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# **The Role of media in spreading dangerous speech in the war in Tigray, Ethiopia during 2020-2022**

Solomon Gebrhwiot Tesfi  
Global Development studies (M-GDS)



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Noragric Department of International Environment and Development Studies

The Faculty of Landscape and Society P.O. Box 5003 N-1432 Ås Norway

Tel.: +47 64 96 52 00

Fax: +47 64 96 52 01

Internet: <http://www.nmbu.no/noragric>

**DECLARATION**

I, Solomon Gebrehiwot Tesfi, 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 thesis has not been submitted before and previously to any academic institution previously.

Signature.....

Date.....

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to all people who are directly and/or indirectly affected by the two-year war in Tigray, Ethiopia

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## **ABSTRACT**

Hate speech plays a significant role in ethnic conflict and war but we lack a good understanding of how and under what circumstances such discourse correlates with violence. To address this gap, Maynard and Benesch (2012) proposed the concept of ‘dangerous speech’, and differentiated between intent and capacity. Understanding the risks associated with disseminating dangerous speech through mass media may facilitate monitoring, early warning and prevention of mass violence (Marques, 2019), and is a necessary step in exploring effective forms of countering dangerous speech. This research examined how dangerous speech shared on mainstream media has intensified identity-based violence in the Tigray war in Ethiopia that took place from 2020 to 2022 as well as the role of journalists in relation to dangerous speech. The study utilized the dangerous speech framework to analyse leaders’ speeches as well as data from interviews with Ethiopian journalists based on thematic analysis of reports and interview data. The research identified examples of dangerous speech by government authorities including: dehumanization, assertion of attack against women and girls, guilt attribution, and threat to group integrity.

Secondly, it found that state used media in disseminating dangerous speech through manipulating longstanding historical grievances for political gains and to justify their position and action while journalists showed loyalty to their ethnic identity and lacked professionalism, which was evident in their divergent views on national issues such as origin of the Tigray war, the role of Eritrea in the war, Ethiopian ethnic federalism and future of the country, and this made it difficult for the journalists to challenge dangerous speech.

**Keywords:** dangerous speech framework, Tigray war, Ethiopia, media, mass violence

## ACRONYMS

ATV	Amhara Television
CMA	Center for International Media
CSJ	Conflict Sensitive Journalism
DS	Dangerous Speech
DSP	Dangerous Speech Project
DW	Dimtsi Weyane Tigray
EDF	Eritrean Defense Force
EIP	European Institute of Peace
ENDF	Ethiopian National Defense Force
EPLF	Eritrean People’s Liberation Front
EPRDF	Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front
ESAT	Ethiopian Satellite Television
ETOC	Ethiopian Tewahdo Orthodox Church
FMI	Fojo Media Institute
FP	Foreign Policy
ICG	International Crisis Group
IMS	International Media Service
TMH	Tigray Media House
TOTC	Tigray Orthodox Tewahdo Church
TPLF	Tigray People’s Liberation Front
TTV	Tigray Television
UNESCO	United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organization



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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Media often play a key role in today's conflict escalation either through taking an active part in the conflict and has responsibility for increased violence and/or conflict de-escalation through staying independent and thus contributing to the resolution of conflict and peace-building process (Sandra, Georgios, & Ozsel, 2002). The history of the 21st century indicates the relationship between war and mass media resulting in the exploitation of media for war promotion and war propaganda (Scheffler, 2015).

According to the World Press Freedom Index Ethiopia ranks 99 out of 180 countries for respect for freedom of information (European Institute of Peace, 2021), with the government holding a powerful position on the media landscape, accounting for one third of all broadcast media in the country. Historically, Ethiopia's media had been associated with ethnic interests, whereby the media have been used by authorities to propagate political as well as ethnic causes; for example, during Emperor Haile Selassie media was treated as a mouthpiece for Ethiopian unity based on Amhara supremacy which was reflected in the language policy of the media, and the Derg regime (1974–1991) continued to view the media as a potential battleground for ethnic conflict and a one-language policy was enforced in the state media in favor of Amharic (Skjerdal,2020). Meanwhile, in post-1991, EPRDF's ethnic federalism philosophy was integrated in its media policy allowing different regions and ethnic groups to be acknowledged by the media. The media reforms after 2018 represent the most promising for the Ethiopian media in which the ethnification received less attention but with unsolicited secondary effects including increased polarization between media outlets driven by ethnic interests to the extent that it is now common to describe media outlets primarily out of their ethnic sympathies (Skjerdal & Mulatu, 2020).

Armed conflict in Tigray began in November 2020, involving four belligerents: the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) and associated militia, the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), and Amhara Regional Special Forces and aligned militias against the TDF, popularly known as the Weyane (EI P, 2021), driven by factors including deep disagreement over the history, nature, and future of the Ethiopian state; power

struggle within the former ruling party; rising ethno- nationalism; and the “Eritrean question. Abiy Ahmed rose to power in 2018, after three years of protests partly against the rule of the TPLF, which had dominated Ethiopia for almost three decades and with the coming to power of Abiy Ahmed made the TPLF believe that the new government had sidelined them, cutting them out of a rapprochement with their former comrade and then archenemy, Eritrean President, Isaias Afewerki, and singling out Tigrayans for prosecution for corruption and human rights offences, while Abiy’s allies argue that the TPLF never accepted losing power, blocked reforms and sought to sabotage the new authorities. As the power struggle simmered, TPLF’s leaders proceeded in 2020 with regional elections in Tigray, in defiance of federal authorities, who had postponed the vote due to COVID-19 and the constitutional crisis escalated when the federal and Tigray governments cast each other as illegitimate and this standoff soon boiled over until on 3 November 2020, saying they feared federal military intervention, Tigray’s forces attacked the national army command in the region and in response, the Ethiopian federal government launched an offensive in Tigray while the neighboring Amhara region took control of Western Tigray, in a campaign that rights groups described as ethnic cleansing and Eritrea also joined the battle on the federal side, with Isaias seemingly hoping to deal his old foe, the TPLF, a decisive blow (International Crisis Group, 2022).

A distinctive feature of the Tigray conflict has been the level of cyber warfare or competition over information and narratives where the warring parties deliberately embarked on a campaign to seize control of the flow of information and blindly discredit any sources that countered their narrative of the conflict (Tofa, Kifle & Kinkoh, 2022). Throughout the conflict as a result of Ethiopia's media ecosystem weaknesses, the media was vulnerable to fake news, misinformation, and hate speech; for example, a study conducted by Tofa, Kifle & Kinkoh (2022) found significant levels of disinformation, misinformation, and biased reporting in the Tigray conflict, with the consequences of fuelling violence and polarization, risking the role of journalism and when journalism becomes a vector for disinformation (UNESCO, 2018), it further reduces public trust and promotes the cynical view that there is no distinction between different narratives within journalism on the one hand and narratives of disinformation on the other.

## **1.2 Problem statement**

Dangerous speech and information disorder are weapons of war and enablers of conflict, used to create and reinforce sentiments of mistrust, exclusion, fear and anger toward perceived enemies, and simultaneously to unite allies and their use and impact-under the labels of propaganda, information warfare, and psychological warfare-have been widely documented and researched (Social Science Research Council, 2020). Inflammatory hate speech catalyzes mass killings including genocide by teaching people to view other human beings as less than human, and as mortal threats, thought leaders can make atrocities seem acceptable – and even necessary, as a form of collective self- defense, as was evident in such speech famously preceded the Holocaust, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and other intergroup mass killings, however, alarming though this phenomenon is, inflammatory speech presents opportunities for preventing mass violence, since it commonly precedes such violence and at a minimum, it can serve as a new early warning indicator (Benesch, 2013).

In the Tigray conflict of Ethiopia, an interaction of social media and mass media played a key role in skewed representation of facts by the government and other warring parties by incepting new narratives or reinforcing existing narratives, and these narratives have been endorsed by high-ranking government officials and disseminated not only on social media, but also through government-affiliated mass media outlets, including television (Shifa & Pabon, 2022). There is abundant research on the impact of hate speech on social media in Ethiopia; however, the vast majority of these studies focus on what is being said or displayed, and how and why messages emerge and spread, but looking through the narrow lenses of a causal link between hate speech and physical conflict misses the complex dynamics of the conflict. According to Benesch (2021), one of the biggest challenges in researching hate speech is accurately classifying statements that contain aggressive, offensive, or hateful content and the difficulty is both conceptual and methodological and therefore, she argues that additional criteria are needed when assessing how dangerous speech acts are and should include: a powerful speaker with a high degree of influence over the audience; the audience has grievances and fear that the speaker can cultivate; a speech act that is clearly understood as a call to violence; a social or historical context that is propitious for violence, for any of a variety of reasons, including longstanding competition between groups for resources, lack of efforts to resolve grievances, or

previous episodes of violence and a means of dissemination that is influential in itself, for example, because it is the sole or primary source of news for the relevant audience.

The purpose of this study was to understand how the media was used to disseminate dangerous speech by leaders during the Tigray war in Ethiopia during 2020-2022, and secondly, to show the roles and challenges of Ethiopian journalists with regard to dangerous speech.

Specific objectives of the study include:

- Examine the nature of dangerous speech by Ethiopian leaders and public figures during the Tigray conflict from 2020 to 2022.
- Explore the relationship of journalists related to dangerous speech in the Tigray war in Ethiopia.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

1, What were the dominant dangerous speeches by politicians and public figures spread through various media channels, and how did they impact the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia from 2020 to 2022?

2, What are the roles and constraints of journalists in relationship dangerous speech?

Thesis outline

This thesis consists of five chapters: the first chapter is an introduction and it shows background information regarding the role of media and journalists in conflict, and the aim, objectives as well as the research questions of the study. The second chapter discusses the theoretical framework chosen to undertake the research and previous research regarding the topic. The third chapter consists the research methodology used to conduct the study; and the fourth chapter presents the findings and discussions, and it is divided in to four sections including: section one discusses an overview of media environment in Ethiopia, followed by a contextual background of the Tigray war in Ethiopia; the third section presents findings of analysis of dangerous speech by leaders and the fourth section presents the findings of interview data from Ethiopian journalists in relation to dangerous speech. The fourth chapter will be the concluding chapter of the thesis, where the research questions will be revisited and answered, and some recommendations for further studies and applications will be presented.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Media and Conflict

Mass media often plays a key role in today's conflict; their role can take two different and opposed forms, either it takes an active part in the conflict and has responsibility for increased violence, or stays independent and out of the conflict, thereby contributing to the resolution of conflict and alleviation of violence (Puddephatt, 2006) and which role the media takes in a given conflict, and in the phases before and after, depends on a complex set of factors, including the relationship the media has in the conflict and the independence the media has to the power holders in society (Puddephatt, 2006). The media sector is usually the first to be blamed when dangerous speech spreads; if a medium releases hate speech this may not only lead to a broad dissemination of such utterances, but may also be accompanied with an increased influence since a medium conveys a degree of legitimacy, and can confer authority and strengthen trustworthiness (Benesch 2008, as cited in Scheffler, 2015) and journalists bear a high degree of responsibility.

The functions of the media in conflict prevention and peace building include (Bratic & Schirch, 2007):

- **Media as information provider:** the media provide people with important information about their environment (e.g. political, cultural, social issues) and help us interpret events beyond our physical realm and help us make sense of them.
- **Media as Gatekeeper:** the media can also act as a gatekeeper who sets agendas, filters issues and tries to maintain a balance of views.
- **Media as Watchdog:** the media sometimes acts as a third party 'watchdog' who provide feedback to the public on local problems and it can bring hidden stories out into the public.
- **Media as policymaker:** the media has influence on policymakers, particularly as they think about how to prevent and respond to violent conflict and it is also a tool of policymakers to get across their message.
- **Media as diplomat:** sometimes the media is used to cover diplomatic initiatives and send messages back and forth between sides of a conflict.



- **Media as peace promoter:** media events can be used at the beginning of negotiations to build confidence, facilitate negotiations or break diplomatic deadlocks to create a climate conducive to negotiation.
- **Media as bridge builder:** the media can promote positive relationships between groups, particularly in conflicts over national, ethnic, religious identity.

## 2.2 Journalism and conflict

One of the most important things that could help reducing conflicts is communication and for two sides to move towards a non-violent resolution they must first talk and this is where good journalism comes in (International Media Support, 2014). In situation of conflict, media that take merely the positions of authorities without probing into the core problem may only do inflammatory purpose in situation of the surfacing of the conflict and this is usually ascribed to news media symbiotic to government (Desta, 2022). According to Desta (2022), this presumption is pertinent to government-affiliated news media specifically operated in Ethiopia dwelling on escalation instead of digging to uncover the interests and needs of parties for cooperative, mutual benefit.

According to IMS (2014), the elements of conflict resolution that good journalism can deliver include:

- **Channeling communication:** The news media is often the most important channel of communication that exists between sides in a conflict. Sometimes one side may use the media to broadcast intimidating or violent messages, but other times, parties speak to each other through the media or through specific journalists. Journalists can also play an important role in assessing the information needs of a society and meeting some of these needs and similarly, journalists can play a vital role in ensuring that people get a comprehensive picture of political and policy developments (du Toit, 2012).
- **Educating:** Each side needs to know about the other side's difficulty in moving towards reconciliation. Journalism that explores the particular difficulties of each side, such as politics or powerful interests, can help educate the other side to avoid demands for simplistic and immediate solutions. Journalists can educate parties on/about ways of managing and resolving conflict (du Toit, 2012).

