving towards Tigray in preparations to attack the TPLF.

High-ranking Sudanese officials allege that a week before the war started, Prime Minister Abiy had ordered them to safeguard their border. It is important to mention that Sudan, Eritrea and Tigray share a border. According to some reports, Eritrea was involved in the planning of military operations against the TPLF (Reid, 2020). Two years after the war started, Eritrea's role in the war cannot be overlooked as there has been many army officers from the Eritrean military fighting on behalf of the Ethiopians government and there has also been several accounts of Eritreans raping Tigrayan women specifically to spite the Tigrayan men. These reports point to the fact that Prime Minister Abiy had well premeditated the war with his strategy of being on one side with the two countries or state that border Tigray.

In mid-November, the TPLF carried out a sequence of rocket assaults on certain targets in the Asmara, the capital of Eritrea in purported reprisal for the country's involvement in the conflict. The Ethiopian federal government claimed brief victory in late November after seizing Mekelle, the capital of Tigray, and publicly declared halted military operations, and set up an interim regional government. The public declaration did not do much as the war continued.

Nonetheless, as the fighting raged on and the warring parties fought for dominance of the land, security circumstances in Tigray grew worse. Despite reports of abuses attributable to Eritrean forces, the Prime Minister Abiy and his outfit refused any calls for peaceful negotiations and vehemently denied Eritrean military' presence in Tigray for several months before openly declaring in March 2021 that the Eritrean military was defending its own border (Blanchard, 2021).

In June 2021, the war took a different turn. The Tigrayan fighters, who go by the name Tigray Defense Forces (TDF), started a novel attack in June 2021, successfully seizing Mekelle and other

areas in the region, which marked a significant turning point in the conflict. General Tsadkan Gebretensae, the TDF's commander, who oversaw Ethiopia's armed forces from 1991 to 2001 claims that "the constitutionally elected Tigray's government rather than just the TPLF, which he claims is still the ruling party of Tigray, is in charge of the resistance in that country (Blanchard, 2021)

The Ethiopian army withdrew from a large portion of Tigray in about two weeks after the TDF began its offensive. This led to federal authorities declaring an interim armistice on 28 June 2021. According to officials, the TPLF was no longer considered a threat to national security and Tigray's military and organizational capacity had been "annihilated." (ibid). Thus, the armistice would expedite humanitarian distribution and permit agricultural workers in Tigray to cultivate food as many Tigrayans were in dire need of food.

The war did not come to an end upon the federal government's declaration of ceasefire. The TDF accused Prime Minister Abiy and his administration as using the ceasefire as 'saving face' rather than a 'humanitarian gesture.' Leaders in Tigray criticized it as a cover for military defeats rather than a charitable act.

In as much as this war has been reported by the press as one between Tigray and the Ethiopian Military Forces, international observers argue that four key parties can be identified within this conflict (Tronvoll 2022). These are the other parties involved in the war – Eritrean Defense Force, Ethiopian federal and regional military, Oromo Defense Forces and Amhara allied forces. Despite the role of these alliances in the war, it is also important to mention that this war is mainly between the Ethiopian federal government and Tigray Defense Force.

[Accusations against Prime Minister Abiy](#)

Upon assuming office in April 2018, Prime Minister Abiy quickly gained a great deal of support throughout Ethiopia by expressing regret for EPRDF "terrorism and violations of human rights" and by pledging a slew of liberal changes (Tronvoll, 2022, p.165).

Within his first few months in office, he started a diplomatic talk with Eritrea which resulted in a historic peace agreement (ibid), freed several political prisoners, welcomed expelled opposition leaders and activists. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019 as a result of these efforts.

These efforts, however, also led to an assassination attempt on his life. (ibid). This suggests that not everyone in Ethiopia was happy about these efforts. The assassination attempt was blamed on Tigrayans for some reason and, this resulted in increased ethnic and political tensions in Ethiopia.

As the peace process with Eritrea gathered traction in 2018, government and public sector officials of Tigrayan descent or ethnicity or background were being fired, while others were either imprisoned or charged with human rights abuses and poor management. As a result, a nervous TPLF began to transfer its top political figures back to Tigray so they could focus on local issues rather than federal leadership posts. The TPLF also started to oppose and impede political initiatives launched by the national government. Prime Minister Abiy on the other hand, began to veer off the 'individual nationality agenda which brought the EPRDF together in the first place and rather started preaching 'an all-embracing Ethiopian national identity' or a oneness in being Ethiopia instead of different nations within one.

However, the TPLF and other ethnic factions still insisted on multinational federalism, of which Prime Minister (PM) paid no attention to. In 2019, PM Ahmed officially created a new party called the Prosperity Party (PP), abolishing the EPRDF coalition and moving away from a federal system of government to a unitary one with his political aim being to centralize power and not to decentralize it. His goal is to consolidate rather than decentralize power. All parties allied with the EPRDF were invited to join the new prosperity party of which several coalition partners joined but the TPLF did not accept this invitation. This decline of invitation led to several tensions between the TPLF and the PP. The issue was very much ideological differences. It felt like a slap in the face to the TPLF. The very ideology TPLF fought for is what PP is throwing away. Thus, the refusal to join the PP was a matter of ideological principle.

All TPLF members left their positions in the federal government after the TPLF, and the PP's political relations completely broke down in 2019. There were several attempts to mediate the political relations, but they all fell on rocky grounds. The TPLF's insistence on the "multinational federal order" was too great to be reconciled with the new PP agenda of improved national unity (Tronvoll, 2022, p.166)

In June 2020, PM Abiy used COVID-19 as justification for delaying the 2020 Ethiopian National Elections. The regional council of Tigray did not approve of this. As a result, the Tigray Federal Association held their elections nonetheless, which significantly increased tensions.

The termination of federal financing for Tigray increased the tensions even further with two sides issuing reports/statements upon statements/reports with each side not giving the other the respect or recognition needed. Thus, an armed conflict between a centralizing government and a dissident Tigrayan leadership was inevitable at that moment (Tronvoll 2022).

3.4 Alliances within the war

3.4.1 The Amharan Special Forces

The Amhara army has been a key player in this war. From the very beginning of the war, they have been engaged in combat with the Ethiopian military against the TDF/TPLF. Scholars contend that the conflict between the Amhara and Tigray dates back more than 20 years as Amhara's involvement in this war and its keenness in backing PM Abiy has been thought of as an effort to reclaim territory lost in 1991 (Blanchard, 2021). It is hardly surprising that Amhara has joined the conflict given the modifications made to regional borders and provinces. Amhara claims that certain lands that are within the Tigray region belonged to them before the TPLF came to power in 1991, so they have made it a priority to reclaim them from Tigray.

All of Ethiopia's regime transitions have resulted in modifications to the administrative borders of the provinces, which are frequently employed by the central government to sustain political power over local aristocracy and political class vying for central power. After the EPRDF assumed power in 1991, this redesign was carried out most recently. During the modifications to Ethiopian regional borders, the Amhara claim that they were denied certain parts of their own land thus, the fight with Tigray is to regain the land back, which they believe was illegally taken away from them. The Tigrayans also believe that the land is theirs as this has been the case for over three decades and are unwilling to let go. Tigrayans have settled in the land and are not willing to give it up to the Amharans.

Ever since the EPRDF defeated the Derg regime and took control over federal power in 1991, several Tigrayans from and previously known refugees have relocated to the lowlands of Setit-Humera (which was once inhabited by both Amharans and Tigrayan but now holds more of a Tigrayan population or since giving the area a sizable Tigrayan population (Tronvoll 2022).

