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Working Paper

The recent political situation in Ethiopia and rapprochement with Eritrea

AGDI Working Paper, No. WP/20/036

Provided in Cooperation with:

African Governance and Development Institute (AGDI), Yaoundé, Cameroon

Suggested Citation: Addis, Amsalu K.; Asongu, Simplice; Zhu, Zuping; Addis, Hailu Kendie; Shifaw, Eshetu (2020) : The recent political situation in Ethiopia and rapprochement with Eritrea, AGDI Working Paper, No. WP/20/036, African Governance and Development Institute (AGDI), Yaoundé

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/228008>

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A G D I Working Paper

WP/20/036

The Recent Political Situation in Ethiopia and Rapprochement with Eritrea ¹

Forthcoming: African Security Review

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The Recent Political Situation in Ethiopia and Rapprochement with Eritrea

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January 2020

Abstract

The aim of this article is designed to provide an overview of the historical and contemporary relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea as well as to examine the recent geopolitical situation and the perception of local people in Ethiopia. This paper is mainly based on secondary data analysis of the available secondary information and news reports, online articles, academic literature, interviews and discussions. The war between Ethiopia and Eritrea brought political, economic and social security threats to the Horn of Africa. Although the economy in Ethiopia is at the developing stage, recent protests have shaken the country to its core. Since 2015, anti-government protests have been triggered over freedom of the press, land rights, under-represented seats in the coalition parties, and horizontal inequality in economic, political and social affairs among ethnic groups across the country. In this study, it is established that the unrestrained political circumstance of the current regime has created dissension and violence among the public, and thus led to escalating political, economic and security crises in the country. If this issue is not rectified quickly, the peace in the country may be jeopardised. Another issue is that although Ethiopia-Eritrea rapprochement is appreciated, the agreement between the two leaders and their foreign policy orientation is still unclear.

Keywords: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Protest, Amhara, Oromo, State of emergency, EPRDF

Introduction

Guerrilla movement, friendship and peace statement

Ethiopia and Eritrea are located in the East African region known as the Horn of Africa. The Horn of Africa is composed of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda. Eritrea is bordered to the south by Ethiopia, Djibouti to the east, Sudan to the west and to the northeast and east by the Red Sea coastline. Eritrea shares a wider border with Ethiopia. Historically, various parts of Eritrea were ruled by indigenous and foreign powers including the British, Egyptians, Italians and Ottomans.¹

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 increased the presence of Italians in the horn of Africa. Eritrea was officially recognised as an Italian colony through the Wuchale (Ucciali) Treaty and the Addis Ababa Treaty at the time of Emperor Menelik II in May 1889. In 1941, the British occupied Eritrea. In 1950, the United Nations (U.N.) played a critical role in bestowing Eritreans the right to self-determination by providing a choice for independence, separation, or supported union with Ethiopia and endorsed Eritrea to become a federation with Ethiopia.² Thus, in 1962, Emperor Haile Selassie officially ceased the federation and annexed Eritrea to be the 14th province of Ethiopia.¹

After 30 years, the Ethiopian Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), now the ruling Eritrean Party, fought side by side in the same year, overthrowing the Ethiopian Mengistu regime.³ Eritreans finally became independent and established their own country in 1993.⁴ In July of 1993, which is after the Eritrean independence referendum, the two countries signed the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. Accordingly, Ethiopia enjoys Assab port duty-free and Eritreans treated equally as Ethiopian citizens within Ethiopia.⁵ The two leading insurgent groups, the TPLF and the EPLF, that now govern in Addis Ababa and Asmara respectively, were primarily opportunistic and tactical friends.⁶

Ethiopia and Eritrea were separated peacefully but they ignored the clear border demarcation.⁷ For over a century during the Ethiopian Empire and the Italian colonial period, the two countries continued to use the ambiguous borders.⁸ The borders of the two sides were not clearly divided.⁹ The small scale clashes between the Ethiopian and Eritrean police patrols near Badme triggered war and such minor incidents brought much more serious actions.¹⁰ In early 1998, the border dispute tension increased and the two countries broke diplomatic relations. From May 1998 to June 2000, the ambiguous border led to a dispute between the two sides. In addition to the ambiguous border, political trajectories, economic

misunderstanding, such as the commencement of an independent Eritrean currency, Nakfa in 1997, the illegal trade involvement of Eritreans, which led to a bitter antagonism are among other reasons for the war break.⁵The border war that erupted between the two countries cost both countries billions of US dollars in Agriculture and infrastructure damage, lost civilians, and investment opportunities. Simultaneously, the trade between them and the aviation services of the two countries were also stopped.

Both parties signed an Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities. To end a violent conflict between them, a comprehensive peace accord, the ‘Algiers Peace Agreement’ was signed in Algiers on the 12th of December 2000. The continuation of active hostilities between both parties was averted due to the peace agreement. However, in terms of ushering a lasting peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the peace agreement has remained ineffective and could not hamper the unfolding war. Moreover, the peace agreement prevailed in the de facto ‘no war no peace’ situation, which is no less harmful than an active hostility.⁵ After suffering a very large number of casualties and spending millions of dollars on the war, the final boundary decision has only changed a very small area.⁴

According to scholars, even as Eritrea acknowledged a town called Badme prior to May 1998, it was under Ethiopian administration.¹¹ However, Eritrea occupied all the controversial land (Badme) and entered the hinterland of Ethiopia.¹² In 2002, the Ethiopian-Eritrean Boundary Commission (EEBC), approved by the United Nations Security Council, decided that Badme, the main town in the northern core of the war conflict, was to be placed under Eritrea.¹³ Although the peace agreement was endorsed and the EEBC took its final decision, both countries could not escape from the no war no peace policy and they used all means at their disposal to hamper the normalisation of relations.

However, as of June 2018, the new Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali (PhD) (Henceforth Abiy) fully accepted the peace agreement and it seems the two nations are re-approached. The question is whether their allies are firm or tactical and whether the reconciliation is analysed or just a hasty move still not known. Although Abiy unconditionally accepted the Algiers agreement and his administration claims it is for good, many people ask whether this decision is based on established conditions and institutionalised.