- **Confidence building:** Lack of trust is a major factor contributing to conflict and the media can reduce suspicion by digging into ‘hot’ issues and revealing them so that there are no secrets to fear. Good journalism can also present news that shows resolution is possible by giving examples from other places and by explaining local efforts at reconciliation.
- **Correcting misperceptions:** By examining and reporting on the two sides’ misperceptions of each other, the media encourages disputing sides to revise their views and move closer to reducing conflict. Journalists are well-placed to identify parties’ misperceptions because we should be constantly talking to the different sides and learning about how they feel about issues and each other and provide people with an opportunity to explain their misperceptions and then encourage other groups to clarify these issues through the media (du Toit, 2012).
- **Identifying underlying interests:** In a conflict both sides need to understand the bottom-line interests of the other. Good reporting does this by asking tough questions and seeking out the real meaning of what leaders say and also looks beyond the leaders’ interests and seeks the larger groups’ interests.
- **Emotional outlet:** In conflict resolution, there must be outlets for each side to express their grievances or anger or they will explode in frustration and make things worse. Media can provide important outlets by allowing both sides to speak so that disputes can be fought out in the media, instead of in the streets, allowing conflicts to be addressed before they turn violent.
- **Face-saving, consensus building:** When two parties try to resolve a conflict they must calm the fears of their supporters and by reporting what they say, the media allows leaders in a conflict to conduct face- saving and consensus building actions.
- **Solution building:** In a conflict, both sides must eventually present specific proposals to respond to grievances and good journalism does this by asking the disputing parties for their solutions instead of just repeating their rhetoric of grievances.

Journalists should seek out other parties and other points of view and should not only repeat old grievances by the old elites; they also should examine what the parties are seeking and the possibility for withdrawal, compromise or transcendence (IMS, 2014), and by providing information obtained through this approach, journalism can make the public far more well-informed about the conflict beneath the violence, and can assist in the process of finding solutions (IMS, 2014). Journalists can help parties to better understand conflict through careful

analysis, considering the conflict from different angles and showing how it affects different people (du Toit, 2012). In most conflicts parties tend to make their positions public, but are reluctant to clearly express the interests underlying these positions. This generally means that parties get locked in a tug-of-war with each side trying to move the other off positions without being aware of the underlying causes. Journalists asking informed, probing questions can play a role in uncovering these interests. This can be done by speaking to leaders as well as by interviewing ordinary members of the different groups about what they think is important (du Toit, 2012).

### ***2.2.1 Conflict sensitive journalism***

Conflict sensitive journalism is a body of knowledge borne from the study of journalism as a discipline, an understanding of conflict science, and the experiences of local, national and international journalists across the world, and stresses key concepts such as truth-seeking, accuracy, and a focus on relevance. CSJ is an active approach to journalism that requires journalists to be critical and analytic, and to question, re-question, and discover truths behind truths (Rama & Gurten, 2018).

The tools and purposes of CSJ are the following (Rama & Gurten, 2018):

- **The Timeline:** gathering facts, identifying gaps, and an understanding an event in its context, and is helpful in findings a story's relevant frame. It is a tool that helps to review and to sort key events in their chronological order of occurrence and it visualizes how these events relate to one another. Through this, journalists can better understand a singular event in its context.
- **The CSJ Triangle:** filling the gaps and identifying the root structural and cultural causes of a conflict, and finding an original and meaningful frame for a story. Adapted from Galtung's concept of the violence triangle, the CSJ triangle looks at events through three lenses; the directly observable, structural factors that lead to the event, and the cultural realities that allowed it to happen.
- **The Actors' Map:** identifying the various actors, voices, and perspectives surrounding a particular conflict, especially those that have the potential to impact the conflict's outcomes. One-sided reporting is when journalists focus only on the perspective of one party in an issue or controversy and, in so doing, isolate other voices and this has a strong negative influence

on how the issue concludes, and when applied to armed conflict, one-sided reporting can have a dire consequence.

- **The Onion:** analyzing these voices and uncovering the needs and interests behind them, thus building resilience against propaganda. The onion, formally the positions, interests, needs tool, is a construct in conflict analysis that is adopted as an investigative tool in conflict sensitive journalism. Using the onion model helps journalists to distinguish between what the different parties say they want, and what they really want, and what they need. These distinctions are critical for journalists given the deluge of easily available statements from official sources during a time of conflict.

### **2.3 Social identity theory**

Social identity theory in social psychology is about the study of the interaction between personal and social identities. Social identity theory intends to stipulate and expect the conditions under which individuals think of themselves as individuals or as group members. The theory also reflects on the effects of personal and social identities for individual perceptions and group behavior (Tajfel & Turner, 1979 cited in Abrha, 2019). Social Identity Theory (SIT) is a body of research first developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner that examines intergroup relations and intergroup conflict. Traditionally, social psychology has explained behavior as the interaction between individuals. But this was later considered a weakness because it fails to explain how groups provide individuals with an identity. SIT was later developed to explain how the group influences individuals (Aghabi, Bondokji, & Wilkinson, 2017).

According to SIT, humans naturally desire inclusion and differentiation. They seek to belong to groups, and tend to classify groups within a given society. Social groups also compete with each other. Groups seek to maintain their perceived upper status by reinforcing prejudices and negative stereotypes of out-groups. In certain conditions, this competition can translate into intergroup hostility and violence (Aghabi, Bondokji, & Wilkinson, 2017). Social categorization refers to the tendency of people to recognize themselves and others in terms of particular social categories-that is, as relatively compatible group members instead of as separate and unique individuals (Tajfel & Turner, 1979 cited in Abrha, 2019). Social comparison is the process by which people identification reflects the notion that people generally do not perceive social situations to others is typically implicated in the way they view other individuals and groups around them (Tajfel & Turner, 1979 cited in Abrha2019).

Gurr (2005 cited in IPSS, 2010) noted that “comparative and case studies point to four conditions that strongly affect group incentives for collective actions: collective disadvantage, loss of political economy, repression and the “frames” or cognitive understanding they have of their situation (Gurr, 2005 cited in IPSS, 2010). Groups tend to whitewash and glorify their own histories, and they often demonize their neighbors, rivals and adversaries-stories that are passed down from generation to generations by words of mouth become part of a group’s lore. They often become distorted and exaggerated with time and are treated as received wisdom by group members (Brown, 2005 cited in IPSS, 2010).

#### **2.4 From hate speech to Dangerous speech**

‘Hate speech’ is the most popular and, at the same time, the most imprecise and holistic concept where no single definition is accepted by international consensus, but the term is generally understood to mean “speech that attacks or disparages a group or a person, for characteristics purportedly typical of the group” (Benesch, 2021). Although some hate speech is explicit and all too easy to identify as such, as a category it is large and contested, with blurry boundaries and we lack consensus on how to define it in law, scholarly literature, common parlance, and even in the rules under which internet companies prohibit some content-and permit the rest (DSP, 2021). On the other hand, dangerous speech is described as, “the forms of speech and ideology that is motivational and inflammatory with capacity to catalyze mass violence, and the ways in which they do so, are strikingly similar across different cases” (Maynard & Benesch, 2016 as cited in Marques, 2019); thus, rasping the identifying features of dangerous speech offers tools for monitoring and preventing mass violence (Marques, 2019).

The concept of dangerous speech incorporates this phenomenon of gradual norm change, allowing for study that more clearly depicts human experience than hate speech and similar categories, and permitting more sensitive monitoring for increased risk of violence (DSP, 2021). Dangerousness, in this formulation, is the capacity of a speech act –as disseminated to inspire violence against members of another human group; hence, and it is defined by the specific harm it endangers, not by its content alone, nor by the intent or motives of the people who produce and spread it. This makes for more consistent definition, and more consensus against this kind of speech, since it is very difficult for people to agree on which content is offensive, but easy for them to agree that mass intergroup violence should be prevented (DSP, 2021).

Dangerous speech share common characteristics: First, dangerous speech is aimed at groups and increases the risk that its audience (the “in-group” will commit or condone violence against another group (the “out-group”) and the out-group must have a defining characteristic that is both different from and meaningful to an audience; second, it promotes fear, as much as it expresses or promotes hatred; third, it is commonly false since it describes whole groups of human beings in appalling terms but unfortunately, people can be quite easily persuaded of misinformation (Maynard & Benesch, 2016)

Dangerous speech can harm directly through insult, derogation, and denigration, and it can harm indirectly by undermining social and moral norms in surreptitious ways and to counteract the harms of dangerous speech requires understanding the mechanisms at work (Marques, 2019). Benesch (2021) notes that genocide prevention efforts should focus on the indirect – but powerful – harm caused by speech, and on speech that has a special capacity to catalyze mass violence, which is called dangerous speech and in order to measure, counter, or diminish that speech, it must be reliably identified, i.e. distinguished from the much larger (and variously- defined) category of hate speech (Benesch, 2021).

#### ***2.4.1 Countering dangerous speech***

With regard to countering dangerous speech, there are two types of strategies have traditionally been used by governing authorities to suppress dangerous speech, or, for that matter, any kind of speech that they find objectionable, in diverse legal systems and societies: punish the speaker or disseminator of the speech, sometimes by means of criminal law and sometimes without law; or suppress the speech itself by censoring it or shutting down the medium by which it was disseminated, such as a newspaper, radio station, a social media platform, or access to all of the Internet (Benesch, 2014). An alternative method to counter dangerous speech focus on the audience- by working to make an audience less susceptible or receptive to dangerous speech .

Benesch (2014) proposes the following methods for countering dangerous speech including:

- **Developing audience resistance to dangerous speech:** since the goal of incitement to collective violence is to condition a group to condone or participate in attacks against members of another group, that purpose can be frustrated if the relevant audience becomes less receptive to such speech. Resistance to dangerous speech seems to increase with the

development of habits such as critical and skeptical thinking, empathy with members of other groups, and willingness to express dissent from the views expressed by a leader

- **Counter speech by influential leaders:** when and where dangerous speech is proliferating, influential leaders – political, religious, and cultural – must be made aware of their capacity and indeed their responsibility to attempt to prevent violence with counter speech.
- **Counter speech to refute falsehoods and supply reliable information:** interventions should identify specific audiences, understand why they may be receptive to the message of dangerous speech, choose speakers and mediums that can reach and influence them, craft effective messages, and recognize and avoid risks. These include: awareness-raising, early warning and response, alternative narratives that emphasize shared values, and counter narratives that undermine dangerous speech or build the capacity of influential positive voices: increase the number of independent media voices available.

#### ***2.4.2 Dangerous speech framework***

The framework used in this study is the 'dangerous speech' framework, developed initially by Benesch (2012). To understand whether a message is dangerous when spread in a particular context, one must examine both content and context and also, to be able to compare the dangerousness of different messages.

According to DSP (2021), the elements that can make a particular example of speech more dangerous that resulted in a five-part framework include:

- **Audience:** even the most inflammatory message cannot inspire violence if its audience isn't susceptible to such notions because a group may be fearful about past or present threats of violence, or already saturated with frightening messages and economic hardship, alienation, unresolved collective trauma, or social norms in favor of obedience to authority may also make people more susceptible to dangerous speech.
- **Context:** the social and historical context in which speech spreads also affects the extent to which it is dangerous, since any message may be understood in dramatically different ways in one place or time versus another.
- **Speaker:** when an inflammatory message comes from a person with influence, it tends to be more dangerous. Influence or authority can come from a variety of sources, including personal charisma, high social status, or official status such as political office. Governments

often have disproportionate influence, and are powerful disseminators of dangerous speech. In many cases, a speaker makes a message dangerous not by creating it, but by distributing, and often distorting, someone else's content.

- **Medium:** there are several factors to consider when analyzing a medium; the first is whether the speech was transmitted in a way that would allow it to reach a large audience; a second question is whether the speech was transmitted in a way that would reinforce its capacity to persuade, for example, was it repeated frequently? Repetition tends to increase the acceptance of an idea; or was the speech published in or broadcast on a media source that is particularly influential or respected among the intended audience? In the same way that an influential speaker lends legitimacy to a message, a media source that is trusted by particular audience gives credibility to the messages it spreads. If a community relies mainly on one source of news, the message spread is more influential (Maynard & Benesch, 2016:77, as cited in Marques, 2019).

**Figure 1 Dangerous speech framework**



**Copyright: DSP (2014)**

### ***2.4.3 Dangerous speech hallmarks***

Inflammatory speech preceding outbreaks of mass violence exhibits certain rhetorical hallmarks, even across historical periods and in diverse languages and cultures. Drawing on the work of other scholars and her own research, Benesch have described these hallmarks and identified five contextual factors with which to estimate the capacity of speech to inspire mass violence that can



be useful in developing and testing new preventive strategies for responding to inflammatory speech, especially in societies at risk of mass violence (DSP,2021):

- **Dehumanisation:** by describing other groups of people as something other than human, or less than human, speakers can persuade their audiences to deny other people some of the moral consideration they give to those who are “fully” human (Maynard & Benesch, 2016). There are several types of dehumanizing messages, which elicit certain responses; for example, speakers often describe an out-group as biologically subhuman: as animals, insects, or even microorganisms such as bacteria or viruses and in cases of genocide and mass atrocity, supporters and perpetrators have referred to their victims as vermin (rats, cockroaches, foxes, or snakes), beasts (apes or baboons), or biological hazards (a virus, tumors, or an infection (Bahador, 2020).
- **Accusation** in a mirror is the most powerful way to foment intergroup conflict is to frame violence as the only way to protect an in-group against greater harm, even annihilation.
- **Threat to group integrity or purity is another rhetorical technique**, or hallmark, of dangerous speech is to assert that members of another group can cause irreparable damage to the integrity or purity of one’s own group.
- **Assertion of attack against women and girls:** Related to the previous hallmark is the suggestion that women or girls of the in- group have been or will be threatened, harassed, or defiled by members of an out- group. This hallmark is very common in dangerous speech around the world and throughout history, likely because it is difficult to ignore a warning of violence against members of a group who are traditionally viewed as vulnerable and needing protection.
- **Questioning in-group loyalty:** Dangerous speech usually describes members of the out-group or target group, some of it never mentions them, instead characterizing members of the in-group as insufficiently loyal, or even traitorous, for being sympathetic to the out-group. During atrocities, in-group members seen as disloyal are often punished as severely, if not more severely, than members of the out-group.