Ever since Tigrayans and former refugees took over the lowlands, there have been some efforts to regain the land, but it had proven futile as TPLF leader at the time, charged and imprisoned

Amharan leaders who were willing to fight the cause. This truncated any hopes of Amharans reclaiming the lowland plains.

However, in 2018 when PM Abiy was appointed as Prime Minister of Ethiopia, he freed many political opposition leaders who were imprisoned during the TPLF/EPRDF rule. One of such political opposition leaders was Col. Demeke Zewdu, who was Welkait Amhara Identity Committee leader. The committee was formed in order to promote the interest of the Amhara people and one of its objectives was to take control over certain lands occupied by the Tigrayans. Thus, when the TPLF went to war with Ethiopia, some scholars believe that Amhara regional forces had been ready for the war a long time ago (Tronvoll, 2022).

On November 4, 2020, as the TPLF carried out an attack against federal forces in the Northern Command, the military offensive against Tigray was launched. For a long time, Amhara regional special forces and militias had been preparing for war. Amhara forces, motivated by the desire to retake the 3 districts of Welkait, Setit-Humera, and Tsegede made up the majority of the onslaught on the western Welkait front line (ibid).

3.4.2 The Eritrean Defense Force (EDF)

Ethiopia's and Eritrea's history have always been interwoven. Both in Tigray and the neighboring Eritrean highlands, the majority of the population speaks Tigrinya (Reid, 2003). Since the TPLF was established in the middle of Ethiopia's political unrest in the mid-1970s, there has been animosity between the TPLF and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front.

The TPLF and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), were the two main resistant fronts against the authoritarian Lenin-Marxist regime, also known as the Derg military junta in the 1970s. Reid explains that even though TPLF and EPLF were both fighting the same enemy, in, due to differences in ideology, their relationship turned sour (Reid 2003). 'Yet in the middle of the fight against the Derg dictatorship, the partnership swiftly disintegrated over ethnic and national identity as there were several disagreements on military strategy, ideology, and the defining of borders (Reid, 2003, p.15). Despite sharing so much culture and values in common, the EPLF and the TPLF continuously have a relationship that has been turbulent for years, even before each party asserted control in Eritrea and Ethiopia, respectively, after the Derg junta's overthrow in 1991 (Tronvoll, 2022). To this day, this relationship is still sour. By the end of the 1980s, both the TPLF and EPLF earned key victories. Together the Tigrayan-led EPRDF and the Eritrean front toppled

the Derg military junta in 1991. A government, which is the EPRDF was then established in Addis Ababa under the leadership of the Tigrayans or TPLF, and Eritrea was freed and declared an independent country by the EPLF. Initially, both parties had a cordial relationship to an extent. This was made evidence when the then TPLF-EPRDF leader, Meles Zenawi attended the Eritrean independence celebrations in Asmara in 1993 (Reid 2003).

Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia and Isaias Afeworki of Eritrea were frequently mentioned in the early 1990s as having reconciled and beginning anew (Reid, 2003). A number of agreements on political, security, and economic collaboration were signed by the two governments. The impression was that the hatred of the liberation war had been put behind them. However, this was not exactly the case as the relationship turned sour. Not only did the relationship turn sour, but it also actually went rotten and put a deep bridge between Eritreans and Ethiopians until 2018, when PM Abiy became prime minister and signed a peace deal with the Eritrean government (ibid).

The war that happened in 1998 between Eritrea and Ethiopia even worsen their relationship. In fact, when Eritrean forces forcefully took hold of a section of territory governed by Tigray in 1998, the two countries' already deteriorating economic and political ties led to a new conflict. This conflict would kill over a hundred thousand people and displace millions (Dias, 2011).

It was only a matter of time, for long-standing issues between Eritreans and Tigrayans to reappear. In 1997, unsolved border problems were worsened by Eritrea's adoption of a new currency and Tigrayan merchants frequently refused to accept it, which led to a collapse in trade between these two parties (Reid 2015). Subsequent developments led to a full-blown war in the 2000s. Eritrea, being a much smaller country compared to Ethiopia in terms of economic, military and political power has greatly suffered irreparably from the war.

In 2000, the TPLF used the Ethiopian military forces to force out the Eritrean military and Tigray had since had control over the whole of Tigray until 2018. Ethiopia also refused to find an amicable way to end the war with Eritrea and as a result, the war went ahead for two decades (Tronvoll, 2022)

Upon assuming power, PM Abiy made certain vital changes which pleased the Eritrean prime minister, Isaias Afwerki making him more accepting of peace talks. Thus, when Mr. Abiy reached out a hand to bring an end to the twenty-year war, Afwerki gleefully agreed. However, some argue

that Mr. Afwerki was not necessarily happy about reconciliation with Ethiopia but rather, he saw it as an opportunity to form alliance with PM Abiy in order to attack TPLF (Tronvoll 2021). The reason being that PM Abiy had made several changes to the political system in Ethiopia and the non-acceptance of the TPLF to join the new Prosperity Party formed by PM Abiy meant that the Tigrayans did not have much say in the political affairs of Ethiopia and since they have a smaller a population, their power had essentially dwindled.

Tronvoll also notes that Afwerki has always been a strong critic of the TPLF-favoured “multinational federal system” since its first mention in Ethiopia in 1991 (2022, p.167). He also did predict that the federal system would bring many problems and troubles to Ethiopia in the future and one can say that Ethiopia is currently living in that future PM or president Afwerki once predicted (Tronvoll, 2022). As a result of persistent anti-TPLF protests, Abiy, who was an Oromo candidate was elected prime minister in Ethiopia. This altered Afwerki's strategy for dealing with Ethiopia. He agreed to Abiy's request to start a political conversation and establish a fresh connection in June 2018. The speech Afwerki gave on June 20, Martyrs Day, which is among the most significant public holidays in Eritrea honoring the slain liberation fighters, however, made apparent his intentions for the procedure when he uttered the notorious phrase, "Game over, TPLF!" (ibid).

3.4.3 The Oromo Liberation Army

Ethiopian politics is very much influenced by ethnicity and tribes. This means that it is quite common for voters to vote along ethnic lines. Ethnic lines are sometimes picked over manifestoes, history or economic plans of individual candidates. There is a visceral support for candidates or leaders from their own ethnic group. Thus. It is quite strange to find that the Oromo forces have chosen to side with Tigray, instead of their own ethnic member, Abiy Ahmed (Tronvoll, 2022)

The cause of this resentment is ideological differences. The Oromo political elite have always been avid supporter of a federal system of government and not a unitary one. It is on this basis that they joined the EPRDF coalition in 1991. In the earlier years of the coalition, the TPLF enjoyed great support from the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). However, TPLF alleged mismanagement put a strain on this cordial relationship.

Huge demonstrations by the Oromo youth movement peaked Ahmed Abiy to the top of the coalition and earned him the highest position in the land as Prime Minister. Thus, the OLM sided

with their ethnic candidate. However, after PM Abiy introduced reforms that leaned towards unitary ideology, tensions between the OLM and PM Abiy began to rise. This has led to the OLM believing that PM Abiy had betrayed them by veering off multinational federalism (Tronvoll, 2022).

Chapter 4: Methodology and Research Design

The methods used in this thesis will be presented and discussed in this chapter. All research projects are founded on methodology, and the choice of design a researcher selects will have an impact on how their research is planned, carried out, and analyzed. There are always several choices to choose from when analyzing data. However, it is up to the researcher to decide what research technique is suitable for research. Transparency in choices regarding methodology and honesty about how analysis was done are basic requirements when conducting research (Bryman 2016).