The dispute over the border of Ethio-Eritrea is over a decade old. Abiy took office in April 2018 and is committed to easing tensions with Eritrea and working with the Eritrean government to resolve the no war no peace situation between the two countries.⁴ Although the

Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki has not expressed his views on this matter, the move by the Ethiopian prime minister was somewhat unexpected. Nevertheless, whether there is a majority of public support from the two nations to Abiy's move is still in question. This study discovered from discussions and interviews with Ethiopian scholars that several Eritreans, even those who are against with the present autocratic regime - President Isaias, still see Ethiopia as a potential menace to Eritrea, not to mention the concern and complaints of many Ethiopians at the border and its proximity as well as the majority of Tigray people towards Abiy's action.¹⁴

In early June of 2019, the Executive Committee of the long-ruling party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), issued a statement saying that Ethiopia will fully accept and implement the Algiers Agreement signed with Eritrea and immediately withdraw its troops from Badme and leave from the hinterland of Eritrea.¹⁵ The relationship between the two countries has been further improved. According to observers, unlike his predecessors, Abiy seemed committed to fulfilling his inaugural pledge in his first year. Woldemariam noted, 'PM Abiy has a more formidable political base than his predecessor'.¹⁶

According to Asmara News on the 8th of July 2018, Abiy stated in the Eritrean capital of Asmara that Ethiopia and Eritrea have agreed to resume aviation services, open embassies, and Eritrea allows Ethiopia, a landlocked country, to use the Eritrean port facilities for foreign trade.⁴ It is widely believed that the decision to resume aviation services and port use and the reopening of embassies and resending diplomatic missions in each other's country will play a critical role in boosting the overall economic and political relationship and the trade of both countries as well as the Horn of Africa. However, as yet there is no apparent statement made on the re-establishment of diplomatic, economic, social, and trade ties between the two governments.

According to Reuters on the 11th of September 2018, both leaders visited their shared borders and celebrated the Ethiopian New Year together. Furthermore, this media listed on its website that on the 9th of July 2018, both countries signed a friendship and joint peace statement in Asmara, declaring the end of hostilities between them and normalising relations. This agreement assumed to promote national unity and regional stability and reshape the political landscape in the Horn of Africa.

Ethiopia's political appearances

Since 2015, Ethiopia has been encountering rising vibrant political protests. Although there were various protests in the country, this time, the political atmosphere of Ethiopia suddenly changed into that of turmoil. Growing public dissatisfaction brings unprecedented Amhara, Gambella and Oromo protests.¹⁷ According to Záhovník noted among the major causes of the destabilisation of the political and economic atmosphere in Ethiopia, high internal displacement in several regions, social inequality, regional discrepancies, the expansion of Addis Ababa to the nearby region, and ethnic-based politics can be mentioned.¹⁸ Thus, the frequencies of protests were increasingly posing risks to Ethiopia's economic sustainability and the ruling government's dream of long-term stability. Nearly every day comes news of a clash between security services and protesters as well as internal displacement due to inter-communal conflict which often results in casualties.

Consequently, the ruling government decided to impose and declare a State of Emergency (SoE)¹⁹ twice. On the 9th of October 2016, the first SoE was declared for six months, and the second SoE was immediately proclaimed one day after the unexpected resignation of the former Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, on the 15th of February 2018, and lasted three months.²⁰ Until the day this SoE was lifted, Ethiopia followed the 'command post'.²¹

Clearly, the relevant state organs have the right to decide and declare the implementation of the SoE in certain areas or in the whole country for a temporary period depending on the situation. However, in the case of Ethiopia, many people ask whether the SoE was necessary. Several opposition figures and rights groups believe that the declaration was just a protection for the long-ruling party, the EPRDF, arising from the aggression of the national revolutions, to quell multiple anti-government protests, to halt freedom of the press and speech and to establish an expedient environment for jailing dozens of innocent people, activists, journalists and members of coalition and opposition political parties.²²

Several news reports and the Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia on the 9th of March 2018 claimed that many innocent civilians and peaceful protesters were killed and thousands imprisoned during the SoE.²² Correspondingly, the situation also led to the death of over 700 innocent citizens and imprisonment of thousands of locals, journalists, and individuals in opposition figures as well as a few of the coalition party members.²³ Although the country is an influential member of both the UN Security Council and the UN Human Rights Council, the government is often accused of stifling dissent, imprisoning innocent

civilians, journalists, activists, religious fathers, and officials regardless of their immunity as members of the regional administrative council.²²

This study finds out that declaring the SoE impacted the country negatively with respect to various aspects including trade, tourism and investment incomes. Some investors in and around Addis Ababa marked that although national and international guarantee were noted in Ethiopia's investment proclamation, potential investors perceived that the current political situation of the country was unstable and economically unsuitable to invest their capital. Some of them are even downsizing their investment and leaving the country due to unstable political situations. Moreover, due to the declaration of subsequent SoEs, Ethiopia lost several investors as well as international aid. Similarly, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and many diplomats felt threatened. Several foreign-owned business projects were attacked by the aggressive protesters. For instance, Shandong Dong, the first donkey abattoir company in the country, Dangote Cement Plc in the Oromia region and Karuturi Global Agro Products Plc in the Gambella region are among the victims.²⁴ The imposed SoE tarnished Ethiopia's image as one of Africa's fastest-growing economies.