### 3 Research methodology

#### 3.1 Research design

The methodology of this study is qualitative. It is interested in meaning, notably, how people make sense of their lives experiences. Also in a qualitative research the researcher is central , he/she is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. Unlike quantitative research where data are collected through inventories, in qualitative research data are mediated through the researcher or the “human instrument”. Furthermore, in qualitative design the researcher present in person among the people and observe institutions or record behavior, not in the laboratory, but in its natural settings. The other unique feature of a qualitative methodology is that it is explanatory. The interest of the researcher lies in the process, meaning as well as the insight to be gained through words or illustrations. In line with this, I was (together with an assistant) the one who took part in data collection and analyzed the data.

#### 3.2 Study Site

The Tigray region, officially the Tigray National Regional State, is the northernmost regional state in Ethiopia. The Tigray Region is the homeland of the Tigrayan, Irob, and Kunama people. Its capital and largest city is Mekelle. It has a population of 7.07 million (2020) and an area of 50,079 km<sup>2</sup>. Tigray is the fifth-largest by area, the fifth-most populous, and the fifth-most densely populated of the 11 regional states in Ethiopia. Tigray is bordered by Eritrea to the north, Sudan to the west, the Amhara Region to the south and the Afar Region to the east (Wikipedia, 2022).

*Figure 2 Map of Tigray Region, Ethiopia*



Source YWCA: <https://www.ywcapdx.org/>

#### 3.3 Data collection

Selection of dangerous speech cases was based on their level of impact in contributing to mass violence in the Tigray conflict. The politicians and public figure personalities were selected

based on their authority in government offices and religious institutions and popular artists in the country. Sample media outlets were selected based on their affinity to the political parties involved in the Tigray conflict. A sample of videos of dangerous speech statements of selected samples were obtained from you Tube, and translated into English language for analysis.

Using purposive sampling techniques, a total of 34 journalists (1/3 female) were selected from mainstream news media organizations, radio stations and a private newspaper due to security, time and resource limitations by the researcher. Semi-structured questionnaire was developed before undertaking the field research and interview with journalists from Amhara and Addis Ababa was done in Amharic language whereas with the Tigray-based ones was done in Tigrigna language. In addition, to supplement the information from interviews, a review of documents from government and research institutions were consulted during the field research. Furthermore, I used observation technique by spending some time with the journalists and people in Mekelle city in Tigray.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

In order to analyze the data I gathered, I did transcription of audio-taped focus group discussions and unstructured interviews verbatim. I went carefully through the transcription to get sense out of it. Having translated the information into English, then i attempted to learn the meaning embedded on the information. Then, I wrote the impressions or thoughts I got from them, then I listed down all possible topics based on the impression obtained from the reading of the transcription. Next, I coined the most descriptive topics that capture the content or the essence of each theme. The themes were then discussed in respect of literature and the research findings. Analysis of dangerous speech cases was done using the dangerous speech framework for identifying, analyzing and evaluating the alleged speech cases in the Tigray conflict. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that researchers use to systematically organise and analyse complex data sets. It is a search for themes that can capture the narratives available in the account of data sets. It involves the identification of themes through careful reading and re-reading of the transcribed data (King, 2004; Rice & Ezzy, 1999 cited in Dawadi, 2020).

### **3.5 Research ethics**

To comply with research ethical protocols, all participants of this research were provided with information about the objectives of the study and they were requested their voluntary participation and to ensure confidentiality their names were quoted anonymously in numbers from 01 to 34. Permission had been provided from Norwegian Agency for shared services in education and research (sikt.no) under reference number 617709, dated 26.04.2023 for project period from 01.03.2023 to 15.10.2023.

## **4 Findings and discussion**

The finding starts by first providing an overview of the Ethiopian media landscape in relation to the Tigray war, it then presents a contextual background of the Tigray war in Ethiopia which will be followed by findings of the dangerous speech statements by politicians and finally offers results of interviews with Ethiopian journalists in relation to their role in counteracting dangerous speech in the country. The first part of the finding consists of an analysis of dangerous speech statements by politicians using secondary data from examples of statements from selected government authorities, religious leaders and influential artists. The speakers were selected due to their position and responsibility in government offices and the society in Ethiopia.

Based on qualitative variables developed by Maynard and Benesch (2012), the research addresses the research question,

*“What were the historical and more temporary dangerous speeches by politicians and public figures spread through various media channels, and how did they impact the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia from 2020 to 2022?”*

### **4.1 Media landscape in Ethiopia**

According to EIP (2022), in Ethiopia, there are twenty-four registered organisations collectively owned 61 FM radio stations; ten government-owned organisations own 27 radio stations between them, and 14 privately owned radio organisations account for 34 stations; however, 41% (14 out of the 34 FM radio stations) are owned by Fana Broadcasting SC, a company that is in turn owned by a collection of politically affiliated endowment funds; furthermore, 8 of the FM radio stations are owned by Dimitsi Weyane, a TPLF-associated company and this means that out of the 34 FM radio stations, at least 64% (22) of the privately owned FM radio stations are owned by groups that are controlled by associated government entities.

**Table 1 Broadcast media in Ethiopia**

<b>Government vs. private media</b>	<b>Television</b>	<b>Radio</b>
Government	9	27
Private	24	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>61</b>

#### **4.1.1 Media during EPRDF**

By 1991, the complexion of Ethiopian society had changed radically when the EPRDF government restructured the state along ethnic lines and the country was reorganized along ethnic units to form a federation whereby ethnic parties were encouraged to prop up and lead their respective regions and the entire rhetoric of the government was undergirded by ethno-linguistic sensibilities (Yusuf, 2019).

Another consequence of the EPRDF ethnic federalism era was the effect on the country's media whereby ethnicity was integrated into media content, and provided a space for programs and content featuring regional languages, such as Tigrayan and Oromo, aimed at residents of those regions. While prior to 1991, most media was centralized around the state broadcasters (namely, Ethiopian Television and Ethiopian Radio), with content in Amharic, during the EPRDF years, although Amharic still had a platform, it also expanded mostly to the benefit of Tigrayan (Lowings, 2022), importantly, ethnicity was used as a metric to measure the interests of journalists and media employees, creating an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust and along with limited regional expansion saw a continued censorship towards any criticisms of the EPRDF and its policy of ethnic federalism, internal conflicts within the country were systematically downplayed, and some topics were outright banned by the government-led national broadcasters (Lowings, 2022).

Generally, there was greater freedom of speech within the media during the early years of the EPRDF government where newspapers reported more openly the socio-economic processes

taking place in Ethiopia and the relaxation of information censorship encouraged the media to be actively engaged in civic and political activities; gradually, however, controls and restrictions were re-instituted (Fojo Media Institute, 2020). Three methods of media control were used; one was censorship control, mostly self-censorship-in order to ensure self-preservation and avoid coercive pressure from the government; the second consisted of physical coercion i.e. anti-terrorism laws, surveillance, intimidation, imprisonment; and the third advanced administrative coercion i.e. limiting advertising revenues, restricting access to information, maintaining high costs for printing etc. and as a result, life for journalists remained challenging to survive and preserve a high level of professionalism and independence. Meanwhile, the private print media endeavoured hard to function as a “Fourth Estate”, the guardian of the public interest and a watchdog on the activities of government, at times revealing abuses of state authority and defending the democratic rights of citizens and journalists refused to be the engine of ideological production and the propaganda tools to support the policies of the party and government (FMI, 2019).

#### ***4.1.2 Post-2018 media***

In the months before Ably Ahmed became Prime Minister in 2018. Ethiopia was in turmoil where Ethiopia’s two largest ethnic groups, the Oromos and the Amhara, had launched massive protests seeking better representation in an EPRDF government dominated since 1991 by Tigrayans, the country’s third-largest group and helping fuel the protests were Oromo and Amhara nationalist social media groups that proved difficult for the government to censor (Fente, 2022). During this period, while ethnic polarization had been growing for some time, the issue was not widely covered by Ethiopia’s domestic media; instead, the dominant broadcasters all controlled by the state or ruling party, consistently emphasized national unity and downplayed ethnic conflict and alternative news outlets were scarce as the government routinely jammed dissident satellite television stations as well as local language radio broadcasts by Voice of America, Deutshe Welle, and the BBC. Critical journalists and bloggers faced harassment, imprisonment, or exile for reporting on ethnic grievances, human rights abuses, or corruption (Fente, 2022).

As far as the role of the media played in the collapse of the pre-Abiy Ahmed EPRDF is concerned, two main trends interacted with each other: one was Facebook including the meteoric

rise of social network platforms and citizen journalism, which seems to have changed the face of politics in Ethiopia; the other was the TV broadcasts by the Diaspora which made information available to Ethiopians on controversial issues to provoke public discussions during which it played a significant part as the key catalyst to the collapse of the EPRDF government (FM I, 2020). However, it is important to realize that at the federal level Ethiopia's press law emphasized the independence of mass media, this was an enormous step for the EPRDF government and was regarded as one of the critical achievements of the constitution because it provided for the registration of newspapers and forbade censorship or the establishment of any censorship agency and the laws forbade the closing down of any media outlet except by order of a court after due warning. All these laws were gradually curtailed (FMI, 2020).

The coming to power of Abiy Ahmed saw one of the most remarkable attempts at media reform in sub-Saharan Africa in recent years; the government freed journalists from prison, deregulated the sector enabling the establishment of dozens of new media houses; and put into motion a media reform process that brought government and civil society together in a shared vision for change, however, these early successes have faltered because the quick deregulation without strong enabling institutions and laws created a surge of media outlets and journalism associations that fuelled polarization and conflict along ethnic fault lines (Fente, 2022). However, it was also a period of increased polarization between media outlets, where the new polarization was overwhelmingly informed by ethnic interests. In his analysis, Skjerdal (2020) where he looked into the role of media in ethnic tensions in contemporary Ethiopia between 2018 and 2020 in ten different media outlets, he observed a tendency of intensified ethnification process where ethnic belonging and identity politics were gaining significance as central frames of reference in the current Ethiopian media discourse and that Ethnicity is being employed as a key to interpret media messages, and it outlines a frame for classifying media channels and personalities (Skjerdal & Mulatu, 2020).

In a similar study conducted by Mulatu (2020), using a framing analysis of stories in selected media channels, he found out that the Ethiopian media tend to take ethnicity at the center of their reporting which intentionally or unintentionally favour their own ethnic group and undermine the other, which is perceived as an enemy. It is found a clear polarization of the media in describing groups as 'Us' and 'Them' based on their ethnic affiliation, adding that although polarization of the media based on political differences (private media for opposition



parties, state-owned media for the ruling party), has been the nature of the Ethiopian media for a longer period, polarization based on ethnicity . Mulatu also criticizes the journalists' level of professionalism citing as an example the values of journalism to serve the public and report accurately, have been overlooked and as a result, fundamental ethics of the journalism profession, like minimizing harm and giving priority to humanity, appear to be in question.

With regard to professionalism of Ethiopian journalists, Skjerdal (2020) also shares similar views in which he characterizes the current Ethiopian media by “floating professionalism” whereby several of the most famous media personalities have an indeterminate relationship with the journalistic profession. They, he said vacillate between different stances – between activists, political and journalistic roles. Historically, it is well documented that many journalists who left the country went into exile because of political sympathies and antipathies and they became part of a constituency dubbed the ‘conflict-generated diaspora’ (Lyons, 2007, cited in Skjerdal, 2020). In contrary to other researchers who associate media polarization with the coming to power of EPRDF and introduction of ethnic-based federalism, Skjerdal (2020) argues that polarization is not a new phenomenon in Ethiopian media logics, and that it was one of the foremost characteristics of the media environment in the 1990s when radical print outlets with sympathies for the previous Derg regime challenged the government through rebel journalism.

Another concern with Ethiopian media is the growing trend in inflammatory speech on the mainstream media even though the media reforms after 2018 was considered significant for the Ethiopian media since 1991, it has also increased polarization among regionally-owned ‘mass media agencies’ which are operated by the regional states and aimed at the local population (Skjerdal, 2020). For example, a study conducted by Tofa et al., (2022), that reviewed patterns of domestic and international media and the role of misinformation, disinformation , and media bias in the Tigray conflict had found significant levels of disinformation, misinformation, and biased reporting that clouded accounts of the conflict and encouraged debates over highly contested issues where in their reporting, both international and local media demonstrated a clear pattern of bias and selective coverage, either towards the government or the TPLF and this pattern of reporting made it extremely difficult to establish the truth, especially on contested issues that were characterized by patterns of disinformation and misinformation. Similarly, Shifa and Pabon (2022) also found that different political groups have used mass media to push their narrative

that other groups are a threat to the unity and continuation of the country following tensions around the shape of the state, leading to a highly polarized political environment in which social media further interacted with the political context and pre-existing tensions and also interacted with the structure and the nature of the broadcasting landscape in Ethiopia.