4.1 Research Design

This research will adopt a purely qualitative design in its analysis. Bryman argues that qualitative research typically places more emphasis on expressions rather than measurement when gathering and analyzing data (ibid). A qualitative research approach, among others, gathers and analyzes data using written materials, visual materials, spoken materials, and textual materials. This is to say that with qualitative research, the emphasis is placed on an in-depth exploration of words and expressions and how to make meaning out of them. In essence, it is about asking ‘why’ and not just ‘what’.

Over the years, feminists have established that majorly, wars affect women differently from men. Men suffer from wartime sexual abuse as well; however, this topic has not garnered a lot of attention comparatively. Therefore, reporters and researchers have established widely on the international scene that rape is an act committed against women that is perpetrated by men. However, that is not always the case. Research has established that men suffer from sexual violence during war. International organizations keep track of the task of counting rape victims since it is crucial to know how many victims there are. However, it is enough to only count. A thorough examination or justification of the causes of rape is required.

“Documenting the widespread nature of wartime sexual violence (also known as “war rape” or “conflict-related sexual violence”) not only helps to inform analyses about the underlying causes of this violence, but it also prompts decisive international action and contributes to better legal, political, medical, and social responses to these harms” (Henry 2015, p.45)

Bryman defines documents as a body of work which have not been created especially for social study, are preserved for the purpose of analysis, and are pertinent to the issues the academic researcher is interested in (Bryman 2016). Since this research is employing a case study, the reports that have been collected and analyzed are mainly war reporting based on the war in Tigray from November 2020 to November 2022. Bryman contends that reports would usually have important details that may be crucial for scholars who are analyzing case studies (Bryman 2020). The selection of reports from various channels and sources is not merely coincidental. Documents or reports produced by various sources usually reveal conflicting accounts of important occasions or phenomenon (Bryman 2016). In this situation, the use of reports from open sources concerning the war provides me with several perspectives.

The war in Tigray started on November 4, 2020. At the time, the entire world was neck deep into a new pandemic, COVID-19. The pandemic took center stage in several news reporting which eventually led to certain matters not gaining as much attention as they should have. As a result, reporting on the war in Tigray is crucial because feminist theory is based primarily on empirical evidence; therefore, the objective is to determine how much reporting was done on this subject and what consequences it had.

Also, the conflict in Ukraine broke out just when the world appeared to be emerging from the pandemic, slowly recuperating, and raising its head. The political, economic, and geographic position of Ukraine and Russia in relation to the rest of the world meant that this war once more dominated news coverage. Newspaper front pages, social media and news headlines were taken over by it. As a result, the Tigrayan armed conflict had little opportunity of taking center stage on foreign news channels alongside the conflict in Ukraine and the worldwide pandemic.

The next chapter (Chapter 5) will disclose the complexities of the war reporting and, to a considerable degree, explore the narratives that the UN, international organizations, and foreign and local media presented. For this reason, research into the war reporting on Tigray is quite important.

As I explained earlier, feminists' international relations scholars developed theories about wartime rape in light of previous conflicts, including the Rwandan genocide, the Bosnian wars, and countless others. In the penultimate chapter of this thesis, I'll use the ideas feminist international relations researchers have developed to explain and evaluate whether the war reporting in Tigray

indicates that rape in combat is a weapon of war, a byproduct of war, or a continuity of gender inequality.

Due to the uncertainty surrounding the current situation in Tigray, I have been compelled to depend on war reporting as my primary source of data. Due to the inaccessibility of the area, conducting fieldwork was not an option. Additionally, at the time of writing, all internet and telephone services had been cut off, making it impossible to contact the war victims in Tigray. The restoration of phone and internet connectivity has been sporadic since February 2023, but it is unpredictable, so I have had to rely on reports to respond to my research question.

These reports include numerous chapters on sexual assault, and I can also refer to several interviews with rape victims.

4.2 Case and Data Selection

In selecting data, only highly relevant reports and news articles who reported and addressed sexual violence in the Tigray war from the year 2020 to 2022 were used.

With regard to lack of access and the volatile nature of Tigray at the time of research, these reports provide a great investigation into the war in Tigray, and they are the best data that is openly accessible as of now. Having said that, it is also important to point out that this research has certain limitations.

In searching the internet for the reports and news website articles to be used for this research, my searches included at least one of these key terms - 'rape', 'Tigray', 'War', 'Ethiopia', and 'Sexual Violence'. In analyzing reports and news items, I proceeded with my data selection in three main stages. In the first stage I strategically searched the internet to find reports and news media that are relevant to my research. The second stage involved reading through the reports and identifying sources based on their quality and their trusted authority on the subject for years. The last stage was a process of 'coding' extract data relevant for my research question.

In coding the data, I first read all the reports to have a general idea and to make sure that they were truly relevant for my research. After that, I went through the reports again to find major themes. That was followed by a colour-coding of both major and minor themes for the analysis section of this thesis.

In selecting data, I had to exclude certain items because the report just cites Ethiopia or Tigray to promote another article but does not to provide any information about either. Other reports were also excluded due to their failure to either mention the war that started on November 2020 or no mention of sexual violence. These reports were discarded and are not included in this research thus, only highly relevant reports and news articles were used.

This research has drawn its data mainly from open sources. Open-source data in this research includes United Nations and non-governmental organizations' reports, news articles and academic articles. Five major reports produced since the beginning of the war in Tigray have been included as part of data for this research. The reports include;

1) *“Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by all Parties to the Conflict in the Tigray Region of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia”*

This report presents data conducted by a joint effort between the EHRC and the OHCHR into various forms of human rights violations and abuses with relations to the armed conflict in the northern part of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia, Tigray. The joint investigation began on May 16, to August 30, 2021, after the EHRC officially called for a collaboration with the OHCHR to investigate the reports of human rights abuses on the 10th of March 2021 and this request was approved on the 12th of March 2021. The investigation covered several zones in Tigray including the capital, Mekelle, as well as southern and western parts of Tigray. Some locations outside Tigray that were considered relevant such as the capital of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, were also included in the investigation.

The investigation interviewed two-hundred and sixty-nine (269) people of which 124 were women and 145, men. The interviews were confidential and included victims and witnesses of alleged human rights violations and sexual abuses. These interviews were conducted in the field.

2) *“I Always Remember That Day” Access to Services for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence in Ethiopia’s Tigray Region*

Human Rights Watch is an international non-governmental organization with the mission of investigating human rights violations and abuses as well as upholding human dignity. This report

was conducted in June and ended in November 2021. Due to inaccessibility and the shut-down of telecommunication services, twenty-one people were interviewed over various “secure channels”. Among these were healthcare workers, international donors, humanitarian aid workers, service providers and members of local organizations. In the report, it is stated that fifteen people who were interviewed worked directly with sexual violence victims and in total, all the people interviewed were handled and treated over a thousand sexual violence victims. In addition, HRW conducted four telephone interviews with two organizations in Tigray concerned with Sexual Violence. Lastly, forty-three individual cases of sexual abuse that had been reported to medical officers were also utilized for the purpose of this report.

3) *“Understanding Conflict Related Sexual Violence In Ethiopia Research Report 2022”*

This report was done in collaboration with Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation and UKaid. This report contains seven in-depth interviews with local and international service providers. In addition to that, over eighty relevant documents were outsourced and used for the purpose of this research. This report opens for more information due to its active engagement with reports and news items in not only English but in Amharic and Italian as well.