Furthermore, the declaration of SoE also shades the diplomatic activity and security. As Addis Ababa is the seat of hundreds of embassies, diplomat offices, headquarters, and export-oriented foreign-owned organisation offices,²⁵ the decree of SoE in Ethiopia severely affects their daily activities. For instance, 'Internet has been blocked, prohibited to use social media, freedom of press seized, prohibited to watch and listen to satellite television and radios, diplomats are not allowed to travel 40 kilometres outside the capital, Addis Ababa, without official permission, and others'.²⁶ Consequently, those who transgress the new measure of the SoE also 'risks jail for three to five years'.²⁶

Incidentally, Ethiopia's political crisis was not just about elites scrambling for a larger piece of the pie but also about the lack of power and economic dispensation between coalitions of four ethnic parties. To illustrate, 'The EPRDF is a coalition of four ethnic parties (from the main regions: Oromia, Amhara, Tigray, and SNNPR) dominated by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)'.²⁷ According to certain studies, 'The largest – the Oromo – are officially 34.5% of the population. They are followed by the Amhara (26.9%) and Somali (6.2%). The Tigray people are the fourth largest minority, with just 6.1% of the population'.²⁸ In 1989, although the TPLF/EPRDF formed a coalition of ethnically-based organizations, to give Ethiopia a wide political scope and legitimacy, in reality, there are politically and economically segregated regions.²⁹ For instance, Afar,

Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, and Somali regions are politically administered by EPRDF's sister parties and have not much political power as the coalition of four ethnic parties.³⁰ Furthermore, all four coalitions are supposed to be equally represented in the ranks of the party leadership but in reality, TPLF dominates all.²⁸ Besides, these four coalitions claim to represent their ethnic communities, but except TPLF that steered the EPRDF other three coalitions, especially, the Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization (OPDO) and the Southern Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Front (SEPDF), have been considered as 'weak and subservient components of the EPRDF'.³¹

Accordingly, the sour relationship among the EPRDF members as well as sister parties lies in disproportionate and horizontal inequality in economic, political and social matters, which is the most dangerous issue for the country.¹⁸ Several studies in the conflict literature argue that internal political instability in many countries has been led by economic inequality, disproportionate shares of public resources and political powers, political oppression, poverty instability, and hegemony.³² As political analysts argue, the ruling party was largely made up of minority Tigrayans, which is the northernmost of the nine ethnically-based regions in the country.³³ Similarly, according to the scholars' perceptions and as of the 16th of January 2017, the *Addis Standard* posted on its blog that the civilians' anger was intensified because of corruption in the political system and disproportionate benefits of the country's economy that has gone primarily to a minority ethnic group, Tigray, compared to other regions.³⁴

Accordingly, the state of forcible subjugation, land-grabbing approaches, unfair economic shares between ethnic groups, and under-represented seats in the coalition parties in the country's corridor of power triggered the protesters into aggression and brought unprecedented anti-government squawking and rebellions across Ethiopia's two largest ethnic groups (Amhara and Oromo). This study examined the reasons and based on sources from several local societies that the anti-government squawking was because the Amhara and Oromo parties in the EPRDF demanded the end of TPLF's 21 years dominance in economic and political systems.³⁵

Following restless and flared anti-government protests, releasing the political prisoners and state prosecutors were initiated by the EPRDF party in its 'deep reform' at the time of Desalegn. To 'widen democratic space' Desalegn had announced plans to drop charges against political prisoners and state prosecutors. However, by the time it was unclear when, how many, and under what conditions prisoners will be released.³⁶ It is not new for the

EPRDF to give vague statements and broken promises, especially on the human rights issue, open political space, political prisoners, election, and state prosecutors since toppling the Derg dictatorship in 1991.³⁷

Since the fall of the Derg in 1991, the TPLF as leader and organiser of the EPRDF has dominated Ethiopian politics.³⁸ Still after over 20 years on power, irrespective of its ostensible claim that it is under the umbrella of the EPRDF, people of the same origin monopolistically have held the position of advantage. Likewise, the whole country had been cash cowed by one specific racial group, the TPLF, while the majority is being treated as impediments. The work of McCracken offers some thoughtful insights and explicitly mentions, 'the TPLF is secretly attempting to loot Ethiopia'.³⁹ He added, 'the TPLF/EPRDF has diverted large quantities of government resources and international aid to Tigray'.⁴⁰ Thus, the minorities Tigreans are beneficiaries through economic, social and political means since TPLF took control of both the regional and national governments.⁴¹ One of the reasons, according to scholars, is the establishment of the Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT), which has flooded Tigray with industries.³⁰ EFFORT is a reliable source of economic, social and political profit company to the region,⁴¹ which no government organs have obtained the right to audit so far.⁴² Generally, the TPLF dominated the EPRDF's despotic nature based on divide and rule.⁴³ Intelligibly, when political and economic power is unequally held, human capital accumulation is likely to be suboptimal since groups cannot make credible, long-term commitments to the elites.

Since Abiy, one of the youngest leaders in Africa, became a prime minister, he has launched a wide programme of social integrity, economic and political reforms and carried out an astonishing turnaround in a manner completely different from that of former prime ministers,²³ at least in the first half-year of his office.²³

In the first few months, Abiy delivered a powerful inaugural speech in those cities where the protests were fiercer. He apologised for the killings of peaceful demonstrators that happened before he came to power and preached unity and 'Ethiopianism,' which has never been adopted by the Ethiopian government in modern times. The prime minister also stunned Ethiopians describing the measures he would implement regarding the economic privatisation of sizeable state-owned enterprises, the peace deal with Eritrea, discussing the Grand Renaissance Dam Project with Egypt's government and addressing various political problems.**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Generally speaking, in his first half-year in power, he lifted the SoE, made a peace deal with Eritrea and initiated an earnest and honest dialogue with opposition parties.⁴⁴ Moreover, by intensifying Desalegn's initiative Abiy accelerated the release of many conscious politicians and journalists who had been languishing in prison cells across the country for more than six years.⁴⁵ Notably, some of the journalists, politicians and individual prisoners who were arrested by the ruling party and denounced as terrorists have been released recently.⁴⁵ Among them were Andualem Arage, the Vice President and Press Secretary of Unity for Democracy and Justice Party, and Eskinidr Nega, a prominent journalist, who had been jailed and were sentenced to life on terrorism charges since 2011. Similarly, among several hundred opposition parties that have been released under Desalegn's regime, Bekele Gerba, the vice head of the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), and Professor Merera Gudina, scholar and politician (chairman of the OFC) can be mentioned.

Would Abiy continue in the path of change in Ethiopia? Will he keep the promises which he made in his inaugural? Can he resist the internal political and ideological conflict among the four coalition parties? Can his administration curb the current religious, economic, and political instability in the country that is mostly initiated by the Oromo extremist? What would be the upshot of establishing an ally with Eritrea? Had it been examined whether Ethiopians and Eritreans are happy about the unclear relations and secret agreements between the two leaders? Had his administration realised when establishing an ally with Eritrea that it would affect Djibouti's economy on the bases of port income? Clearly, Ethiopia is a stable port customer with Djibouti.