#### ***4.1.3 Media Actors in the Tigray Conflict***

One of the consequences of the regionalization of Ethiopia's media is the precipitation of media outlets into their respective ethnic affiliations. Skjerdal (2020) explains that it is not enough to review media houses in Addis Ababa to grasp the currents in Ethiopian journalism and he stresses the need to look into the regionally-owned 'mass media agencies', which are operated by the regional states and aimed at the local population. As an example of regionalization of Ethiopian journalism, he cites the establishment of regional journalists associations where in particular areas, it becomes clear that the organizations are advocates for specific regional interests at the expense of national journalists association. In a similar study, Mulatu (2020) also argues that the current Ethiopian media structure and ownership have contributed to the polarization since they are structured under the regional governments which are demarcated by languages and the political narratives of the regional states determine the media content and their frames, as a result of these, unlike another period, one can vividly see the political narratives of each ethnic group in the media which ultimately diminish their amicable relationship with or among the ethnic groups in the country.

Skjerdal (2020) listed the major media outlets responsible in disseminating misinformation, disinformation and hate speech throughout the Tigray conflict include:

- **Amhara ethno-nationalism and ASRAT media**

ASRAT Media has an unconcealed intention to speak with an ethnic mandate ref. Its perception of the media situation in Ethiopia is that Amhara voices are neglected, and that the Amhara region and its people are falsely blamed for wrongdoings in the country, historically as well as today ref. Asrat Media is licensed as a public media company in Washington DC, but most of its staff work from Ethiopia with its production is only on television so far, transmitted through satellite, YouTube and Facebook but intends to cover all of Ethiopia, and although the Amhara region is its main focus ref. Language-wise, the station so far only broadcasts in Amharic, aiming to stand up for the Amhara people and expose injustice which other media

channels neglect either on purpose or by design ref. Media people and commentators generally portray ASRAT Media as ethnically inclined and one-sided and they claim that invited guests in the channel are often ‘Amharic extremists’ who reiterate a similar narrative and the channel is found to create a narrative where the federal government is believed to secretly interfere with and destabilize the Amhara region (Daniel, 2020, cited in Skjerdal, 2020).

- **Dimtsi Weyane Tigray (DW)**

DW is an Ethiopian news-based television and radio network headquartered in Mekelle, Tigray region of Ethiopia; owned by Dimtsi Weyane Tigray Plc., it first launched a satellite television channel in 1980 and in 2018 launched a satellite television channel and the channel broadcasts programmes mainly in Tigrinya with some programmes in Amharic, Oromo and English. Although DW’s commitment has consistently been towards Tigray, but its political role has changed throughout its four decades of existence, echoing the major turns in Ethiopian politics; in the 1980s it was a resistance radio; from 1991 to 2018 a pro-government radio, and since 2018 an emerging opposition radio, culminating with TPLF’s departure (or, in TPLF’s view, exclusion) from the government coalition in November 2019 (Wikipedia, 2022).

- **Tigray Media House (TMH)**

TMH is a Washington-based satellite TV station established in 2019 by Tigrayans in the diaspora with a mission of enriching the lives of Tigray people by providing captivating media through non-partisan journalism and it promotes community dialogue through exchanging of information across different social, cultural, geographical regional and ideological boundaries and the media house believes this dialogue will assist TMH’s endeavour to enhance tolerance, social integration and mutual co-existence among all east African people ([www.tmhtv.org](http://www.tmhtv.org)).

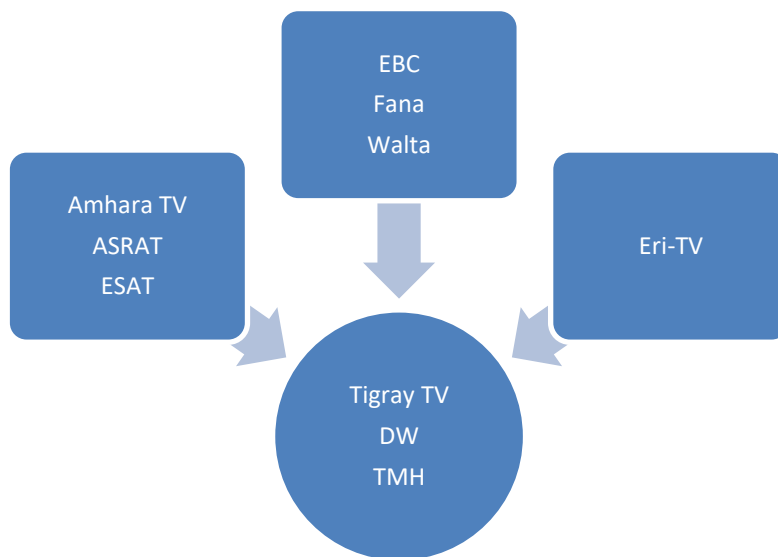
- **ESAT**

A number of other newcomers on the Ethiopian media scene, many of them returned diaspora channels, have come a little in the shadow in the debate surrounding the markedly ethno-nationalistic channels and the most prominent of these is arguably Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio (ESAT), which since its inception in 2010 has been one of the most vocal networks in opposition to the Ethiopian government (Skjerdal, 2020). It was banned by the authorities until 2018 as a result of its affiliation with Ginbot 7, a group which the Parliament had defined as a terrorist organization; with a certain base in Amhara nationalism, ESAT has always used Amharic as its main language (Skjerdal, 2020).

- **Ethiopia**

Another example of a channel with Amhara roots and pan-Ethiopian sympathy is the weekly newspaper Ethiopis. It was first launched as a EPRDF-critical outlet by Eskinder Nega in 1993; the oscillating role of Eskinder Nega is indicative of the hybrid identity of many private actors in the local media market as they are committed to professional journalism, but they also propagate a political agenda and Eskinder’s own response to this claim is that he sees no problem with the shifting roles but to the contrary, he regards the proximity between media and politics as fruitful for both parties (Skjerdal, 2020).

**Figure 3 Media actors in Tigray war in Ethiopia**



#### ***4.1.4 Media narratives as precursors of dangerous speech***

Prior to the coming to power of Abiy Ahmed, the Amhara Democratic Party (ADP) was working in consort with the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP) as a tactical partner in the anti-TPLF power struggle. The Amhara and Oromo media together with diaspora-based ethno-nationalist media were to instil the narratives fuelling the protests that included: minority rule, plunder of national wealth, uneven development, bureaucratic nepotism, human rights violations and the absence of rule of law (Woldearegay, 2022). Exploring the involvement of television in particular, the media have become inflammatory institutions where ethnic media outlets in the

regions sent messages that their ethnic group has been the victim while others are perpetrators (Gessese, 2020). For example, Amhara TV and ASRAT TV (Amhara ethnic TVs) have painted the twenty seven years TPLF dominance as anti-Amhara while Tigray TV and allied Dimtsi Weyane (DW) dwelled on narratives of victimhood, pain and suffering and characterised the Abiy administration as conspiring to turn the wheel of history by re-imposing a unitary arrangement (Woldearegay, 2022).

Among the narratives that the Ethiopian state media used to describe ethnic Tigrayans was the economic oligarchs rhetoric in which, for example, Fana Broadcasting Corporation (FBC) aired a documentary entitled. ‘Fithin Filega’ literally meaning the quest for justice, where aimed to tarnish the political and economic achievements of the TPLF/EPRDF by describing it as a period where only certain ethnic group had been benefited from the country’s economic growth in the last twenty seven years of EPRDF government. The state media also portrayed Tigrayan elites as corrupt and being responsible for all the corruption in Amhara, Oromia and other regions in Ethiopia. In 2018 the state and party-affiliated media corporations including Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC), Walta and Fana televisions aired a documentary on alleged grand corruption at the state-owned industrial conglomerate, the Metals and Engineering Corporation (MeTEC), targeting Tigrayan personnel as the sole perpetrators while deliberately ignoring personnel from other ethnic groups, including Demeke Mekeonnen, Deputy PM, a non-Tigrayan, long-serving chairman of the Board of Directors at MeTEC.

In addition, as soon as PM Abiy came to power, all state and party-affiliated media outlets started broadcasting extensive campaigns that transferred all of the blame of human rights violations, and whatever crimes there was in the country to ‘Tigrigna speakers’, For example, on December 11, 2019, EBC, Fana and Walta media aired an inflammatory documentary entitled, ‘Yefitih Seqoqa,’ literally meaning ‘agony of justice’, which narrated human rights violations in Addis Ababa prisons as committed only by ‘Tigrigna speakers’ from among prison administrators who had different ethnic background. The other narrative the state and party-affiliated media employed was portraying Tigrayans as ant-reform; for example, hours after the bomb attack at a rally for PM Abiy Ahmed in Addis Ababa, the PM appeared on the national TV and was quick to point his fingers on a certain group, describing it as, “anti-peace forces’ who attempted to destroy the unity of the country” and he promised incidents like this will not deter his government from pursuing his reform agenda. This was a dog whistle and the listening public

was able to easily understand whom the PM was referring to, and when he said “anti-peace and ant-reform”. Not surprisingly, no Tigrayan was officially arrested or charged and later, the Federal police announced that the mastermind behind the bomb attack was a woman, a member of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), who lived abroad.

Government supporters also shared information from state and party-affiliated media outlets as part of their campaigns, and information shared by government supporters was also circulated by government officials and state-owned media. These examples illustrate that mass media in Ethiopia served as a propaganda platform and that such rhetoric have the capacity to incite violence against certain ethnic groups. For example, according to a report by Human Rights Group, new administrators in the Western Tigray zone and security forces from Amhara region were responsible for a campaign of ethnic cleansing carried out through crimes against humanity and war crimes targeting Tigrayan civilians since the Tigray war.

#### **4.2 Background of the Tigray war**

Armed conflict in Tigray began in November 2020, involving four belligerents: the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) and associated militia, the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), and Amhara Regional Special Forces and aligned militias (European Institute of Peace, 2022). The Tigray conflict remains hotly debated, but generally, a combination of four factors is advanced to explain the origin of the war include: deep disagreement over the history, nature, and future of the Ethiopian state; power struggle within the former ruling party; rising ethno- nationalism; and the “Eritrean question” (European Institute of Peace, 2022). Analysts explain it in terms of the contestation between a centralizing federal government and an autonomy-seeking, possibly secessionist, Tigray (Tofa, Kifle & Kinkoh, 2022); a similar analysis is also provided by Shifa and Pabon, (2022) state that the underlying causes of Ethiopia’s current armed conflict are linked to what is known as ‘the nationalities question’, which has been a major point of contention for Ethiopian central governments since Emperor Menilik II (1889-1913) established modern Ethiopia in the late nineteenth century.

In fact, Abiy initially enjoyed considerable support from the TPLF, as seen in his re-election as Prime Minister in October 2018 (Shifa and Pabon, 2022). The conflict emerged after several prominent former TPLF members were imprisoned in connection with different corruption scandals. According to Shifa and Pabon (2022), the TPLF leaders argued that Abiy’s anti-corruption efforts were manipulated to target Tigrayans and later, these tensions escalated

with the formation of a new political coalition, the Prosperity Party in 2019 and the TPLF's refusal to join the new party, claiming that the process of dissolution of the EPRDF was unconstitutional and ultimately, tensions mounted with the postponement of the election in 2020 and reached their zenith in the emergence of the war in the Tigray region in November 2020, following an alleged attack by TPLF on an Ethiopian army base in northern Tigray (Shifa & Pabon, 2022) .

#### ***4.2.1 The Tigray war and Amhara nationalism***

The diminishing Tigrayan political influence post-2018 has led to the last resurgence of Amhara confidence, hope and regional power which has also hardened Tigrayan ranks by contributing to the creation of a siege mentality and this militarization in the Amhara Regional State has only confirmed Tigrayan fears of being under threat, leading to a counter-build-up of military prowess inside Tigray (Reid, 2020). He also adds that the contention between Amharas and Tigrayans is not only based on power struggles but also other more concrete flashpoints including border disputes, for example, the Welkait and Tsegede areas, now part of Tigray, which have long been claimed by the Amharas and the issue has been part of the agenda of Amhara-dominated rebel groups that fought the EPRDF between 2001 and 2018 and that same agenda served as a rallying point for the Amhara youth protesting against the front rule in 2018. The Amhara youth and some senior officials from the Amhara region have frequently accused the TPLF of destabilizing the region by sponsoring rebel groups, among which the most noted case is the Qimant movement (Reid, 2020).

According to Nyssen (2022), areas known as Welkait, Tsegede, Tselemti, and Humera were initially incorporated into the Tigray region during the 1991-1994 transitional periods, because the residents of those areas were overwhelmingly Tigrinya speakers and ethnically Tigrayan; however, many Amhara nationalists have claimed historical possession of these lands and although this historical ownership argument is irrelevant to the current federal setup, Amhara irredentist claims should nonetheless be scrutinized more closely. Nyssen argues that Amhara irredentism has been a driving force in the Tigray war and that removing this most productive zone from Tigray that borders Sudan appears to be part of a strategy to impoverish and subjugate Tigray, while encircling it with hostile forces (Nyssen, 2022).