4) *“We Will Erase You from This Land” Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing in Ethiopia’s Western Tigray Zone”*

This report is a collaborative effort between two arguably reputable international organizations, which are HRW and Amnesty International. Amnesty International claims to be “independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest, or religion and are funded mainly by our membership and individual donations” (Amnesty International, 2021). The report includes interviews with 427 people of which 409 are victims of sexual abuse. None of the interviews were in-person due to lack of access. Other reports that have been conducted previously by HRW and Amnesty International independently were included in this report as well. The report spanned between November 2020 to December 2021. Medical notes and reports were also analyzed. In addition, eighteen interviews were conducted with media reporters as well as workers on international organizations who have been following this war very closely.

5) *“Weaponized Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Tigray”*

OMNA Tigray is an organization that was created with focus on informed advocacy for Tigrayans. This organization has been pivotal in the reporting of sexual abuses, among other things, in the Tigray war. It claims to be a non-partisan as well as a non-profit organization. In its report, it carried out interviews with survivors' families and engaged several open access data concerning the Tigray war.

In addition to these, I have also gathered fifteen other open-access materials from various reputable websites such as the BBC, the New York times, as well as local news media in Ethiopia. I should note that there should be a separate reference list for news articles.

In total, twenty (20) sources were used for the purpose of analysis in this research.

The reports provide valuable data in studying wartime sexual violence in Tigray. Due to the newness of the war, there is lack of access in getting data and reports provide us with valuable information in understanding sexual violence.

With regard to lack of access and the volatile nature of Tigray at the time of research, these reports provide a great investigation into the war in Tigray, and they are the best data that is openly accessible as of now. Having said that, it is also important to point out that this research has certain limitations.

4.4 Limitations of Study

4.4.1 Underreporting

Due to the fact that data on sexual violence and abuses are quintessentially hard to gather, this dissertation shares the same statistical difficulty as other research efforts on similar subject matter (Nordås & Cohen, 2011). Due to the breakdown of institutions and medical systems, victims of sexual abuse do not report it when they are sexually violated. Also, due to political instability and security concerns, the climate is even more dangerous. Thus, the data presented could be sporadic, splintered, insufficient, and restricted information. At the time of data collection for all the reports, the war was still ongoing and for this reason certain interviews could not be conducted, and certain areas of Tigray were inaccessible and for this reason, the information available is quite limited.

Furthermore, the war in Tigray has been under the shadow of COVID-19 and the Ukraine war, thus, information on the war is comparatively limited.

With that being said, I would like to mention that due to the small size of report sampling for this research, it cannot be used as a generalization of Tigray or Ethiopia. The objective of this research is not to identify a generalization of Tigray or Ethiopia, but to give insights into sexual violence and make sense of the motivations behind them.

4.4.2 Language Barrier

Ethiopia has five official languages which are Amharic, Oromo, Tigrigna, Afar, and Somali. I'm not literate in any of these languages. For these reasons, all my reports and media sources are in English, and I do not recognize that, it would have been credibility of this research would have been heightened if I could read and interpret reports in these five official languages.

4.4.3 Open access Data

These kinds of documents provide makes it easy for verification since everyone with internet is able to access them. All the reports sampled for the purpose of this dissertation were collected from reputable international organizations. Finally, “open access documents enhance the study’s replicability, meaning that other researchers may obtain the same results” (Rihkeim 2022, p.39; Halperin & Heath, 2020)

Even though news items/articles often concentrate on current events and cover only a small area, the use of reports help with the validity of this research as reports are more thorough and incorporate a wider variety of data collection techniques.

Chapter 5: Understanding Experiences and Motivations of Sexual Violence

The focus of this chapter is to answer the main research question of this thesis as stated in ‘Chapter 1’. The chapter has been divided into two sections. The first section investigates the reporting of sexual violence as well as exploring patterns and forms of sexual violence. The second section analyzes the explanations of sexual violence as stated in my research question and answering them by drawing on feminist perspectives and sexual violence reports.

5.1 Overview of Human Rights Concerns in the Tigray War

The Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) announced the beginning of a collaborative investigation into alleged abuses during the war with the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in March 2021. The OHCHR stated that "deeply distressing reports of sexual and gender-based violence, extrajudicial killings, widespread destruction and looting of public and private property by all parties continue to be shared with us." (OHCHR/EHRC 2021, p.53). There have been several reports of human rights abuses in this war. The number of fatalities from the conflict is thought to be as high as 500,000, according to researchers at Ghent University in Belgium. Many of these victims died from famine, sickness, or a lack of medical care. According to UN estimates, millions of people have been displaced (Gottbrath, 2023). The OHCHR also reports that information about a number of incidents, such as city shelling and mass killings, had been verified by the commission (ibid). International organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have reported cases of sexual abuse and killings in Tigray. The severity of sexual violence in this war has been reported by local non-governmental groups, as well as the local and international news media.

U.N. aid chief Mark Lowcock has reported that there are several accounts of prevalent and systematic sexual violence in Tigray, which he claims has been committed by Amhara Special Forces, Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers, as well as affiliated militia, as a form of warfare (Nichols, 2021).

The United Nations (UN) Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict has reported that the occurrence of sexual violence in Tigray is one with a great level of brutality beyond comprehension (U.N., 2021). According to current administrative officials in America, Ethiopia's

military initiated a campaign to fracture families and ruin the mental and reproductive health of its victims (ibid).

Human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have gathered testimonies of rape victims who claim that they were singled out for rape by members of armed forces because of their ethnicity as Tigrayans (Amnesty International, 2021). Amnesty International published a report that suggested a trend of sexual abuse and torture mainly by Ethiopian and Eritrean troops. It also noted "sadistic" viciousness in some attacks, most of which were attributed to Eritrean soldiers (ibid).

5.1.1 Evidence of Sexual Violence in Tigray

Among the several reports of human rights abuses is sexual violence. One of such human rights abuses has been sexual abuse or rape especially against women. Throughout the two-year conflict in Tigray, human rights organizations, the UN, and news media have reported on the widespread rape of Tigrayan women by the federal troops, as well as by their allies from neighboring Eritrea and militia groups. Forces from Tigray have also been accused of raping women in the Amhara region as they advanced into Ethiopia's capital.

Even though, each group has tried to absolve itself from being responsible for sexual violence, the Biden Administration and international observers infer that sexual crimes have been committed by all sides in the Tigray war (Gottbrath, 2023). Reports from Amnesty International and several others also point to the same fact that not only was rape committed by the EDF, Ethiopia and its allies but Tigray, which is clearly to be the underdog in this war has also committed several counts of sexual violence especially against Amharic women (Byaruhanga, 2023). No one group can be absolved from responsibility of this heinous crime. However, Tigray being the underdog also means that its people or women have suffered a great loss and experienced more sexual violence compared to the others. Byaruhanga propounds that even though women in all areas of the conflict have suffered from sexual abuses, reports and evidence show that Tigrayans have suffered more of the abuse than anyone else (2023).

The parties accused of rape are members of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), Tigray Defense Force (TDF), Oromo troops and Amhara forces. As a matter of fact, all parties involved in this war have been accused of perpetrating sexual violence (EHRC/OHCHR, 2021). The accounts of rape have differed in the course of the war. This

is to say that there is no officially agreed number for sexual abuses committed within the two years of the war. However, this is not surprising as the vulnerable nature of war usually does not provide victims with the conducive environment to seek help or report their cases.