The Ethio-Eritrea rapprochement

The diplomatic relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea is arguably very complicated and problematic but important for the source of regional political, economic and social stability in the Horn of Africa.⁵ Eritrea has had volatile, violent, confrontational, problematic and hostile relations both in neighbouring countries and international arenas.⁴⁶ Eritrea's confrontation and conflict with Ethiopia, Sudan and Djibouti can be mentioned in the neighbouring countries. The reasons might be territorial, political and economic conflicts.

The elevation of the tactical and opportunistic relations between TPLF and EPLF resulted in the Derg regime.⁴⁷ Both parties had their own goals. The EPLF struggles for

Eritreans and TPLF struggles for Tigrayans' independence from Ethiopia, 'but later [TPLF] framed its war in the wider contexts of democratic Ethiopia'.⁴⁸

In April 1993, Eritreans voted overwhelmingly for independence and the TPLF/EPRDF welcomed Eritrean independence sympathetically.⁷ Subsequently, for several years Meles Zenawi and Afeworki, the cousins,⁷ 'seemed to be prepared to put past conflicts behind them and cooperate on a broad range of economic and diplomatic issues'.⁴⁹ However, after the bloody war over border boundaries started their bilateral relations had degenerated and characterised by a no war no peace condition. Subsequently, each side has hosted and supported opposition parties and rebel movements. For instance, Asmara provided support to the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) while Addis Ababa provided material support to the Eritrea opposition parties.⁵⁰

But then a year before his unexpected resignation Desalegn brings the idea of diplomatic relations. Woldemariam offers some thoughtful insights and articulated that although Desalegn shows a signal to shift the country's diplomatic relations with Eritrea by developing a 'new policy' in order to create a 'sustainable peace', his goal was judged as to 'further isolating Eritrea'.⁵¹ However, after Abiy came to office although there were many unclear issues, the relations with Eritrea commenced. After three days of fully accepting and implementing the Algiers Agreement, Abiy made a historical visit to Eritrea on the 8th of July 2018. **Error! Bookmark not defined.** It was a major event attracting more attention at the national and international levels. Similarly, the issues between them have been alarming to the neighbouring countries. Nevertheless, the return of peace, which has brought the two countries to work together, allowed them to declare an end to their war and acknowledge the Algiers agreement.⁵² This will indeed make a significant improvement to the social, cultural, political and economic relationships in the Horn of Africa.⁵³ Nevertheless, the deep-rooted mistrust between Ethiopia and Eritrea escorted confusion on what kind of foreign policy orientation they have towards each other and as many believe, this issue is now shelved but not yet resolved.

At the time of his visit to Eritrea, Abiy stressed that the controversy over the border dispute had led to the collapse of both countries. The effects of the war were drastic for the entire region and led to several thousands of civilian displacements and it is estimated that over 100 000 people were killed.⁵⁴ It is widely believed that the beginning of reconciliation will bring forth greater opportunities for both countries. The two leaders signed a memorandum of agreement on the 9th of July 2018 and believed that this agreement would

further strengthen their trade and economic ties. Ethiopia and Eritrea are engaged in reconciliation, after two decades in solitary confinement and both nations have been embarking on a series of activities to establish long-term relationships ranging from telephone calls to the restarting of Ethiopian flights to Eritrea.

The Horn of Africa has been the subject of a significant wave of regional war for long and the Ethio-Eritrean war was among them. However, the recent peace and reconciliation of the two countries have presented new hope and has been appreciated by several scholars and leaders of the world.⁵⁵ Particularly, the Ethio-Eritrean war broke out regarding the border dispute concerning Badme. According to Aljazeera's Awol K. Allo, the cost of the war that entailed military resources for both countries was in several billion US dollars. Moreover, the war had devastating effects on natural resources, agricultural products, the ecosystem, and investment attractions which negatively affected the social, political and economic activities on both sides.⁵⁶

Before the war, the two countries' bilateral trade agreements had enabled them to join the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and both countries are the member states of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Accordingly, both countries were involved in each other's trade and assistance but after the war broke out, there was an upheaval and the crisis had been rising since then. Although trade exchange between them continued after the war broke out, it used to take place via a third party and commodities were extremely expensive for both countries.

Nevertheless, after the recent peace agreement, it is believed that there will be economic growth and trade development, diplomatic ties, people-to-people and government-to-government relations will be strengthened in the Horn of Africa. Consequently, the situation will increase investment inflow and job opportunities, enhance business and capital goods, improve technology transfer and human resources, raise diaspora inflow and minimise refugee outflow. While the nature of the trade agreement between the two countries is not known at the moment, it is possible to predict that both countries' economic and trade connections will deepen and strengthen.

For over two decades, peace and reconciliation between the two countries were not easy to achieve, and the realisation of the Algiers Agreement had been a major issue. Although the border demarcation and no war no peace condition had been a puzzle over a decade, without third-party intervention the declaration of peace has been made by both countries' governments.⁵⁷

Security and economic challenges

The political system in Ethiopia has undergone significant changes since 2015. It is remembered that the country was in great danger of collapse and disintegration. It was said that the ruling party had been composed of four national organisations, but in practice, TPLF had the strongest influence over others and held several high political positions.

According to many people, Abiy was the first emerging leader of the Oromo ethnic group. Suspicions among members of the party have become more and more apparent, and rumours are swirling that the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP) is taking over the higher political authorities as TPLF did before. It seems this time is for the Oromo ethnic group.

The upcoming national elections may play a significant role in mobilising the necessary public support for the changes and reforms that Abiy has proposed, but it is unlikely that a successful election will take place without a consensus among the coalition parties, between opposition parties and a peaceful environment in the country. This is because in Ethiopian politics, especially since the EPRDF took power, elections have been controversial.⁵⁸ In light of these developments and other reasons discussed in this study, the upcoming national election is a perception that might convey instabilities, which may threaten the peace in the country. Would Abiy's administration resolve ethnic tensions and conflicts and bring a peaceful environment before the planned election? It is difficult to answer the question of whether the national elections will take place at the scheduled time.