On the other hand, Tigrayans believe that Amharas nationalism goes decades back. For example, Tsehaye (2020) states that Ethiopianists and Amhara nationalists who constitute Abiy's power base intend to undo the multi-national federal system adopted by Tigrayan and Oromo elites in 1995, and build a country in their own vision, to regain their 'glorious past' of Menilik II's Ethiopia. From 1885 until 1991, under successive Emperors including Haile Selassie, power was concentrated among the Amhara people (Lowings, 2022), which coincided with a promotion of Amhara culture and the establishment of Amharic as the state language but during this period, some groups, notably Oromo and Tigray, opposed the domination of Amhara culture and language and accused the Amhara establishment of active persecution.

#### ***4.2.2 Eritrea's role in the Tigray conflict***

On the other hand, while the November 4, 2020 declaration of war by the Ethiopian government alleged that the TPLF had launched an attack against Ethiopia's Northern Command, well-seasoned observers of Ethiopian politics emphasize that the long-term causes of the war go back as far earlier than November 4, 2020 and that if the Northern Command was attacked, it was a defensive move (Omna Tigray, 2021). Similarly, Reisen (2022) argues that Eritrea is a key player in the genesis of the war, in the war itself and in the future of Ethiopia; for example, a confident President Isayas Afewerki of Eritrea declared on the national Martyrs Day, 20 June, 2018, two weeks before the joint declaration of Peace and Friendship: "It was Game Over, he said, for the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which he coined the 'junta' and in Eritrean official media the Eritrea-Ethiopia Peace Agreement was also covered, on 3 July 2018, as a "Game Over" initiative of President Isayas, denouncing the TPLF and declaring it dead (Reisen, 2021) .

According to Tekla (2021), Eritrean military involvement in the Tigray war was perhaps the singular external influence that has profoundly altered the course, and the essence, of the Tigray conflict and that while PM Abiy and President Isayas denied for months that Eritrea was involved in the war after it was declared on 4 November 2020, not only was Eritrea present inside Tigray, but it had also prepared to move into Tigray prior to the declaration of the Law and Order operation. The animosity between TPLF and EPLF goes decades back when the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the Eritrean Liberation Front (EPLF) overthrew the Derg in May 1991 and formed a government in Addis



Ababa while the Eritrean front liberated Eritrea which became independent state, and this moment was just the start of a new phase of a deep-rooted rivalry and this continued between the governments until the recent entry of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in 2018. The rivalry between Tigray and Eritrea is superficially about borders, but it is more about regional power and longstanding antagonism (Reid, 2003) .

Despite the adverse consequences of Eritrea's involvement in the Tigray conflict had on the Ethio-Eritrean public, Ethiopianists were dismissive about its implications and went on to justify the Eritrean presence and complicity in Eritrean on-going atrocities and this unconditional support by Ethiopianists for the Eritrean involvement has resulted in Tigrayans' rejection of Ethiopia and the people-to-people relation between Tigray and the midland appears to have been seriously compromised and the permanent severing of socio-political relations between the two communities can no longer be discounted (Teka, 2021). Furthermore, Eritrea's military intervention in the Tigray war has also caused a major fracture in its internal politics of Eritrea, part from reinforcing the old divide between Metahit (lowlands) and Kebessa (highland) communities, it has added an additional layer to Eritrea's already polarized political climate by delineating a new fault line across the pro and anti PFDJ movements (Teka, 2021).

According to Reid (2023), the outbreak of the war in Tigray served a number of purposes for Isaias; firstly, it gave him the opportunity end Eritrea's long-standing international isolation and it did this by enabling him to exercise influence in a conflict which threatened the region; secondly, it reasserted his influence in Ethiopia's internal affairs and lastly, it provided an opportunity to seek revenge on the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which had outwitted and outgunned Eritrea militarily in the 1998-2000 war and it also had outmanoeuvred Eritrea diplomatically in the years following the conflict. He also argues that the government in Asmara has pursued an opportunistic foreign policy, with its aim essentially to gain regional superiority at Ethiopia's expense and many respects, the single biggest obstacle facing the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) regime in Asmara is a strong, unified Ethiopia-a country capable of dominating the region in economic, military and diplomatic terms, and especially one covertly or overtly hostile to Eritrea itself. This was the case under the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) regime led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

### 4.3 Case studies of dangerous speech by leaders

The Tigray war in Ethiopia illustrates a case where politicians have taken advantage of historical resentment to gain political capital and he cites examples of analysis from influential people such as religious leaders, journalists and political figures were among those dangerous speech perpetrators on mainstream media platforms in Ethiopia. The Tigray war in Ethiopia offers an illustration where politicians have taken advantage of historical resentment to gain political capital, and it is not hard to find instances of ethnicity claims made by politicians in government office and influential personalities in religious institutions in Ethiopia.

This section provides an analysis Ethiopian government leadership statements disseminated through state-owned as wells as political party-owned regional media outlets during the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia. For each of the case studies, a five-part qualitative framework was used to analyse dangerous speech involved through examining the message itself, the historical and social context of the message, the speaker, and the medium with which a speaker delivers a message. The main research question that this section addresses is:

*What are the historical and temporary dangerous speeches by politicians and public figures through various media channel, and how they impacted the Tigray war in Ethiopia from 2020 to 2022?*

Generally, politicians and leaders in Ethiopia see hate as an effective tool to mobilize people against ethnic communities and they use unmonitored media as intermediary. The continuous propaganda and name calling against Tigrayans as corrupt, as back stabbers, as killers of soldiers, as anti-Ethiopia etc. has been part of the government rhetoric tactics. However, despite the role of government officials in disseminating dangerous speech and exacerbating violence in the Tigray war, the government shifted the main guilt for the dangerous speech and violence on social media and the private media, accusing them of fuelling ethnic violence and imposed anti-hate speech law. Although the Ethiopian media broadcast hate speech utterances, however, the media sector was largely manipulated by the government.

Prior to the Tigray war, the government has created “media that looked independent to outsiders, but which was under its full control behind the scenes”. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali once said, “the problem with Ethiopia’s media is an excess of media freedom,” while the truth is the real problem is lack of media freedom. Politicians create a problem, promote

violence, incite dangerous speech and then when things do not go their way, they start to blame the media. It can be concluded that in the case of the Tigray war, the media sector was an intermediary of dangerous speech disseminating dangerous speech top-down due to a lack of media freedom. The media sector is the first to be blamed when dangerous speech spreads. The media's responsibility should not be denied because if a medium releases dangerous speech, this may not only lead to a broad dissemination of such utterances, but may also be accompanied with an increased influence since a medium conveys a degree of legitimacy and can confer authority and strengthen trustworthiness (Benesch, 2008). The inflammatory role of media in the Tigray war points to a socio-historical context-a past history of conflicts that feeds politicians to manipulate to incite dangerous speech for mass violence and as the quotes from high-profile political leaders indicate, influential speakers have taken advantage of longstanding grievances, resentment and misrepresented historical conflicts for political gains contributing to a context of dangerous speech.

#### **4.3.1 Dehumanisation**

One of the criteria for analysing the dangerousness of speech is the form of speech delivered by influential speakers and dehumanisation is one element of harmful messages. Inflammatory language by political leaders and armed groups in the Tigray conflict “continues unabated,” Alice Wairimu Nderitu, U.N. special adviser on the prevention of genocide, said in a statement, “There is discourse often propagated through social media, which dehumanizes groups by likening them to a ‘virus’ that should be eradicated, to a ‘cancer’ that should be treated because “if a single cell is left untreated, that single cell will expand and affect the whole body” and calling for the “killing of every single youth from Tigray” which is particularly dangerous, the statement said (Muhumuza, 2022).

For example, Daniel Kibret who is Social Advisor to the Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said:

*“Weyane is not something that we shall try to understand; we can only eradicate them. For instance, in Australia, there is an island called Tasmania which is found in southern Australia. They (British Settlers) have completely decimated the Tasmanian tribes until only one person remained. They have completely wiped them out. That is what we should do; it is only by wiping them out that we can solve the problem. As I said before, the diseases ‘Weyaneness’ shall be erased from three things: one from physical existence so that it may not exist physically...Secondly, the idea of Weyaneness must never exist, even in the form of an idea.”*

When he was asked by a journalist to whom he referred in his speech, Daniel wrote, ‘they’ refer to the terrorist TPLF group,’ but his audience surely understood him to be referring to Tigrayans, an ethnic group native to the northernmost region of Ethiopia (Benesch, 2021). In any case, calling for any group of people to be obliterated is dangerous in the circumstances (Benesch, 2021). Benesch further described her concerns citing Daniel as saying, *“Satan was the last of his kind. And they must also remain the last of their kind”*. The audience applauded and even laughed, though in the current Ethiopian context the speech was immensely dangerous, so much so that a spokesperson for the US State Department decried the speech by Daniel Kibret, to a group of high-ranking officials, as *“dangerous and unacceptable”*.

An EU envoy said in June 2021 Ethiopian leaders expressed intent to *“wipe out the Tigrayans for 100 years”*, an allegation Addis Ababa strongly refuted. Pro-government journalists and activists have since called for Tigrayans to be killed and for the entire Tigrayan population to be interned. On 20 October, a journalist wrote that the forces involved in the offensive should not be held responsible for killing civilians because TPLF is to blame for as it has called for mass mobilization of the population. Such sentiments further heighten fears that Tigrayan civilians” (ICG, 2022). Similarly, Simon Adams, executive director of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, has condemned hate speech from Ethiopian leaders:

*“The reference to people as weeds that need to be removed, or as monsters that must be erased, is classic hate speech. And calling for the total extermination of any political party and its supporters is tantamount to incitement to commit war crimes and other atrocities”*.

In another instance, the justification of the goodness of the Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s government with all its loyal citizens is simultaneously a justification that all ‘bad’ subjects’ are instruments of evil. Right at the beginning of the war, the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) webpage uploaded the logo of the TPLF, adding a portrayal of the devil. Such dehumanization has extended to all Tigrayans who have been represented as the evil enemies of the country and its messianic ruling party (Teklu, 2022). A translation of the announcement by the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) reads:

*“The Ethiopian federal Defense Force supported by the Ethiopian people is involved in law enforcement and survival campaign. Until the blood-sucker and Devil (TPLF) comes under control and the tear of the Ethiopian people is compensated, it will continue to fight, Victory to our brave army.”*

### **4.3.2 Assertion of attack against women and girls**

From February 2021 onward, reports detailing horrific instances of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) against women in Tigray emerged, some of which bore hallmarks of ethnic cleansing. Government officials responded by releasing statements that sometimes read as contradictory-on the one hand,, the Prime Minister seemed to suggest that reports were likely exaggerated as part of TPLF propaganda, but, on the other hand, they said rapes were being committed by escaped prisoners or by Tigrayan men. Government supporters instrumentalized this to push the narrative that Tigrayans were responsible for CRSV. According to Human Rights Watch (2022), the armed conflict in Tigray has been accompanied by reports of widespread sexual violence across the region in areas controlled by different warring parties, including rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, and torture. Sexual violence-often accompanied with degrading and ethnic-based slurs-has been used as a weapon of war, particularly by Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces against Tigrayan women and girls. By February 2021, conflict-related rape had been confirmed by and condemned by Ethiopian authorities and UN officials (HRW, 2020).

When Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed was asked about sexual violence in the Tigray war during Ethiopia's parliament on March 20, 2020 parliamentary session, he said:

*“The women in Tigray, these women have only been penetrated by men, whereas our soldiers were penetrated by a knife.”*

### **4.3.3 Threat to group integrity**

State and party-sponsored media and government officials have characterized Tigrayans as a danger to society. For example, Agegnehu Teshager, who is the President of Amhara region called for the extermination of Tigrayan people's as the conflict escalated in the war-wrecked Tigray region and urged local youth to take up arms against forces loyal to Tigray's ruling party.

In a televised remark, the regional president said:

*“Unless this enemy (Tigrayans) is exterminated, we would not have peace, Tigrayans are enemies of all other Ethiopian communities and we should fight with patriotism to win against these people”. I call on all young people, militia, non-militia in the region, armed with any government weapon, armed with personal weapons, to join the anti-TPLF war mission from tomorrow; these people (in reference to the people of Tigray) are enemies of the whole of Ethiopia; they are enemies of the Oromos; they are enemies of the Afars; they are enemies of the Gambellas; they are enemies of the Somalis.”*

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed accused Tigrayans of having betrayed and back-stabbed the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF). The Prime Minister has said, *“Ethiopia was facing*

*an enemy that he likened to an invasive weed or cancer*". Although he stopped short of saying the words referred to Tigrayans, it is apparent he meant everyone who supports the Tigray Defense Forces-almost the entirety of Tigrayans. Following those remarks, hundreds of Tigrayans throughout Ethiopia have been jailed; Tigrayan-owned businesses have been closed down; anti-Tigrayans.

ESAT, a satellite TV has been an actor in spreading hate speech against the people of Tigray. For example, a journalist of ESAT, Mesay Mekonnen stated:

*"It is necessary to drain the sea to "catch the fish," referring to Tigrayans as the "sea" and the Tigrayan leadership as the "fish."*

In 2017, when Amhara and Oromo protests were intense and Gondar was festering with anti-Tigrayan sentiments, ESAT broadcast a call message to the people of Ethiopia, ESAT broadcast:

*"Our struggle is not like the typical struggle between so-called oppressive government and oppressed people as occurs across the world," here, the oppressed is meant Ethiopians outside Tigrayans and the oppressor, the Tigrayans. The statement also adds that the struggle is between "those who wish to destroy our race and rule over us and the rest of us Ethiopians whose misery has been unending. It is unfortunate that the 5 million are serving and being used by ten or so leaders at the top and those close to 10,000 around them."*

In 2006, ESAT broadcasted a call for Ethiopians stating, "95 % of Ethiopians to exterminate 5 % Tigrayans".