In March 2021, Helen Hayes, a British parliamentarian reported in the house of parliament that estimates place the number of rapes against women in Tigray at 10,000 (Hayes & Cleverly, 2021). As a result of the shame surrounding rape and the fact that the majority of healthcare centers were inoperable, the United Nations relief coordinator anticipated that the real occurrences of rapes would be significantly higher (Cook, 2021). Every victim of rape typically reported twenty other women who had also been raped with her and were unwilling to report the rape to any hospitals, according to a doctor at a hospital in Mekelle (Kassa & Pujol-Mazzini, 2021).

According to a July 2021 United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) projection, about twenty-six thousand (26,000) women between the ages of fifteen (15) and forty-nine (49) would require treatment due to rape and gender-based sexual violence during the Tigray War (Gelaw, 2021). The International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHRE) believes that the number of sexual assault victims in Tigray may be substantially greater than the previously stated total of "more than 1,000 women and girls" (ICHRE, 2022). These numbers are thought to be a significant undercount of the real number of sexual violence. There has been a rise in requests for emergency contraception and STD testing at hospitals, which are indications of sexual violence in conflict areas. Internet restrictions at the start of the crisis created a simpler way for Ethiopia to refute claims of violence against women on the ground, but seven months into the conflict, constant reports of rape against young girls and women continue to be revealed (ibid). Despite claims by the Abiy's administration that the TPLF is encouraging women to fabricate stories, hospitals throughout Tigray have compiled hundreds of cases of extremely violent sexual assault along with horrifying accounts of mass rape, extortion and sexual torture (Cook, 2021, p.374). Many women have reported being sexually assaulted by Ethiopian or Eritrean soldiers, proving that Ethiopia does not adequately safeguard young girls and women against gender-based sexual violence and actively promotes it (ibid, p. 374).

The ENDF and EDF have been on the winning end of the Tigray war and as a result, they have been blamed for committing several rapes especially against Tigrayan women (DMF/UKaid, 2022). Reporters have gotten in contact with rape survivors mainly through medical reports and

doctor's notes (Amnesty International, 2021). Others have also made contact with survivors of sexual violence through secured telephone lines (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Rape has mainly been perpetrated in Western Tigray, but it is not only limited to the Tigray region. Reports show that Tigray forces raped Amharic women in Bahir Dar, which happens to be the capital of the region of Amhara (Amnesty International, 2022). However, Tigrayan women have borne the brunt of sexual violence in this war since the TDF does not have as much control compared to the ENDF.

After the EHRC and OHCHR agreed to conduct a joint investigation into the war and sexual violence, Prime Minister Abiy said that his administration was going to investigate the reports of sexual violence (Feleke et al., 2021). However, as at now, not much has been done by the government in investigating wartime rape.

In most cases, the motivation behind sexual violence is insinuated as well as the forms of sexual violence. However, it is important to note that there are certain details that are missing in the reporting of rape which is that men's accounts are rarely mentioned.

5.2 Patterns of Sexual Violence

In reviewing reports and news articles, there has been a trend or pattern of behaviors in regard to sexual violence. This segment of the analysis will discuss the various patterns discovered in the reports used.

5.2.1 Who is mentioned?

The disparities in reporting between men and women's experiences of rape during armed conflict, however, are glaringly apparent. Therefore, despite the fact that feminist literature appears to be slowly moving away from the woman-victim narrative and instead exploring other aspects and genders, there is still much to be done in that area.

In recent years, political, scholarly, and journalistic attention has been focused heavily on wartime sexual violence, particularly rape (Feron, 2017). Horrific accounts of mass rapes and sexual enslavement, among other several examples of sexual violence, continue to shape how we understand armed conflicts especially the Balkan wars, Rwanda Genocide and several other wars over the past decades (ibid). The reportage about rape during the Balkan Wars and the Rwandan Genocide has placed a strong emphasis on women as victims of war. Although it is argued that

women experience the majority of sexual violence during armed conflict, it is interesting that men receive extremely subpar coverage of rape during war.

The focus of war reporting on the wars mentioned above clearly centers on women. Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that feminists have consistently demonstrated that women have historically been the target of rape during times of war. Rape during wartime became a hot topic because feminist scholars wanted to show that women were affected by war differently than men, and one way to achieve that was by investigating the atrocities committed against women in the form of rape. The reporting even in wars after the Bosnian wars and Rwandan genocide often frame sexual violence as occurring primarily, if not exclusive, to women, which is one of the remarkable features of war reporting and the Tigray war reporting is no exception. Due to the notion that women are naturally more peaceful than men, reporters are naturally intrigued by the experiences of women especially when it comes to wartime rape. This can be seen in the reporting of the Tigray war. Majority of the reports are based on female experiences and not the experiences of the perpetrator or the men victims. Thus, this affects what kind of reporting is presented to the masses by the media.

5.2.2 Low reporting of male victims of sexual violence

In all the open access reports and news articles assessed, studied and analyzed for the purpose of this research, much of the attention has been focused on women-victims. There is no interview with any man who was sexually abused. I must mention that over 90% of the report reviewed mention that few men were said to have been rape while some the rest do not refer to men at all. The reports do not provide individual testimonies or accounts of these men's experience as they did with their female counterparts.

Many victims of sexual abuse during armed conflicts are undoubtedly women, and war reporting reflect that. However, it is both troubling and fascinating that male victims have received so little attention. Sexual violence against men during war is frequently referenced both in academia and the media through a rhetoric of 'exceptionality and novelty', as though it were an unfamiliar problem that had just been identified (Feron 2017, p61). Feminist theories are mostly founded on empirical evidence, and as a result, feminists have focused on women for many years. The reportage on male victims is very low. Very little investigation has been done into this kind of reporting (OMNA Tigray, 2022). The EHRC/OHCHR joint investigation (JIT) which happens to

be one of the prominent reporting of sexual violence on this war did not present any personal testimonies or accounts from men who were raped. The mere mention of men being raped without their testimonies reported puts forward an 'add-and-stir' approach. In this sense, men are mentioned just in passing. Feron also reports that violence against men is typically shown as an uncommon phenomenon that does not truly blend into the larger story of sexual violence in conflict. As a result, they are discounted as idiosyncratic and considered to be ineffective for illuminating the bigger picture of wartime rape (Feron 2017, p61). This is surprising because feminist IR scholars express to be very particular about the individual testimonies of the minority and how they shape discourses in the international. However, feminists have been lacking in the reporting of men as victims of sexual assault during war. Previous wars have focused so much on women as victims, and this continues to affect how war report is done even in recent times. This also leads to a situation where because men's experiences are not accounted for, the right policies will not be made to factor in men going forward.

However, another point to mention men's general reluctance to share their rape experiences with reporters or investigators. In a patriarchal society where men are associated with strength, power, and dominations, men are placed in a tough position to report their rape experiences. Rape is frequently not reported because of stigmatization, humiliation, and other factors, to name a few. According to reports, the actual number of rape victims can never be known, and they are likely to be substantially higher. It is emphasized that women's principal role is that of carers and caretakers because it is thought that they are naturally nurturing and civilians. Another unstated notion is that men in war zones are either in the military or are associated with armed groups. Women are believed to have been forced to leave their homes, forced into sexual slavery or human trafficking, or even forced into joining armed groups. In other words, women's behaviors and deeds are typically portrayed as though they were unrelated to the war, as if they could only ever be victims and never agents (Feron, 2017).