Economic crisis

While Ethiopia can still be at the forefront of GDP from Africa, growth slipped to 8% in 2018 and 2019. Despite the government's tendency to shrink the government-led economic model, the country continued to look at European and Western countries for credit and technical assistance, as well as at China's financial, technical assistance, and additional investment.

Along with this, the government has begun to transition to the private sector's economic management system and is planning to privatise the telecom and logistics sector in the first round. The government says it will do the work in different phases, and the first plan is said to be prioritising the improvement of the legal framework and job creation. Addressing unemployment is a serious problem for Ethiopia to solve since the rate is escalating.

By taking lessons from the role of youth (Qeerros and Fano),⁵⁹ who had taken over the past political system through anti-government protests, Abay said his administration is focusing its efforts on employment-generating projects and developing major cities. This is taken as a reference to the recent Financial Times newspaper saying that if we can change Addis Ababa, we can change Ethiopia.⁶⁰ However, in order to reduce the income inequality prevailing in Ethiopia and to promote sustainable development, the change must start from the rural areas of the country where 80% of the population are engaged in agriculture and agriculture is the foundation of the country's economy.²⁴ Besides, concerning employment-generating projects, there is no single project that has been commenced since Abiy has come to power. This is a headache to Abiy and his administration.

Although Abiy has done many reforms, the continuation of these reforms is still in question, while the paths to success are vague and narrow. Thus, his administration should strive to create a democratic and stable political system centred on diversity in his second year of power. It is expected that his administration has to work along with the coalition to have a common vision by restructuring and strengthening the EPRDF or the recent 'Prosperity Party,' so that Abiy's reform journey will be successful. It is also an assignment that is expected from his administration to rectify the economic crisis by designing a clear and strong economic road map.

Above all, Abiy and his administration are expected to face serious criticism for the deteriorating of the economic, social and security situations. Furthermore, Abiy is expected to acknowledge that the challenges facing the country are beyond the power of one leader and this will enable the country to use the assistance of skilled countries. Many participants in the discussion believe that Abiy and his administration could not handle the Oromo ethnic nationalists, extremists and the OLF by providing the reason that the army of OLF still did not disarm.¹⁴ The participants in the discussion ask a question to claim their observation is accurate, where were Abiy and his administration when several banks were robbed in Oromi regional state?¹⁴ On top of the political instability in the country burglarizing private and governmental properties, (discussed below) is a total economic disaster.

Security crisis

Last year alone, more than three million people were displaced by ethnic violence, making Ethiopia one of the most internally displaced countries in the world, and conflicts between states continue to escalate.⁶¹ The worst recession has occurred in the Guji Oromia region and

the Gedeo southern region of Ethiopia, where more than one million people have been displaced, in addition to the destruction of many people's property. Moreover, according to several observers Amhara people have been displaced, killed and harassed from all corners of the country.

It is difficult to deny that Abiy's actions against the senior leadership and national security officials on the one hand have created significant public spillovers and, on the other, increased security vulnerability. In addition to this, it is said that the TPLF and some of the Tigray people feel a great sense of isolation and violence, especially on the agreement that Abiy made with Afeworki which provoked anger. Tigray region, the northern part of Ethiopia, is one of the regions in the country that straddles the border with Eritrea. Thus, the fear of eruption of war between Tigray and Eritrea is in the mind of many. According to scholars initially, the TPLF, which is currently ruling the Tigray region, had the intention of expanding the Tigray borders in Ethiopia so as to establish the 'Republic of Greater Tigray' according to the 1976 manifesto.⁶²This may be among the reasons that most of the TPLF and Tigrayans do not agree with Abiy unconditionally accepting an agreement with Eritrea.

By contrast, the prime minister has been involved in setting up several committees, including National Reconciliation Commissions and Ministry of Peace to handle regional, group or ethnic problems. In order to solve the attendant problems once and for all, the government must strengthen institutions beyond the temporary solution, and especially in establishing the newly established Ministry of Peace to work towards an inclusive national reconciliation in the community. Abiy's assertion on the establishment of a border and identity commission was fiercely opposed by some politicians, extremists, scholars, observers, and even a civil society group.

The ownership of Addis Ababa is currently another headache that Abiy is facing, which the Oromo extremists advocate. Accordingly, the Oromo ethnic nationalists and some of the ODP members claim that Ethiopia's capital is a part of the Oromia regional state. This issue escorts an ideal conflict and separation among the coalition parties mainly the Amhara Democratic Party (ADP) and ODP and causes the emergency of Addis Ababa City Advocacy group named 'Baladera Council,' where Eskender Nega is the leader.

Incidentally, it is revealed that Orthodox followers and Orthodox churches in the Oromia and Somali regional states are being attacked by ethnic extremists. Since 2015 as several local people mention more than 10 Orthodox churches and several mosques have been burned to ash. By the time this data was compiled, two Orthodox churches had been

burned in the eastern and western Hararge of the Oromia regional state, and the Orthodox followers and church fathers were known to have led to death, persecution, beatings, and forced conversion. Thus, political, economic, social, and cultural security even freedom of religion in Ethiopia is at a greater risk.

Analysis and discussion

This study analysed that the hope of the Ethiopian political renaissance is in danger because of the power struggle among the Oromo political elites, ethnic nationalists, extremists, and ethnical based political systems. These situations led to internal displacements, ethnic conflicts, social, political and economic instability in the country. The unreliable relations among members of the coalition party, a mass killing tragedy that happened on the high delegates of Amhara regional state and the non-cooperative movement of TPLF to Abiy's administration are additional issues for the current situation in the country. Furthermore, the action of the extremists and ethnic nationalists group has been shrouded Abiy's administration in criticism.