Andargachew Tsige, a British citizen, Ethiopian politician called on Ethiopians:

*"I tell you we should confront them with no mercy, no discipline, just with barbaric cruelty."*

In another instance, in a meeting to mobilize Ethiopian artists for the war, Yohannes Buayalew, a higher party and government official said:

*"We've to teach our people to hate them (Tigrayans). There are still Amharas who don't understand. Our people must cultivate hate. Hate must be internalized. One factor for winning a war is hate, then wiping out the demon."*

However, despite its contribution to dangerous speech against ethnic Tigrayans, in 15 February 2019, members of ESAT were welcomed to Ethiopia, as heroes, with fanfare at Bole Airport by high profile Ethiopian government officials which made Tigrayans believe that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed is in the network of people that believe in the extermination of Tigrayans and they cite for example that the founder of ESAT, former chairman of Ginbot-7, Professor

Berhanu Nega, is now Abiy Ahmed's best friend and advisor and a leader of EZEMA, a shadow party that has happily endorsed and cheered the war on Tigray.

Ginbot-7 (now nick-named EZEMA), according to Andargachew Tsige, Ginbot-7's secretary, is the one that provided the undisclosed roadmap that Abiy Ahmed supposedly follows (Tghat, 2020).

#### **4.3.4 Guilt Attribution**

Guilt attribution, for example, rape or murder, current difficulties, the destruction of the economy, oppression etc. presents as out-group as the morally deserving target of resentment and retributive action (Maynard & Benesch, 2016). This is illustrated by statements of political leaders. Even before the outbreak of the war in Tigray, state media had portrayed Tigrayans as criminals and corrupt worthy of ostracism and persecution; for example, Jawar Mohammed, a prominent Oromo politician portrayed Tigrayans as owning everything in the country, using "*Hagos*" (a unique Tigrayan name).

In a documentary program on human rights violations in the past 27 years, broadcast on all TV stations categorically portrayed all Tigrinya speakers as criminals worthy of persecution and in the entire program, supposed victims were made to explicitly attribute horrible crimes to Tigrayans by deliberately mentioning a rehearsed "*Tigrinya speakers*" as doers of the crimes. By this, the crimes were attributed to all Tigrayans, as opposed to individuals who have names and this caused a massive anti-Tigrayan sentiment and Tigrayans were made targets of hate by other Ethiopians (Tghat, 2020).

Prime Minister Abiy has used rhetoric to turn Ethiopians against TPLF, and Tigrayans as a whole using degrading terms to refer to TPLF leadership since coming to power, including calling Tigrayans "*daylight hyenas*." He has successfully painted a picture of Ethiopia, where the TPLF, and Tigrayans by association, were the corrupt ones that stole from the motherland, while others lived in poverty and the majority of Ethiopian population has accepted this as a fact. Since the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) has gained the upper hand militarily and the elected Tigrayan government was reinstated, rhetoric against the Tigrayan "enemies" has escalated and intensified by both the Ethiopian and the Amhara regional government. Abiy has called his "*enemy*" and the "*junta*" the "*cancer of Ethiopia*," vowing to "*crush the weeds of Tigray*" (Omna Tigray, 2021).

Military officers like General Bacha Debele is accused of inciting violence against Tigrayans and driving the Ethiopian national defence forces to wildness exaggerating, fabricating and dramatizing attacks against Ethiopian military members in the Northern command by Tigrayan forces. On November 10, 2020, few days after the war broke out, General Bacha Debele, gave a sensationalized televised address to Ethiopians, he said:

*“The Northern Command soldiers had been savagely slaughtered, breasts of female soldiers had been cut, their bodies were thrown and eaten by hyenas, and that the perpetrator Tigrayan forces were ‘sons of Satans who should be sent to hell.’ They are bandas (traitors); they are our enemies; that is what you expect from enemy; they shall be sent to hell; that is where they belong.”*

Many believed that his sensational televised speech to be behind the bitterness, wildness, and savagery manifested by Ethiopian soldiers resulting in hundreds of massacres. He is also accused of fuelling hatred and violence against Tigrayans in other parts of Ethiopia. General Bacha Debele was Chief Coordinator of Army Building Affairs of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) during the Tigray war, Bacha was promoted to the rank of full General in January 2022.

Ethnic-based dangerous speech expressions have also been made by Ethiopian religious leaders during the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia. Religious leaders and teachers grounding the war in divine will/mind based on sacred texts and prophetic utterances and such solidarity was expressed through publicly expressed support and generous financial support made to the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF). For example, MegabeHadis Eshetu, a clergyman who is popular among Christian Amhara on one occasion said that it was *“God’s benevolence”* that had set Tigrayans and Tigrinya-speaking Eritreans against each other and that Ethiopia (often synonymous with the Amharic-speaking population) would be *“in trouble”* if peaceful relations prevailed between the two peoples. This statement was made against the backdrop of the apparent peace agreement signed between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 2018 (Haileselassie, 2023). In the first weeks of the Tigray war, Deacon Daniel Kibret argued in the media that, *“the fight was between Ethiopia, supported by God, and evil forces”*.

At various occasions, the Ethiopian Orthodox priests said, for example, Abune Mikael, *“It’s better to be ruled by the Devil than to be governed by the ‘junta’”*; Aba Petros, *“The allegations that all the atrocities and sexual violence that are committed in Tigray is a complete*



lie”. Aba Ermias, ” *We don’t have the capability to criticize the Fanno, let alone condemn them,*” Aba Morqoryos, ” *It’s not necessary to have fear for a bunch of Tigrayans,*” Abune Fanuel, “*When I heard Abune Mathias speaking about what happened in Tigray, I got ashamed,*” <https://youtu.be/zUCID2Ygk64>

In response to the public speech by Ethiopia’s Orthodox Church religious leaders, the Tigray Diocese asked the church in Addis Ababa to protect civilians and denounce the atrocities committed in Tigray by the Ethiopian and Eritrean armies, as well as the Amhara Fanno militias and threatened to split from the Holy Synod in Addis Ababa. Divisions within the church over the Tigray war culminated in the birth of the Tigray Orthodox Tewahdo Church (TOTC), which has strong support among the Tigrayan diaspora.

Ethiopian artists had also played a role in spreading dangerous against ethnic Tigrayans during the Tigray conflict. One example is artist is Debebe Eshetu, a known Ethiopian actor who is quoted to have said, “*Instead of being eaten by a hyena, it is **better to eat the hyena and repent, my advice to Dr. Abiy is to let’s eat them and repent***”. Another example is Abrar Abdo, an Ethiopian actor and icon of Ethiopian theatre, who made a speech to his audiences:

*“We (Ethiopians) in the country and abroad shall not compromise to devote our financial resources and sacrifice our lives for our country. Except that they (Tigrayans) go to hell, as their wish is to go to hell, they will not stop from disintegrating Ethiopia then, how can we have mercy to these? How can we say that they are Ethiopians and our fellow brethren?”*

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=IIdcwqFOX2w&feature=share>

The examples reviewed illustrate also how directly and indirectly harmful forms of dangerous speech have been present in contemporary Ethiopia media. It points out the naturalness with which harmful dangerous speech is accepted and taken for granted by politicians in government offices and influential personalities in Ethiopia. Even though the government bears responsibility for the development of policies aimed at promoting social cohesion, combating dangerous speech, and protecting vulnerable groups during conflicts, the government mass media have created narratives that justify action against certain groups in the conflict. These findings suggested that while Ethiopian lawmakers enacted the Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression Proclamation in March 2020, many individuals and government-related organizations that posted dangerous speech statements have not faced repercussions.

#### **4.4 Historical and social context in relation to dangerous speech**

One of the features of the dangerousness of speech is the socio-historical context—a past history of conflicts—that Ethiopian government officials exploited to feed anti-Tigrayan sentiment to incite violence. It is not the aim of this research to investigate the historical analysis but the examples offered below to illustrate harmful dangerous speeches that are relevant to the current context of the Tigray war in Ethiopia. Politicians have taken advantage of historical resentment to gain political capital and we find plenty of instances ethnicity claims made by Ethiopian government officials and other influential people.

Eritrean government's indignant anti-Tigray front rhetoric had its echo in the popular contempt for so-called Agame, the term Eritreans used for Tigrayan migrant labourers and for the Tigrayan front, the Eritrean front was the clearest expression of perceived Eritrean arrogance and with the resignation of Haile Mariam Desalegn and the rise to power of Abiy Ahmed, then, what followed was the effective overthrow of the TPLF which had been the dominant force in the EPRDF coalition and this provided Isaias a clear incentive to respond to Abiy's overtures (Reid, 2023).

##### ***4.4.1 Perception and culture***

According to Tigrayan narrative, Eritrean government anti-Tigray rhetoric had its echo in the popular contempt for so-called Agame, the term Eritreans used for Tigrayans migrant labourers and for Tigrayans, it is seen as an expression of perceived Eritrean arrogance. Looking back in history, after the death of Emperor Yohannes IV and the shift of power to Emperor Menilik II of Amhara and the founding of new Eritrea as Italian colony, Tigrayans believe that they had been systematically marginalised and impoverished by Amhara rulers and that they were seen as paupers and had been subjected to degrading names (Agame) in Eritrea. Agame, the name of eastern part of eastern Tigray was changed to a degrading term representing all Tigrayans. Tigrayans had also be portrayed as treacherous in Eritrea to the extent that a zigzag road was named 'Libi Tigray', literally meaning 'the heart of Tigray' still today, and such degrading terms has the capacity to sow seeds of mistrust in current and generations to come.

Furthermore, in Eritrea, Tigrayans had for many years taken low-paid jobs, low-status jobs such as casual labourers, and domestic servants and most Tigrayan men were hired as labourers such as in slaughtering of farm animals, wood cutters, potters and shepherds while the women were hired as waitresses, house maids and prostitutes. Eritreans on the other hand, used

their skills and capital to buy or build businesses in Ethiopia. Eritreans and Tigrayans have a long history of battles with foreign invaders and thus have developed a tradition of self-defense and a culture of ‘hine mifday,’ meaning ‘revenge’, and ‘habo,’ meaning ‘courage’ in which the notion of give-and-take, dialogue and compromise is considered a weakness (Plaut, 2021). Similarly in Amhara ethnic group, there is a culture of ‘dem melash,’ meaning ‘revenge’.

#### **4.5 Journalism and dangerous speech**

This section discusses the results of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with sample journalists in Tigray, Amhara and Addis Ababa and provides an in-depth analysis of the perception of the journalists in the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia that took place from 2020 to 2022. It aims to answer the research question,

*Research question No 2,*

***What are the roles and constraints of Ethiopian journalists in relation to dangerous speech?***

The findings were the systematically categorized into key themes and analyzed accordingly. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that researchers use to systematically organise and analyse complex data sets. It is a search for themes that can capture the narratives available in the account of data sets. It involves the identification of themes through careful reading and re-reading of the transcribed data (King, 2004; Rice & Ezzy, 1999 cited in Dawadi, 2020). The research identifies what the participant sample media practitioners are saying including what key ideas or points are they experiencing, what points they appear to agree or disagree about and what experiences do they hold in common. Based on interview results held with journalists, the following major thematic categories were identified by the researcher.

##### ***4.5.1 Issues of agreement (common issues)***

- Ethiopian media and freedom of expression

Through its potential to address large audiences or very specific groups, and its power to generate and to mold public opinion, journalism has an important function in a democratic society; some call the media the sword arm of democracy as it can act as a watchdog, protecting public interest against any oppression and also creating awareness. One element of the context of dangerous speech is the media and when analyzing dangerous speech in Ethiopia media, it is crucial to examine what roles journalists opt to assess their capacity in conflict resolution and

peacebuilding measures. When asked about how ethical principles guide their role in the Tigray conflict, journalists from a private-owned newspaper expressed their belief that free expression and the application of ethical journalism are important for building a democratic society and minimizing dangerous speech and enlightening citizens. They also added that journalists should be conscious of the impact of their words especially in a country like Ethiopia where deep-rooted social, historical and political grievances exist.

Most of the interviewed journalists have similar opinion regarding ethical principles. They urged refraining from cultural/ethnic bias, ensuring equal representation of all societal groups, exercising caution in news narratives to avoid incitement of violence and hatred, and to ensure the practice of professional values such as accuracy, impartiality, and truthfulness. None of the interviewed journalists talked about the journalists' role to sign peace agreements rather they emphasized the implementation of ethical principles when reporting on conflict. For instance, one of the interviewees asserted:

*“Caution is necessary to guide journalists’ attitudes and behaviors. We need to see whether our attitudes refrain us from practicing ethical values of accuracy, impartiality, truthfulness, and objectivity. We need to practice caution to avoid anything that affects people’s sentiments, or causes violence and hatred, or damage societal peace. Balanced media coverage is crucial in conflict-ridden societies like Ethiopia where ethnic, religious and community violence is common.”* (Interviewee 10).

As discussed above, the sampled journalists have knowledge of the importance of the practice of ethics in journalism; however, some of them highlighted the pervasiveness of journalists' prejudices and personal biases in the Ethiopian news media that fueled political rivalries and ethnic fragmentation in the country on many occasions in the past. One of the interviewees stated, *“We need to break the hegemony of personal beliefs and prejudices as journalists need to be truly ethical when reporting on conflict. Unfortunately, that is not the case in Ethiopia.*

Another reporter added:

*“While several journalists who talk great about the ethics of conflict reporting, but they violate it on daily basis. I see them emphasizing impartiality, respect for human rights and democracy etc. while their ethnic and sectarian prejudices do reflect in their reporting.”*

The results generally indicated a weak implementation of ethical principles to report on conflict in Ethiopia's mainstream media, which could affect their role in conflict resolution and peace

building. Nevertheless, the practiced role of Ethiopian journalists in conflict resolution and peace building did not appear as strong as enough because of less practice of ethics and abidance with laws.