Hence, in a war that has been under the shadow of COVID-19 and the Ukraine war, it is not very surprising that the reportage of male victims is especially low. There is a power dynamic built into how rape is viewed, that is the perpetrator being powerful or dominant and the victim considered weak. Therefore, a man who experiences rape is seen as one who is weak and is dormant. In patriarchal societies, men would want to keep rape experiences to themselves since society is set

out in such a way that men are supposed to be powerful, and women, not so powerful as men. This illustrates how little is done to account for men's perspectives when it comes to war reporting, with the focus continuing largely on women. Doctors without borders has compiled a good number of cases in several African countries including DRC where women have perpetrated their war crime of rape (Feron, 2017). Many men end up committing suicide and this has been seen in the reporting of the Tigray war as well. Feron also argues that because the international community tend to tailor recovery programmes mainly for women and for that reason, men do not feel welcome to share their experiences (Ibid). Male victims suffer tragic consequences because of the fact that the majority of international programs addressing sexual violence during conflicts focus on women and often suggest that only women are capable of being victims of sexual violence. Thus, this takes men out of the discussion of sexual violence in most situation. On a global scale, and particularly in terms of United Nations (UN) policy and resolutions, there is minimal discussion of male sexual assault during times of conflict; instead, attention is focused on the necessity of shielding women from male aggression (Shacks, 2018).

5.2.2 What is mentioned?

Findings show that different types of sexual violence were present throughout the armed conflict in Tigray (Amnesty International, 2021). Even though some international organizations have provided the numbers of recorded or confirmed occurrences of sexual violence, there has been no attempt made to determine the entire scope of incidences of sexual violence in this conflict. Sexual violence reporting on the war has included people of all ages and sexes even though there seems to be more survivors of rape who are of young ages (mostly, early twenties and teenage girls). It is reported that young girls and women from Tigray were the primary target and children as young as six years old were raped. People with disabilities and pregnant women were raped as well (Amnesty International & Human Rights Watch, 2022). In certain cases, victim's family, usually their children and spouses were often compelled to watch on as their relatives were raped:

“Service providers and health providers also raised concerns about the trauma experienced by family members of sexual violence survivors, particularly children and spouses. Some were raped in front of family, husbands, the whole family is disturbed” (Amnesty International & Human Rights Watch, 2022, p.46).

A twenty-seven-year-old shop owner identified as Jamila reported that while she was in her shop, a group of armed Fano militia entered her shop and went ahead to rape her right Infront of her kids:

“Two of them raped me and then I lost consciousness and don’t know how many more raped me, if all six [did], or not. They said: “You Tigrayans should disappear from the land west of Tekeze! You are evil and we are purifying your blood.” It was early morning, before 7 a.m., ... about four days after the ENDF came to town. My children were with me, and they saw what they did to me. They are 7 and 2 years old” (Human Rights Watch, 2021, p.147).

Older women have also reported of being raped. An 80-year-old woman named Shashu was raped by multiple men.

“Two, three people on one human, I was completely traumatized. It's as if there is nothing good on my body anymore” (Byaruhanga, 2023).

In other cases, some family members were forced to rape their own relatives. In the town of Abiy Addi, a grandfather was ordered to sexually assault his 18-year-old granddaughter of which he refused and for that reason, he was killed (Insecurity insight 2021, as cited in DMF/UKaid, 2021).

Several forms of sexual violence have been reported including anal, oral and vaginal rape as well as the insertion of foreign objects especially to the female body parts. Some men were stripped naked in public while others were mutilated with heated metal rods (ibid). Sexual violence was either preceded or followed by demeaning verbal abuse usually directed at the victim’s ethnicity or lineage (Amnesty International, 2021).

5.3 Applying Theory

To draw from the theoretical foundation presented in chapter two of this thesis, there were three feminist explanations give in understanding wartime rape. They are rape as a byproduct and/or weapon of war as well as a continuum of gendered inequality. In this section of this chapter, I present findings from reports in analyzing each category.

5.3.1 War reporting on rape as a weapon of war.

Rape as a weapon of war has garnered a lot of attention from feminist IR scholars and the international media in the late 1990s. This explanation to wartime rape gained popular attention during the Bosnian wars and then the Rwandan genocide. These wars brought a new perspective as to how the international opinion would begin to define how and why rape happens. The wars in Bosnia and Rwanda changed in that perpetrators of war were charged or prosecuted for the first time at the International Criminal Court (ICC) as a war crime and crime against humanity. It has been established with evidence that during the Bosnian war, there was an intentional goal of Serbian soldiers impregnating Muslim women in rape camps (Shackels, 2010). Sexual violence perpetrated by the Serbian militias, primarily against Muslim women in Bosnia, was a significant part of the war. Sexual camps and rape camps were set up to rape women, specifically.

Even though the rape in Tigray has not proven to be as systematic as the one in Bosnia where gynecologists were recruited to make sure women got pregnant, and the women who did not get pregnant were punished, it still does not throw away the argument that the rape of Tigray women still had some systematic features to it and this section of the paper will explore that. These three dynamics have been identified in explaining rape as a weapon of war in this context. The war in Tigray has been considered an ethnic conflict (Gondwe, 2021). Thus, the question of identity has come to bear in explaining why Tigrayan women have been especially targeted by the EDF. Violence and the deliberate building of ethnic identities are closely related, argues Fearon and Laitin (2000).

5.3.1.1 Ethnic Identity

In the war in Tigray, there has been several accounts of women who were held for several days in certain areas and rape numerous times before released. EHCRC/OHCHR JIT reports that five women were kidnapped, held captive, and sexually assaulted for a duration of a few days to three months in 2020 (2021). One of the victims, a Tigrayan woman reports that she was transferred to an unidentified place in the Amhara region, where she spent about three months being detained against her wishes in a soldier's home (Ibid). At the time she was interviewed, she was reported to have been seven months pregnant because of the sexual abuse she suffered during her detention (ibid).

This incident is not different from what happened, particularly during the BiH war. In the Tigray war, there has been reports of women, specifically of Tigrayan descent were detained in soldiers'

houses and raped numerously for days. The Eritrean has been accused of the bulk of rape in this war. The Eritrean army especially has used this war in Tigray as a platform to avenge what the TPLF did to Eritreans during their reign.

Identity is a key issue in regard to wartime rape. Questions of identification are brought into stark perspective during times of war. Every social group, including those that are targeted, develops a stronger sense of self in times of danger (Weitsman 2006, p.566). Due to patriarchy and the context of the Ethiopian community, fathers are only considered the sole contributors to identity. Thus, a baby conceived through rape is seen as that of the opponent man who raped and not necessarily the woman who brought forth the baby. This goes ahead to explain that women are only seen as or are reduced to baby-making machine who do not contribute anything meaningful to the community aside giving birth to kids. For this reason, women who are raped or sexually tortured, are eventually considered as people who have nothing to offer the society, and this leads to women being targeted. Thus, soldiers who rape women know exactly what they are doing because they know that at the very least, they are stripping away whatever dignity is left of these women, if there is any at all.

When these babies are born, their identity is irrevocably tied to their rapists. It is common for the father's identity to be absolutely undetermined, either because the victim did not identify the perpetrator or because the mother was sexually molested by several different men that it is difficult to verify paternity without genetic testing (Weitsman 2006, p.566). Nevertheless, this bond to the father still exists and to a large extent determines the whole identity of the child regardless of if the child was completely raised by his/her mother. That stigma still exists no matter what. Some of these soldiers who perpetrate rape are very aware of the collateral damage they cause when they rape and forcefully impregnate women. They know that the impact is generational and would cause problems and shame for prolonged times and this also feeds into men wanting to dominate and fighting against the enemy who is usually a man through a woman. This explains that if the combatant rapes the women, she does not only affect one individual but also finds a way to sting the 'ego' of his rival. This sends a very strong message about how identity is viewed, created, and imagined (Weitsman 2006, p.566). This connection also sheds light on the presumption that the maternal contributions of women to the identity and parenting of their children are insignificant in these patriarchal societies (ibid).