The Amhara and Oromo people revolution attempted to infiltrate the ruling party, the EPRDF, which was formerly dominated by the TPLF for decades.⁶³ Furthermore, the Oromo Democratic Party(ODP), formerly known as the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organisation (OPDO), has been able to create a quick understanding and did not hesitate to cooperate with the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the predecessor to the current Amhara Democratic Party (ADP), the Oromo political elites, ethnic nationalists as well as the extremist groups. The reason is that the Oromo political elites and the extremist groups have the ability to make propaganda and organise the youth in the region and the ADP also has the ability to cooperate on ditching the dominance of TPLF. Following which, Abiy, who was the deputy chairman of the ODP, came to power. **Error! Bookmark not defined.** The domination of the TPLF in the ruling party has now minimised and the ODP has seized the opportunity to expand the power structure as had been practiced by TPLF and according to the political observers, ADP seems tactically and systematically pushed out by ODP and the Oromo extremists and ethnical nationalists.

As of the 13th of January 2019, the *Aigaforum* marked on its website that since Abiy came to power, the Oromo political elites struggle was underway to control power in the region as well as in the country. Accordingly, the ODP has entered the new political arena with a few of its members, its regional opposition political parties, the OLF, some political

elites, and the extremist groups with the political agenda. Several of the Oromo political parties also did not escape the critics of the extremist group. This problem brings a threat to the federal government, led by Abiy, who is now the chairman of the ODP and the chairman of the EPRDF, **Error! Bookmark not defined.** for that, he has double responsibilities for the corresponding consequences since he came to office. The crisis eventually plunged the gap between the Oromo political elites and threatened the country's peace and economic survival. The political turmoil is increasing and there is almost a threat to the rule of law in the country.

Furthermore, according to the *Aigaforum* the OLF which has been called for reconciliation and peaceful settlement of the conflict on the 19th of June 2018 speech made by the prime minister, also found the opportunity to destroy a government's structure and tried to govern a few sub-cities in the western Oromia region. Similarly, according to the *Continental Telegraph*, *FanaBroadcasting Corporate* and *Reuters* news reports on the 15th, 16th and 17th of January 2019 respectively, listed on their websites that about 18 private- and government-owned banks in three Oromia zones were robbed and according to the rumours OLF was behind the robbery.⁶⁴ A few of the ODP members become divided against themselves and unwilling to cooperate with their party instead support OLF and the group of extremists in the Oromo region.⁶⁵ Consequently, the *Aigaforum* noted that the ODP, which has tried to slay this issue, has failed and some clashes between the ODP and the OLF also occurred. The *Aigaforum* mentioned, concerned Oromo elders, Abba Gadas, intellectuals, and business persons travelled to Wellega to investigate the matter and tried to bring both belligerent parties together. Similarly, Abiy accused the OLF of daydreaming to take his government power by force within three months.

The study analysed that the fearless attitude of Abiy is likely to result in fierce competition among Oromo extremists and other political parties. This is a devastating event for the country. The ruling party and the federal government have yet to provide a road map showing the political and economic agenda. This is because, in the absence of any visible or feasible plans and an organised policy to promote the country's economic situation, unemployment becomes a major source of political instability and can readily turn into a major threat to socio-economic stability across the country. Currently, Abiy's administration is facing inevitable critics and opposition from societies, political elites, opposition parties, economists and extremists due to its fearlessness. However, it needs strong and strategic action to get out of this situation.

There have been many comments about the challenges that Abiy may face since coming to power, and many have speculated that handling of a coalition entailing ethnic groups with ideological differences can be one of the huge challenges. As has been prophesized, one of the huge challenges is a tendency for disunity among Amhara (ADP) and Tigray (TPLF) parties. Nor did Abiy, either as the country's prime minister or as the EPRDF chairman, attempt to approach the two parties. Similarly, the hegemonic conduct of ODP and its ethnical extremists having the intention of holding several higher political authorities is escalating. This will facilitate the decline of the movement of solidarity and poverty struggle in the country.

Furthermore, droughts, poverty, political repression, vigilante attacks, rebels, internal displacement and forced government resettlement have driven Ethiopia's external and internal migration until recently.⁶⁶ In 2019, the level of humanitarian need was expected to remain the same as in the previous year and the country has now over eight million people in need of humanitarian assistance.⁶⁷ Let alone, as of the 17th of February 2019, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs listed on its website that only in central Gondar of Amhara regional state over 45 000 internally displaced people were in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. Even on the 22nd of October 2019 as per the regions' mass media agency due to low rainfall, a severe drought hit Wag Himrazone and north Wollo in Amhara regional state; about hundred thousands of citizens in these particular zones are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. The prime minister recently said on an interview for the Financial Times that if he lifts at least 60 million people out of poverty, whether he liked it or not he will be internationally famous.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, as yet Abiy's administration has no clear economic policy roadmap to let millions out of the poverty circle. As of the 28th of July 2018, the Ethiopian Reporter listed on its website that there had been no declassified economic policy in Abiy's administration and solving the unemployment problem that puts the country into crises had not yet begun. Markedly, when unemployment results in poverty, it turns into an object of political bargaining.

Incidentally, intending to strengthen regional peace cooperation has implications for both the security and economic stability of the East African countries. However, if there is no institutional basis for any kind of regional cooperation, it will never benefit Ethiopia. For instance, Ethiopia's peace agreement and diplomatic relations with Eritrea have not yet been established institutionally nor has it been publicised, and whether Eritreans and Ethiopians support Abiy's action is still unclear and unanalysed. With this in mind, although conducting

relations with neighbouring governments is essential for Ethiopia, national stability should come first. Thus, his administration has to contemplate the essence of its nations' perception of national stability. If not, what is the national interest of Ethiopia on regional cooperation in the existence of internal instability?

In fact, political and economic hardship for Ethiopia is basically an internal problem, not a regional problem. The problem that needs more attention is mainly the domestic political and economic solution as well as ensuring national peace. Unquestionably, the diplomatic peace and reconciliation achievements, as well as political and economic cooperation in the region, should primarily be based on the national interest of the country.