For example, a male news producer from a private newspaper said:

*“Ethiopia has anti-hate speech law protecting privacy, ethnic and religious sentiments, I think the practice and implementation depend on journalists’ abidance by the laws and that their attitudes do not override their sense of responsibility to practice ethics and respect the laws.” (Interviewee 2)*

The Ethiopian journalists operate in a social and cultural milieu that requires them to be sensitive while reporting on different ethnic and religious groups, and that does necessitate them to practice respect, individual caution, and virtues. Interviewees’ feedback further highlighted that the implementation of code of ethics was not just restrained by their apathetic attitude to follow laws, but it was also restrained by safety risks and pressure by diverse groups posed to them. For example, a male news anchor from the state-owned channel stated:

*“I acknowledge journalists’ political and religious fragmentation. They have their individual biases and prejudices as well, and that can be observed quite often. At times, it can escalate conflict. However, journalists are not always biased. There are many occasions when they are threatened to report not only one-sided story. Additionally, they do so to save their lives. Then, you can see the gap between theory and practice of ethics. “(Interviewee 5)*

- Diversity, economic conditions and transparent ownership of media

Recently the Ethiopian media environment has turned more polarized, characterized by contestation of narratives along ethnic lines. The different media channels function as extensions of political positions, testifying to political parallelism in the Ethiopian media. The current Ethiopian media can be best described as characterized by ethnic parallelism. Different media channels show commitment to a certain region or group of people. In addition, the new media situation is characterized by floating professionalism in which most media personalities play roles as an activist, political and journalistic roles. It is difficult to differentiate between professional journalists and amateurs. Media professionals who call for responsible reporting are targeted by the government and the media industry itself. When asked about how ethical principles guide their role in conflict situation in Ethiopia, most journalists raised key issues.

A senior reporter from a private newspaper commented:

*“I think the fact that media channels which focus on ethnicity and regional state in Ethiopia is not against the constitution and does not necessarily mean it is a source of conflict as long as mechanism for maintaining balance and self-accountability are in place. If remedial measures are not taken by concerned bodies, the polarization in Ethiopia’s media is likely to grow stronger in the future.” (Interviewee 7)*

All journalists pointed out that even after the coming to power of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, media outlets still continue to operate under very difficult policy and economic conditions. For example, newspaper print run are very low with leading private newspapers having only 15,000 copies of each issue in relation to operating in a population of over 100 million. The newspapers could print more copies were it not for the ban on private printing presses. Private newspapers that rely on state-owned printers face challenges of late printing and shortage of newsprint ink and as a result, the mainstream print media is limited to major urban centers. Private media journalists also complained that they have been denied access to government information and often not invited to government media events. The journalists suggested that the establishment of think tank platforms that brings media, civil society organizations and government representatives on media and other national issues.

Another point raised by a journalist from Tigray who stated:

*“With coming to power of Abiy Ahmed, TPLF leadership had also been split into two following protests by Amhara and Oromo youth. In the process Abay Woldu who was the then President of Tigray region and chairman of the TPLF resigned and was replaced by Debretsion Gebremikael (PhD). With regard to media in Tigray, TPLF admitted that media outlets in Tigray had been monopolized by TPLF and that it had been an instrument of the ruling party and promised to liberalize the media as per the demand of the people of Tigray.”*

According to Addis standard newspaper, several journalists at the TPLF-owned Dimtsi Weyane Tigray Television and Radio (DW) headquartered in Mekelle, Tigray region, have resigned from their jobs in protest against lack of editorial freedom and bad media leadership. The journalists complained that the media only entertains ideology of one group, and that they couldn’t practice their profession freely. They said, “Tigray’s agenda is not the priority of the media, and journalists are promoted based on party membership despite their knowledge and experiences. They also add that the leadership of the media is loyal to the party and that they lack professional experience. “Experience, hard work, and knowledge have no value in the media unless you are a cadre.”

For example, one journalist commented:

*Tigray people's agenda is not the priority of the media, and journalists are promoted based on party membership despite their knowledge and experiences". Despite owned by the party (TPLF), he said, "the media should not be led by the idea of individuals or groups, it should be led by the editorial," we are not even allowed to express our ideas on our own personal social media pages" (Interviewee 6)*

Another journalist, an assistant editor and a senior journalist commented:

*"The leadership of the media is politically loyal to the party (TPLF) and that they lack professional experience, hard work and knowledge has no value in the media unless you are a party member. Even after programmers and documentaries were made ready to broadcast, if they are not to the liking of the party (TPLF) officials, they would be dropped with a phone call. Due to the war in Tigray, at least 330 employees of the media have not been paid their salaries for over two years and as a result, several journalists resigned from their jobs in protest against lack of editorial freedom and bad media leadership".*

Ethiopia has a history of a lack of independent media. Even after the so-called "media reform" in 2018, the symbiosis between the state and media outlets continued. As a result, the state continues to have a strong hold on mass media outlets via its control and influence over mass media broadcasting channels. Despite being classified as public broadcasters, official media outlets, such as the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC), the Ethiopian News Agency, and other outlets, are mainly used to support the federal government's communication strategy. This is why during the early stages of the Tigray war; the Ethiopian government was effective in establishing media blackout. The imposition of media blackout in the areas where clashes occurred made it difficult to report on the armed conflict beyond what was broadcast by government media outlets.

Another concern raised by the journalists is issue of plurality and diversity of media, a level economic playing ground and transparency of ownership. While there is growing access to TV channels, diversity of content is a challenge as most of Ethiopia's media, remain fearful of the existing restrictive legal regime and are largely city-based. Apart from owning the biggest broadcast entity Ethiopia Broadcasting Corporation (EBC), the government also owns regional TV and radio stations that are restricted on broadcasting political content. Ethiopia's independent media are small, self-censor and steer clear of controversial political issues out of fear of harassment. The dominating media are the state-owned broadcasting stations and newspapers, and these tend to support the government's political positions and policies. According to private

media, apart from the issue of licensing prohibitions, developing sustainable business models or the media sector as well as enhancing local content and more geographic representation remains a challenge and he further adds:

*“Media professionalism still remains a key issue and this can only be possible through media reform interventions. However, even though the Prime minister has pledged to reform repressive laws and has acknowledged the role of media in good governance, in practice, no improvements have been made”.* (Interviewee 13)

- Capacity building and support for freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity

The journalists raised the issue of professional capacity building and stressed the need to strengthen the skills of media practitioners either at individual or organizational capacities so that they can fully take part and own and contribute to the media policy reform process. In connection with capacity building, some female journalists have also expressed their concern about lack of gender equality in media, even though they usually hear about gender mainstreaming and equality pledges, in practice that has not been materialized and there are limited opportunities for female journalists in the Ethiopia media industry. Newspapers such as The Reporter say that they are training media staff in-house because journalism graduates because they are not adequately trained for the job at hand. There seems to be no adequate platforms for continued engagement between the media industry, and training institutions. The journalism schools need to increase links with regional and international media institutions and for support in enhancing their training capacity and they have also to make a lot of changes to improve the curricula. In addition, journalism schools should provide training to community radio stations.

Another issue raised by the journalists was the role of media as a platform or democratic discourse. One example for this they mentioned the need for the establishment of independent community radio stations in the country which could play a notable information sharing role, challenging government restrictions on coverage of sensitive issues but that play a public interest journalism role that has the potential to strengthen community platforms for dialogue, debate and access to information. Whereas journalists seem to be very critical of their role, they rather blame politicians for not taking responsibility. On the other hand, the Ethiopian government shifted the main guilt for the dangerous speech and ethnic violence on social media and private media, accusing them of fuelling ethnic violence in the country and drafted anti-hate speech laws. Prior to the Tigray war, the Ethiopian government had created media that looked



independent to outsiders, but which was under its full control behind the scenes. Prime Minister Abiy is quoted to have said, “The problem with Ethiopia’s media is an excess of media freedom.”

#### ***4.5.2 Issues of disagreement on national narratives***

With regard to the historical and ideological causes that led to the armed conflict in Tigray, Ethiopian journalists showed parallel explanations. The Tigray war was preceded by longstanding ethnic competition among the Amharas, Tigrayans and Eritreans. Amhara-Tigrayan nationalist contention is related to changing power dynamics and disputed territories. After the death of emperor Yohannes IV, Amhara rules reigned over the country and Tigrayans felt marginalized and during the emperor Haile Selassie rule grievances turned into rebellion and when the TPLF came onto the political scene, anti-Amhara ruling class sentiments were fuelled to establish an insurgency that finally won power in 1991. Amhara elites subsequently took the position of the underdog constantly agitating for change, and in turn inflaming Tigrayans suspicion and fear towards them. The diminishing Tigrayan political influence post-2018 has led to the fast resurgence of Amhara confidence, hope and regional power. Militarization in the Amhara Regional State has confirmed Tigrayan fears of being under threat, leading to a counter-build-up of military prowess inside Tigray. The contention is not just based on power struggle but also border disputes.

When asked about the factors that led to the conflict, Ethiopian journalists showed a deep disagreement with regard to the history, nature and future of the country. Based on interview results, the Ethiopian journalists were categorized into three groups: Group 1 consisted of Amhara-based journalists and journalists from Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) On the contrary, journalists from Amhara TV, and EBC stressed that the major cause of the conflict was due to the ethnic-based Ethiopian constitution that was introduced in the country since 1991, which resulted in power struggle among the coalition of ethnic-based political parties under EPRDF. Particularly journalists from Amhara TV believed the ethnic-based constitution does not represent the interest of the Amhara people and denies them of their right to live and work throughout the country and for the last 27 years of EPRDF rule, ethnic Amhara people had been target of ethnic-based violence all over the country. Furthermore, they feel that the ethnic-based

border demarcation had given land to regions like Tigray, Oromia and Afar which used to be Amhara provinces.

The group two category represented journalists from independent private newspaper considered Ethiopia's past history as a nation-building endeavor that failed to achieve its goals due to the democratic deficit of the process and suggested for democratization of the new nation building process based on individuals' rights rather than the self-determination rights of the nations and nationalities of the country. Finally, group three consisted of Tigray-based journalists who described Ethiopia's past history through the lens that the Amhara rulers used to oppress the other nation and nationalities of Ethiopia and hence, they advocated for a political arrangement that grants autonomy to nations and nationalities of the country. Specifically, from a Tigrayan perspective, they pointed out that the Tigray war had a deep root in history.

For instance, a journalist from Tigray explained:

*“Tigray is a victim of its own history. On March 1889, Emperor Yohannes dies at the battle of Metema; Emperor Menilik II of Shewa became emperor of Ethiopia and signed the Wuchalle Treaty with Italy that ended up in the division of the Tigrigna-speaking people and the founding of Italian Eritrea. Over the following decades, as a result of the deliberate impoverishment and neglect and subsequent emigration, Tigrayans came to be seen as paupers and were subjected to degrading names in both Ethiopia and Eritrea. In Eritrea, Agame, the name of the Eastern Tigray area, was changed into a degrading word to refer to all Tigrayans.” (Interviewee 16)*

With regard to the role of Eritrea's military involvement in the Tigray war, Journalists from Radio Fana and Amhara TV responded that the Eritrea was involved in the conflict because of the missile attack by TPLF forces and it was a defensive move and is justifiable, while journalists from the Ethiopian Reporter newspaper believed that although the triggering factor was the missile attack by TPLF, they think that the full-scale military involvement was beyond the trigger and that it is against the sovereignty of Ethiopia. On the contrary, journalists from Tigray TV and Dimtsi Weyane said that the Eritrean military involvement in the conflict was a result of the animosity between TPLF and EPLF dating back from the armed struggle against the Derg regime and goes back to the time of the coming to power of EPRDF in Ethiopia and Eritrea's independence. Some of the journalists even believe that the Eritrea government views the ethnic-based federal arrangement of Ethiopia as a threat to the survival of the Eritrean state and Eritrean nationalism and by extension, prosperous Tigray is viewed as a threat to Eritrea and

that's why during the Tigray war the Eritrean military deliberately targeted at key economic infrastructure of Tigray.

Tigray-based journalists view Eritrea's involvement from a different angle. For instance, a senior reporter from Tigray argues:

*"Even before the start of the war on Tigray, the Eritrea's regime propaganda has been putting all the blame for the poor living condition of Eritreans on the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Tigray people. The Eritrean government started its hate campaign against TPLF and the people of Tigray soon after the border war in 1998. Since then the Eritrean government has been waiting for appropriate time to attack Tigray."(Interviewee 7)*

From the above interview, it can be seen that there exists a contradictory opinion among Ethiopian journalists with regard to the immediate and long-term causes of the armed conflict that broke out in Tigray including on issues of nation-building projects of the country and future path for sustainable peace.

- **Ethnic federalism and the Ethiopian constitution**

A major issue that divided journalists is the degree of political power that should be concentrated in regional governments. Journalists from Tigray see Ethiopia's version of "ethnic federalism" as a means of preserving "unity" in Ethiopia rather than a tool for secession. Journalists from other ethnic groups such as the Oromo worry that without a political arrangement that gives significant power to regional governments, majoritarian politics will leave no space for them to express their cultural identities or pursue regional political interests. Government supporters such as Amharas and pan-Ethiopianists often blame ethnic federalism for entrenching divisions among Ethiopia's many different ethno-linguistic groups.