“If you were male we would kill you, but girls can make Amhara babies” -

(Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, 2022, p.145)

This also insinuates that men carry the identity of a child. Thus, the killing of Tigrayan men means wiping out the Tigrayan identity and the impregnation of women connotes the continuation of the Amharan identity or at least a diffusing of the Tigrayan identity. This continually confirms the reasoning that women are affected differently by wars compared to men. Women are often left with the burden of carrying a pregnancy they do not want, birthing the child and still not being recognized for contributing to the child’s identity. Also, most women eventually go through stigmatization when other members of the community find out they were impregnated through rape by the ‘enemy’. The child born of wartime rape also suffers abuse from the community for this same reason.

5.3.1.2 Sexual Slavery and Ethnic Cleansing

In Bosnia, women were raped severally by numerous men at different times. In the Tigrayan situation, despite there being evidence of women being detained and raped, there is no report pointing to sexual camps being set up as it was done during the war in Bosnia.

In Bosnia, Sharlach lists three indications that sexual violence was premeditated and methodical. Firstly, rapes that occurred in various camps had the similar characteristic of male relatives being forced to rape their own family members. Secondly, the act of sexual violence happened against Muslim Serbs concurrently during the war in different sexual camps located across the Bosnia. Lastly, sexual violence was perpetrated in the same detention facilities (2010).

In the case of Tigray, the reports do not specify if sexual camps were set up or not, nor do they mention if these rapes happened simultaneously. However, there is mention that rape was targeted mainly against the young girls and women of Tigrayan descent and some cases men.

Men were reportedly stripped naked to shame them or were raped. However, the reports show that Ethiopian Army, the Eritrean Defense forces, and the Amharan allies specifically targeted Tigrayan women.

“You [Tigrayans] ill-treated the Eritreans for 20 years, now for 50 years you will starve, then we will kill your men and rape your women. We were sent here to clean out Tigrayans, they will be replaced by real Ethiopians; we are cleansing this country of people like you.”

(EHRC/OHCHR, 2021, p.43)

Women who had male relatives who fought with the Tigrayan Defense Force were singled out for confinement and then suffered various types of sexual assault (ibid). This suggests that sometimes, the reason why men rape is not necessarily to ‘hurt’ the women but to send a message to the enemy camp. The EDF is reported to have harassed relatives of fighters on Tigray’s side. With the deliberate intent of demeaning, tormenting, and condemning Tigrayan women, systematic rape occurred during the regional killing in Tigray in particular. There is no doubt that ethnicity and gender largely influenced the widespread rape of Tigrayan women. Due to the TPLF’s long stay in power, there has been some form of hatred for Tigrayans by other ethnic groups in Ethiopia and even Eritrea due to the power struggle that happened between the TPLF and the Eritrean forces at the time. The patriarchal nature of society and the perception of women (especially Tigrayan women, in this case) as sexual objects that must be subjugated explains some of these comments some the perpetrators passed.

Even though most of the rape accounts suggest that rape was perpetrated mainly against Tigrayan women by the Ethiopian army and their allied forces, there has also been some reports of Tigrayan soldiers committing this atrocious act. According to reports, several wives of male Ethiopian-allied fighters were arrested, and gang raped. Some of them were killed after they were raped (ibid). Women were frequently kept in segregated areas, beaten, and regularly raped by many men at a time for several days, just like in the cases of the Rwandan genocide and Bosnian wars.

However, the ethnic cleansing and sexual slavery of particularly Tigrayan women cannot be singled out. The patriarchal makeup of the Ethiopian or Tigrayan society played a significant role in encouraging widespread rape culture especially during wartime. Women remained and still do remain primarily dependent on male family members especially their husbands, and their lives almost revolves completely around being wives and mothers even though there has been some progress over the years. In a community where so much of a woman’s worth is defined by her virginity or sexual ‘purity’, there have been fighters who have been raping virgins and further hurting their self-esteem:

“He raped me while the other three waited outside. He took my virginity and then left, and then the other three men also raped me”

(Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, 2022, p.148)

There has been attacks on women’s reproductive health during this war. In patriarchal communities, women gain social status from giving birth and their capability to maintain their virginity until marriage. Thus, the rape of women is just a way to diminish their social status and render them worthless or useless and to also take away their dignity.

These women's cultural status ‘decline’ when raped as they are seen as ‘unworthy’ for marriage or to be part of the community even if it happened during wartime. This makes life even harder for young girls and women. The reports also point to the fact that some perpetrators did say that they were brought to Tigray to give Tigrayan women HIV (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

“Why the hell did you want this? We want you to be sick. That is what we are here for. We are here to make you HIV-positive” (Kassa & Pujol-Mazzini, 2021)

In Rwanda, rape was a tactic employed in to dehumanize Tutsi women and make them unhealthy as well; it was not done particularly to get them to become pregnant. This has been evident in some reports of sexual abuse in the war in Tigray. Since women are generally considered the ‘carriers’ of babies, making her ill will also affect the generation she gives birth to. Thus, rape and other sexual assaults have frequently been used to demean and dehumanize the victims during war.

Even though rapes in Tigray have been described as frequently violent, involving punching, insertion of foreign materials into private parts, slashing, etc. there isn't any solid proof that women were intentionally targeted in the same way that they were in Rwanda.

5.3.2 War reporting on rape as a continuum of gender inequality.

5.3.2.1 Gender relations

It has been argued that gender-based sexual violence during wartime is based on already existing gender relations. Wartime rape is such a potent weapon of terror because it is based on the very idea of honor anchored in women's bodies and feeds on underlying gender relations and social structures (Olujic, 1998; Bhasin, 1998).

Some feminists believe that it is useful to quickly review the relationship between gender relations in both peace and war and sexual violence during armed conflict as this will help to better understand rape during wartime. This is to say that, when studying rape, the sole focus should not be on why rape happened during the war but to also go back and try to make sense of the preexisting gender relations even before the war started. In a community or country where patriarchy is so pronounced, you would find that usually men would find women as a tool to use during war so instead of killing them, they would rather sexually abuse these women.

Many feminists see militarization as the more pressing problem rather than warfare, because warfare is more of a temporary process comparatively. After all, militarized culture justifies violence as a means of resolving dispute (Farwell, 2017).

The military establishes and upholds power structures both on the national level and on the international level, making it mainly a patriarchal institution in terms of both its personnel and policies and as a result, it perpetuates gender roles and patriarchy within society (ibid).

Many feminist scholars see gender relations as a never-ending battleground without an apparent resolution for women whose safety is in jeopardy. Sexual violence during war overlaps with these continuous spaces of conflict and is also largely influenced by gender (Kelly, 2015).

Farwell (2017) views wartime rape as an “intensification, an extreme iteration, of the sexual violence that exists even when armed conflict is not present” (p.394). Thus, patriarchy and militarization interact, and patriarchy is more pronounced during times of war as a result of the disintegration of social structures and the increased likelihood that rapists will get away with their crimes. In this sense, rapists have an easier time with their crimes. Farwell (2013) goes on to say that also argues that during war, “protectionist values that are inherent in patriarchal relations promote views of women as men’s property to be defended” (p.394).

This is why it is not surprising that women who are related to fighters have been particularly targeted in this war. One of the victims of rape reports that she was particularly targeted due to her relationship with the fighters.