Conclusion

After Abiy came to power, many reforms have taken place. Regardless, there are many ways in which Abiy's reform project could go wrong. On the one hand, the emerging issues on the economic, social and political affairs in Ethiopia. First, on the political front, the coalition parties have been involved in a power struggle, internal divisions among EPRDF members are high and ethnic politics (racial federalism) and language-based politics has intensified.²⁹ Additionally, the deep-rooted mistrust between the EPRDF members, under-represented seats in the coalition parties, the recent '*Medemer*'⁶⁸ principle and the idea of the 'Prosperity Party' exacerbate the issue. The aim of changing the EPRDF into the united party called Prosperity Party was fiercely opposed by many politicians, scholars, observers, and civil society groups. Such a situation may put the country at great risk of spurring various conflicts.

Second, from the social perspective, the problem of inter-ethnicity continues to affect the citizens of the country, religious institutes are in danger, population displacements are traceable to political instability and the people have become refugees in their own country. Third, on the economic front, it is believed that there is horizontal inequality among the nine administrative regions.³⁰ For instance, according to several scholars since the revolution, Tigray has experienced vast economic growth that directly helps to develop huge industries as well as infrastructural facilities in the region.⁶⁹ This asymmetric economic development and other corresponding issues have led to anti-government violence and social anger.

On the other hand, a diplomatic issue, which is the unclear and mysterious relations between Addis Ababa and Asmara, is of socio-political concern. It remains a question to many how Abiy's insistence on the Eritrean leader Afeworki is in line with the interests of the

Eritrean and Ethiopian citizens. As yet, their relationship is unclear to either of the societies as well as the international political arena, and the intentions of both societies are yet to be analysed. Moreover, Abiy's administration has not been able to answer many of the concerns raised in the country. Some of the concerns raised made by members of civil society and critics include, whether his administration has the desire to resolve the structural and political problems facing the country. Whether it is wise for his administration to analyse the problem of the neighbouring countries instead of facing problems first in its own country? The question is not about why Abiy's administration is paying more attention to solving the diplomatic confrontations and securing diplomatic achievements with the neighbouring countries but about whether his administration used enough time and effort to solve the internal problems.

Ethiopia requires a leader who believes in a sturdy democratic government that provides the basic needs and freedom for the people. Abiy came to power during the most challenging moments of the country where there were conflicts and turbulences in several regions, the fear of persecution was mounting, the stability and living conditions of the capital were fragile, the capital city, Addis Ababa, was at risk, there was the increased difficulty of maintaining economic stability, uncertainties of peace prevailed in many regions, foreign currency scarcity was intensified, the reliability and righteousness of national statements made by the EPRDF regime were dubious, *inter alia*.

Fortunately, Abiy's journey bestows hope to the Ethiopian nation and beyond especially in the first half-year of his office. During his first year in office, he has been influential in all aspects of peace and development for the country as well as for neighbouring countries. Most importantly, his promising start in dealing with the peace agreement with Eritrea has the essential future of both nations with respect to several aspects. As a result, the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to him. Nevertheless, lawlessness which is still prevalent in many parts of the country has been characterised by random ethnic conflicts, identity-based attacks and massive internal displacements. In general, the country is under the verge of political, economic, and social crises. As a result, some of his political moves have been judged as reckless and fearless. Thus, would Abiy continue on the path of change in Ethiopia? This question remains a concern for most citizens in the country, scholars and policymakers.

This study posits that there are two groups of thoughts in Ethiopia when it comes to Ethiopian politics. The first group is constituted by nationalists who have been struggling for

a change of the constitution and abolition of ethnic-based regions and federalism, while others are ethnic nationalists who have been pushing the agenda of regional separation from the rest of the country. This is not the issue that can be undermined easily and need not reckless, sluggish and reluctant actions from the government; rather it requires vehement and rapid solutions for the sake of the future of the country.

Incidentally, the leaders of the four ethnic parties and the opposition political parties should collaborate by eliminating their differences to establish lasting democracy, true peace, and unity in Ethiopia and beyond. This Prosperity Party has to bring forward something good to the country as well as to the societies that have not practiced during the EPRDF regime. Besides, it is the responsibility of every citizen to put in more effort to maintain genuine democracy, peace, and sustainable economic development in the country. If these discussed issues are left unaddressed, the semblance of peace in Ethiopia currently enjoys may be in jeopardy.

Notes

- ¹Rosen, 'Constitutional process, constitutionalism, and the Eritrean experience'.
- ²United Nations, *'The United Nations and the Independence of Eritrea'*; See also, Negash and Tronvoll, *'Brothers at War: Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War'*.
- ³Wrong, 'Ethiopia, Eritrea and the perils of reform'; Young, 'The Tigray and Eritrean peoples liberation fronts'.
- ⁴Gebrekidan, 'Ethiopia and Eritrea declare an end to their war'; Negash and Tronvoll, *'Brothers at War: Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War'*.
- ⁵Kaleab, 'No peace no war'.
- ⁶Trivelli, 'Divided histories, opportunistic alliances'; Hamilton, 'Beyond the border war'.
- ⁷Cornwell, 'Ethiopia and Eritrea'; See also, Kaleab, 'No peace no war'.
- ⁸Gilkes and Plaut, 'The war between Ethiopia and Eritrea'.
- ⁹Steves, 'Regime change and war'.
- ¹⁰Murphy, 'The Eritrean-Ethiopian war (1998-2000)'.
- ¹¹Jacquin-Berdal and Plaut, *'Unfinished Business: Eritrea and Ethiopia at War'*; Murphy, 'The Eritrean-Ethiopian war (1998-2000)'.
- ¹²Murphy, 'The Eritrean-Ethiopian war (1998-2000)'.
- ¹³EEBC, 'Eritrea-Ethiopia boundary commission (EEBC)'.
- ¹⁴ Discussion and interview with some local Ethiopian scholars about the current social, economic and political crises through social media networks, between August and October
- ¹⁵Gebrekidan, 'Ethiopia and Eritrea, longtime foes, meet for peace talks'.
- ¹⁶Woldemariam, "'No war, no peace" in a region in flux', 14
- ¹⁷Addis and Zhu, 'The political situation, trends and geopolitical implications of Sub-Saharan and North African countries'.
- ¹⁸Záhořík, 'Reconsidering Ethiopia's ethnic politics in the light of the Addis Ababa Master Plan and anti-governmental protests'
- ¹⁹SoE refers to the occurrence or imminent occurrence of special major emergencies and the need for state organs to exercise emergency authority to control them and eliminate their social hazards and threats.
- ²⁰BBC News, 'Why has Ethiopia imposed a state of emergency?'
- ²¹ The command post was established to oversee and execute the SoE in Ethiopia and controlled by SirajFegessa, Minister of Defence and head of the Command Post Secretariat.
- ²²Agence France-Presse, 'At least 1,500 arrests in Ethiopian state of emergency'; Greenslade, 'Ethiopia uses anti-terror laws to silence critical journalists'
- ²³Washington Post, 'Abiy Ahmed pulls off an astonishing turnaround for Ethiopia'.
- ²⁴Addis and Zhu, 'Assessment of the impact of Chinese and Indian economic activities in Africa'.
- ²⁵Wubneh, 'Addis Ababa, Ethiopia – Africa's diplomatic capital'
- ²⁶Addis and Zhu, 'The political situation, trends and geopolitical implications of Sub-Saharan and North African countries', 111
- ²⁷Human Rights Watch, *'Development without freedom'*, 13
- ²⁸Plaut, 'The legacy of MelesZenawi', 645