When asked about the major political problem in Ethiopia, all Amhara-based journalists responded that ethnic-based federalism is the key problem that is responsible for the escalation of ethnic-based conflict and violence in the country. On the contrary, all Tigray-based journalists state that the post-1991 ethnic federalism and constitution arrangement is meant to decentralize power and resolve the 'nationalities question' by accommodating the country's various ethno-linguistic groups. In a fragile situation of the country prior to 1991, in which the survival of the country was under threat by various armed groups, the establishment of regional governments was a measure that ensured the survival of the Ethiopian state. Considerable number of national movements perceived ethnic federalism as the panacea to the age-old national oppression and

dominations of their respective constituencies and hence they commended the implementation of ethnic federalism as an appropriate measure to salvage the country from the alleged impending disintegration.

A journalist from Tigray states:

*“Since the centralization project started in the 19th century in Ethiopia, successive regimes that ruled the country perpetuated ethnic oppression and marginalization under the guise of nation-building endeavors, was an attempt to destroy the cultures and languages of ‘other nations’ in the country.”*

The absence of consensus among Ethiopian journalists regarding ethnic federalism results from contradictions that dates back to the formation of the modern Ethiopia state in the nineteenth century and have become virulent since 1991. Ethiopia’s politics is intensely contested and at stake are fundamentally opposing visions of the country’s history, problems and the way forward as conceived by different ethno-political constituencies and a diaspora dominated by Amhara. The events that led to the current Tigray war in Ethiopia have a long history beginning with the death of Emperor Yohannes IV in 1889, who was from ethnic Tigrayan and whose main base was Tigrigna-speaking peoples of both Tigray and Eritrea. After the death of Emperor Yohannes IV, Emperor Menilik II, who is from Amhara Ethnic group took over state power that led to the formation of new Ethiopia and the emergence of Eritrea under Italian colony. Tigrayans’ historical memory of the period following the Amhara rule under Menilik II and later Emperor Haile Selassie is portrayed as a deliberate project of impoverishment and neglect in Ethiopian politics and economy. According to Tigrayan narratives, at the expense of Tigray, two major power centers emerged at Asmara of Italian Eritrea and at Addis Ababa of Menilik II of Amhara and the two power centers embarked on different nation-building projects. The project in Asmara wanted to create a new national Eritrean identity completely severed from Tigray, while the other one centered in Addis Ababa followed a unitary government structure (Gebremikael, 2020).

In 1935, Emperor Haile Selassie from Amhara ethnic Group crowned in Ethiopia during which the grievances of Tigrayans transformed in to armed conflict against the Emperor’s centralization efforts, which is known as ‘Qedamay weyane’ meaning ‘the first revolution’, demanding for autonomous administration. This ‘Qedamay weyane’ served as a source of inspiration to the Tigrayan students at Addis Ababa University who formed the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) and after seventeen years of armed struggle, overthrew the Derg regime

and this marked the end of the unitary state project in Ethiopia. In 1991, the TPLF-dominated Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) assumed state power and re-configured the new Ethiopia under ethnic federation system. The constitution of the country reiterates that the rationale behind the ethnic federalism is to decentralize power and resolve the 'nationalities questions' by ethno-linguistic groups. However, the decision to re-configure the Ethiopian state along ethnic lines was perceived mainly by the Amhara ethnic groups as a political ploy to dismantle the country.

**Figure 4 Timeline of the Tigray war in Ethiopia**



#### ***4.5.3 Issues for concern in relation to sustained peace***

- **Mounting Tigrayans nationalism**

Tigrayan nationalism is now at the forefront of Tigrayan politics. In the past, TPLF had been a calming influence when it comes to relations with neighboring communities but now it is facing increased pressure to reflect a strong position on Tigrayan nationalism. Previously known for prioritizing a class-based political analysis, the TPLF now seems to have been bullied towards shelving its leftist ideals, and is joining the nationalist fervor. Irredentist sentiments which previously had minimal support have become increasingly main stream. Tigrayans wanting to re-establish stronger socio-economic bonds and possibly political unity with the neighboring Tigrigna-speaking Eritreans and this trend is becoming very popular especially among the young generation. Aggressive nationalism has become so strong since the outbreak of the Tigray war in November 2020 that Tigrayan politics has marginalized pan-Ethiopian sentiments like Arena Tigray and the Tigray Congress Party. Both appear to have lost their support base among local and diaspora Tigrayan communities.

## 5 Conclusion

The Tigray war of Ethiopia is a complex case that interacts with the geopolitics of the Horn of Africa, historical trauma, hate speech, media manipulation and propaganda. Meanwhile, the vast majority of studies in Ethiopia have had a narrow focus on inflammatory statements on social media and how they spread to large audiences, which offered few insights into the influence of dangerous speech spread using state media on inciting mass violence.

Findings of analysis of public speeches by leaders and influential figures in Ethiopia showed that the messages fulfill the requirements of the dangerous speech framework with identified dangerous speech features including; dehumanisation, assertion of attacks against women and girls, guilt attribution and threat to group integrity. Perpetrators of the dangerous speech comprised influential people in society ranging from politicians, journalists to artists and military generals, who have significant influence on the audience in shaping public opinion that contributed to escalating ethnic tensions. However, the perpetrators have not been held accountable.

Findings of analysis of the Ethiopian media landscape indicated that most influential media outlets in the country are owned by the government, and the media ecosystem is characterized by ethnic parallelism where different media channels show commitment to their ethnic group and played the role of propaganda. With regard to the role of Ethiopian journalists, the study found that the journalists were victims of the intensified ethnic polarization in which they showed belonging to their ethnic identity. When it comes to professional ideals, ethnic and political agendas had dominated over professional journalism which made it difficult for Journalists to challenge dangerous speech in the country.

However, despite the pressures from the government and society, journalists need to be conscious of their negative contribution by adding fuel to an already ethnically divided society and polarized political economy of the country, and they need to be reminded that through practicing ethical journalism, they have an important role to play in reducing the spread of dangerous speech, and consequently tackling potential violent conflicts. Interestingly, journalists from independent private media showed a more promising attitude towards national issues of the country despite the financial, political and legal pressures and if supported financially and

technically, they have the potential to mobilise journalistic values in creating critical mass of population in the country.

## **Recommendations**

Much of the debate about tackling hate speech in Ethiopia presupposes legislative frameworks focusing on contents on social media, however it is useful to collect and study dangerous speech systematically, looking for its nature and volume over time which can serve as an early warning for violence. It is also crucial to address dangerous speech and its harmful effects through targeting at the elements of the context of dangerous speech including: the speaker, media/journalists, and the public (susceptible audience).

The findings of this study has to be seen in the light of some limitations such as unavailability of resources, limited sample size, limited access to information, and lack of previous research on the topic. Therefore, to better understand the implications of the research, future studies could address issues including examining experiences of best practices from countries that have used the dangerous speech framework such as Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Denmark, Hungary, Kenya, Pakistan and the USA. Together with the concept of conflict journalism, the framework could then be enlarged to develop a comprehensive analytical approach for designing dangerous speech mitigation strategies in the country.

In Ethiopia's complex media environment, journalists are victims of political manipulation by the government and other political groups in the country and conventional journalism training alone is not sufficient to equip journalists deal with challenges of violent conflict situation and hence, enhancing their understanding of conflict sensitive journalism is crucial. In addition, journalists should be aware of their negative role in fuelling violent during the Tigray war but they must now consider promoting non-state initiatives through mobilization of influential people and institutions in the country to raise awareness about the impact of dangerous speech on the society.

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## APPENDICES

### General information

1. Where the alleged dangerous speech was registered (TV show, Radio show, TV reportage, Radio reportage, TV live streaming, Radio live streaming)

### To assess the context of DS

1. What is the topic/ subject matter of the programme during which the alleged DS occurred?

The subject matter resonates in the society as: Important, sensitive, highly sensitive, controversial, is it of public interest?

2. Is the topic of public interest? a)no b)yes c)can become
3. What is the specific social and political context in the society regarding the topic and the manner it is presented?
4. Do the statements incite to discrimination, hostility or violence against a person or a group of people and / or are they expressed in order to incite the audience to act against a person or a group?  
a) No b) Yes
5. Write here the statement which includes potential hate speech and its description:
6. What is the position or status of speaker(s) in the society? a) Citizen b) Public personality c) Politician d) Journalist / moderator e) Public servant f) Mayor / local or regional councilor
7. How is the speaker(s) perceived by the audience? a) Popular figure b) Respected figure c) Not respected figure
9. Are the authors of the hate speech influential individual(s) or not? a) No b) Yes
10. What is the degree of influence the speaker has? Can it be quantified? a) Limited b) Small c) Large d) Very large
11. Do the authors of the alleged hate speech participate often as guests in public debates? a) No b) Yes
12. Do the speakers represent a known institution/organisation? a) No b) Yes
13. How is the institution/organisation the speaker(s) represents perceived by the audience? a) As an important institution/organisation b) As an active institution/organisation c) As a less known institution/organisation

To assess the intent of the author(s) to incite the public against a person or target group

1. Are the statements inclusive of elements of advocacy and incitement against certain groups or their representatives? a) No b) Yes
2. Does the speech identify the group or the representative of the group that is being portrayed in a negative, stereotypical, resentful and insulting manner, with hateful statements, etc.? a) No b) Yes
3. What is the target group? a) A person negatively identified due to their protected characteristic or their association with them b) A group negatively identified c) Both
4. The protected characteristic underlying the alleged hate speech: a) Age b) Gender c) Political affiliation d) Opinion
5. Combating hate speech in the media in Ethiopia
6. How does the audience reacts to the discourse (if this can be analysed)? a) The audience support the speech b) The audience react against the speech c) The audience does not take any stance regarding the speech d) Other, please explain: .....

To analyse the content and form of the alleged hate speech

1. Is the speech direct and provocative? a) No b) Yes c) Unclear
2. What is the style used? a) Scientific b) Official (juridical -administrative) c) Artistic d) Colloquial e) Other, please explain:...
3. What is the nature of the arguments used? a) Arguments related to the person b) Arguments related to the use of force c) Arguments related to authority d) Arguments based on scientific data e) Arguments based on religious dogma f) Other, please explain:...
4. Is there a balance in presenting views and opinions in the TV/radio programme? a) No b) Yes c) Unclear
5. Were the opinions presented neutrally or in a documented manner by the media institution? a) No b) Yes
6. Were the opinions presented using biased statements, or discriminatory and false statements by the media institution? a) No b) Yes
7. Are there insults used against the targeted group (explicit or implied)? a) No b) Yes
8. Can the statements trigger strong negative emotions in a common viewer/listener? a) No b) Yes
9. Is the speech praising or glorifying, promoting and justifying violence and spreading racist ideas and stereotypes, stigmatization, etc.? a) No b) Yes

10. Is the speech praising or glorifying the Holocaust or other genocides, or negative historical figures etc.? a) No b) Yes
11. Does the discourse deny, minimize, approve, or justify crimes of genocide or crimes against humanity? a) No b) Yes

To assess the dissemination of hate speech

1. What is the extent of the dissemination of the alleged hate speech?
2. What is the magnitude and size of the audience?
3. Is the speech widely accessible to the public? a) No b) Yes
4. What is the estimated size of the audience of the alleged hate speech? (considering the coverage, availability of programme, popularity, etc.)?
5. Do the audience have the means to act against the targeted group as a consequence of the act of incitement?
6. Does the speech appear on the webpage of the audio-visual media service provider? a) No b) Yes c) The provider does not have a webpage

To assess likelihood of harm

1. Is there an imminence of danger or risk of potential harm that could be caused by promoting the speech? a) No b) Yes, in this case, explain the risk or danger:.....
2. Does the speech call on certain actions that could be understood by an average audience member to incite hatred towards a group or a representative of that group? a) No b) Yes c) Unclear
3. Does the speech clearly identify a particular “enemy”, disparaging and denigrating the identified targets? a) No b) Yes, indicate which:

To assess the role of journalists/ media service providers in preventing and combating hate speech in the audiovisual media.

1. Has the media institution promoted the alleged hate speech? a) No a) Yes
2. If you ticked “No” to question 1, indicate in which way the journalist/media institution intervened to stop the dissemination of hate speech: a) Intervened to stop the message b) Condemned the message and fenced the media provider c) Turned off the microphone d) Took an advertising break e) Stopped the message and

If you ticked “Yes” to question 1, please specify in what manner the media institution engage in disseminating the alleged hate speech?

3. a) Did not react b) Accepted the message and agreed with its author c) Encouraged the further dissemination by providing air time d) Contributed to the message dissemination by words, or screen messages, videos, etc. e) Used the hate speech again f) Others (indicate which): ..... explained why f) Ensured a second point of view (an independent expert) g) In another way, please explain:
  1. Has hate speech been disseminated in the form of SMS, e-mails, Facebook and Twitter messages sent to the media provider by the audience subsequently shown in the programme (e.g., in the scroll)? a) No b) Yes
  2. The alleged hate speech disseminated in the media programme was: a) Shown on the screen b) Read out by the moderator c) Another situation, please explain: .....
  3. What was the reasoning the media service provider offered in response to the alleged violations (provide details)?

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**Norges miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet**  
Noregs miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet  
Norwegian University of Life Sciences

Postboks 5003  
NO-1432 Ås  
Norway