“...he asked if my father was a fighter and I said he was dead. He said: “You liar!” and slapped me in the face. He raped me while the other three waited outside” - (Amnesty International & Human Rights Watch, 2022, p.99).

Sexual violence is an assault on both the enemy's manliness, demonstrating that they are unable to defend "their" women (Olujic 1998).

Gendered relations are shaped by constructions of reproduction, whereby the woman's body and a man's relationship to it are essentially interpreted. In this way, the woman's body is only limited or understood as only a reproductive body. In Delaney's words, 'men are owners of the seed, in the form of both the grain and children, and they control the seedbeds in which these are planted' (1991, p.239)

According to this perspective, the woman serves as the seed's carrier and gives nourishment from the 'soil' which is her physical body, but the seed from the man is what establishes the child's identity and not that of the woman's.

As seen by pleas to preserve the dignity of the 'motherland', states are frequently seen metaphorically as female, and thus need to be shielded from external pressures (Farwell, p.395).

"... we will kill your men and rape your women" (EHCR/OHCHR, 2021, p.43).

The above statement was a reported claim by one of the perpetrators of rape. The identity of a woman is always tied to a man and for this reason, an attack on a woman is preemptively an attack on her male protector. This goes to show that women are not necessarily seen as individuals and are always attached to the identity of a man whether it be her father, husband, or other close male relatives.

In effect, the identity of the child born of rape becomes automatically tied to that of the father. This leads to women who get pregnant being ashamed to go back to their community or suffer stigma because their baby's identity is tied to the rapist.

For women and young girls who have been raped and for the children born as a result, facing social stigma is a critical issue (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

A healthcare provider reported that thirteen babies had been delivered at a safehouse, however, only one mother had been able to reintegrate into the Tigrayan community as the other twelve are terrified of going back due to social stigma and inability to provide and care for their babies (ibid). Due to women's dependency on their male relatives in patriarchal communities, women find it

hard to be able to stand on their own feet. Thus, in patriarchal societies, “men are both the arbiters and the protectors of the boundaries for women and for nations” (Farwell, 395).

Also, because the body of a woman is considered one of the important features of her, if not the only important feature, raping a woman is essentially you completely ripping her off her self-respect and dignity. Also, in a society where the men who commit the abuse are spared but all the shame and stigma are directed towards the woman to the point where in most cases, the relatives denounce her for being rape, rape serve as a power play for the rapists.

Culturally, women are considered as people who protect the dignity of their community. Yuval-Davies argues that women uphold the reputation of their society by getting married and adhering to customs that preserve hereditary lineage and unadulterated ethno-cultural identity (1997, p.395).

The conclusion is that during armed conflicts, sexual violence turns into a tactic for breaching or even demolishing these hereditary and ethno-cultural identity and further undermining the ‘honor of the community and the purity of its lineage’ (Farwell, p.395).

In the case of the war in Tigray, from the victim’s narrative of sexual violence especially pointing to the comments they made while committing the act, one can say that the aim of these rapists and other combatants has been to destroy the lineage of Tigrayans and to attack the ‘honor’ and ‘ego’ of the Tigrayan men in a way to shame them for not protecting their women or also to call them weak. This is because in a patriarchal society, men are supposed to be strong and protect their women so a failure of men to protect their women point to these men are weak and the enemy is strong and this reenforces their patriarchal tendencies or capabilities.

5.3.3 War reporting on rape as a byproduct of war

Rape as a by-product of war was one of the first understandings of why rape happens during wars. Early feminist scholars contend that the justification for rape as a byproduct of war stems from a belief in men's (heterosexual) natural desire for sexual release. This belief undoubtedly underlies the persistent appearance of prostitution camps around battlefields in time past and in a variety of international contexts, including UN peacekeeping missions (Baaz & Stern, 2009; Witworth, 2004).

From the reports studied and reviewed for the purpose of this thesis, there is no record of prostitution camps being set up to satisfy the sexual needs of heterosexual men.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) found Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, who happens to be a former minister of family and women's development in Rwanda, guilty of war crimes such as rape, as well as several grave violations of the Geneva Conventions (UN, 2011).

During the prosecution of people who had committed atrocious crimes during the Rwanda genocide, it came to light that some women were 'given out' to fighters as a reward for their efforts in the genocide and Pauline Nyiramasuhuko played a major role in that.

In this sense, the men who committed the act were not necessarily doing it out of punishing the women but in a way to fulfill their sexual desires. The reports concerning the war in Tigray do not mention any such thing happening.

Sometimes, the reason rape become rampant is because of the reaction of the leading commanders to rape. Even when it is common, rape by fighters may occur as a routine, when it seems to be allowed from top officials (Wood, 2018).

Thus, the popularity of rape during wars can sometimes depend on the Commander's position on rape and his or her approach to addressing it that is either penalizing perpetrators or fostering norms (ibid).

Prime Minister Abiy, who is commander-in-chief of the Ethiopian National Defense Force has been accused of having a lackadaisical approach towards rape reporting during the war. In the initial stages of the war, he consistently refused to address the issue of rape publicly. His government officials consistently denied the occurrence of rape as well. This lackadaisical approach must have inculcated rape norms with fighters knowing they were most likely going to get away with their crimes.

It is important to mention that compared to other explanations of wartime rape, determining if rape is a mere by-product of war is difficult to ascertain. It has also been argued that men raping women in the name of their inevitable desire for sexual release is inextricably linked to power relations between men and women in society. The perception of men in a patriarchal society of women's

body being something they can use for their own pleasure is the real issue at hand. Thus, more attention needs to be paid to that.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have examined feminist perspectives on sexual violence and the reporting of sexual violence in the war in Tigray. I have investigated three main conceptualizations of wartime rape, which are a) weapon of war, b) byproduct and c) continuum of gendered inequalities and expounded and how the reporting of the war fits into these explanations or not. To begin with, to understand sexual violence in relation to armed conflict, I have drawn on feminist conceptualization of sexual violence and how wartime rape has been theorized over the years based on previous wars such as the BiH war and Rwandan Genocide. This is seen in the second chapter of this thesis.

Secondly, ‘Chapter 3’ of this thesis brings a full understanding to the war, in terms of how it started, where it started and who the main parties and individuals involved in this war are.

‘Chapter 4’ is my methodological chapter which presents the research design, sources and limitations of this study. I discuss that underreporting, language barrier and the use of open access data limits the findings of this study.

‘Chapter 5’ of this study contains the analysis. The thesis has found that sexual violence has been committed against individuals, especially women of all sexes and ages were a target for combatants. However, the thesis also found that women of Tigrayan descent were particularly targeted by the EDF and ENDF even though victims’ profiles have varied.

This thesis has also found that all parties to this armed conflict have been accused of committing sexual violence. Even though, the TDF has been on the losing end of this war, reports have shown that they have committed rape against women of different ethnicities, such as the Amharic.

Furthermore, this thesis has also found that there was a deliberate attempt by combatants to damage the reproductive capacities of women of Tigrayan descent through mutilations and insertion of foreign objects into their private parts.

Per the findings of this thesis, I conclude that wartime rape in the Tigray war can be categorized as a weapon of war and continuum of gendered inequality. I argue that considering wartime rape as a mere byproduct of war is problematic as this explanation actually ties into power relations.

I should mention that my research is limited to these three themes thus, had I focused on other understandings of wartime rape, my result would have probably been different.

To conclude, this war has been under the radar when it comes to the international community. This is not surprising because it has been under the shadow of COVID-19 and the Ukraine war. However, I believe that feminist international relations scholars can make a difference by showing research interest in this war and studying deeper into the issues of sexual violence.

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