- ²⁹Aalen, 'Ethnic federalism in a dominant party state'; Abbink, 'Ethnic-based federalism and ethnicity in Ethiopia'.
- ³⁰YidegandPremanandam, 'Horizontal inequality and political instability in Amhara region, Ethiopia'.
- ³¹Tadesse and Young, 'TPLF', 391
- ³²Reid, 'Old problems in new conflicts'; Adugna, 'Regional economic favoritism and redistributive politics as a public good'.
- ³³ McCracken, 'Abusing self-determination and democracy'; Plaut, 'The legacy of MelesZenawi'; Young, 'The Tigray and Eritrean peoples liberation fronts'.
- ³⁴ Human Rights Watch, '*Development without freedom*'; Young, 'The Tigray and Eritrean peoples liberation fronts'; Záhorský, 'Reconsidering Ethiopia's ethnic politics in the light of the Addis Ababa Master Plan and anti-governmental protests'.
- ³⁵ Interview with local Ethiopian societies about the current social and political situation between July and October
- ³⁶Aglionby, 'Ethiopia to release all political prisoners'; Maclean, 'Ethiopia says it will free all political prisoners'.
- ³⁷Moore, 'Ethiopia says it will close notorious prison and free some inmates'; See also, Gudina, 'Elections and democratization in Ethiopia, 1991–2010'.
- ³⁸McCracken, 'Abusing self-determination and democracy'; Ylönen, 'Is the Horn of Africa's 'Cold War' over?'
- ³⁹ McCracken, 'Abusing self-determination and democracy', 203
- ⁴⁰Ibid, 186
- ⁴¹Aalen, 'Ethnic federalism in a dominant party state'; Adugna, 'Regional economic favoritism and redistributive politics as a public good'; see also, McCracken, 'Abusing self-determination and democracy'
- ⁴²Gebregziabher and Hout, 'The rise of oligarchy in Ethiopia'.
- ⁴³Gebregziabher, 'Ideology and power in TPLF's Ethiopia'.
- ⁴⁴Schemm, 'Under a new state of emergency'.
- ⁴⁵Ylönen, 'Is the Horn of Africa's "Cold War" over?'; TeminandBadwaza. 'Aspirations and realities in Africa'.
- ⁴⁶ Reid, 'The trans-Mereb experience'.
- ⁴⁷ Reid, 'Old problems in new conflicts'
- ⁴⁸Ibid, 371
- ⁴⁹Lyons, 'The Ethiopia–Eritrea conflict and the search for peace in the Horn of Africa', 168.
- ⁵⁰Lorton, 'The Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict'; Lyons, 'The Ethiopia–Eritrea conflict and the search for peace in the Horn of Africa'; Wrong, 'Ethiopia, Eritrea and the perils of reform'
- ⁵¹Woldemariam, "'No war, no peace" in a region in flux', 420.
- ⁵²Gebrekidan, 'Ethiopia and Eritrea declare an end to their war'; Kiunguyu, 'Eritrea'.
- ⁵³Ylönen, 'From demonisation to rapprochement'
- ⁵⁴ Lorton, 'The Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict'; Woldemariam, "'No war, no peace" in a region in flux',
- ⁵⁵Kiunguyu, 'Eritrea'; Ylönen, 'From demonisation to rapprochement'; Záhorský, 'Reconsidering Ethiopia's ethnic politics in the light of the Addis Ababa Master Plan and anti-governmental protests'..
- ⁵⁶Allo, 'Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict, 20 years on'.
- ⁵⁷Sengupta, 'Ethiopia's new leader raises hopes. Now comes the hard part'.

- ⁵⁸Gudina, 'Elections and democratization in Ethiopia, 1991–2010'; Vaughan, 'Revolutionary democratic state-building
- ⁵⁹Qeerroo- youth in Afaan Oromo; Fano - movement of youth for democracy. Both of them are the national youth movement for democracy and freedom resistance groups in Oromo and Amhara region respectively.
- ⁶⁰Pilling and Barber, 'Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed'.
- ⁶¹Gotamo, 'Ethiopians can't afford additional ethnic kelils in their country'.
- ⁶²Gebregziabher, 'Ideology and power in TPLF's Ethiopia'; McCracken, 'Abusing self-determination and democracy'.
- ⁶³ Human Rights Watch, '*Development without freedom*'; McCracken, 'Abusing self-determination and democracy'; Plaut, 'The legacy of Meles Zenawi'.
- ⁶⁴Maasho, 'Ethiopia says launches offensive against Oromo rebels'; Fana Broadcasting Corporation. 'About 18 banks robbed in three zones of Oromia: Bureau'; Worstall, 'IRA financing techniques turn up in Oromo, Ethiopia – bank robberies.
- ⁶⁵Temin and Badwaza. 'Aspirations and realities in Africa'.
- ⁶⁶Addis and Zhu, 'The political situation, trends and geopolitical implications of Sub-Saharan and North African countries'; Minwagaw, 'Ethiopia'.
- ⁶⁷Minwagaw, 'Ethiopia'.
- ⁶⁸Medemer' meaning togetherness, which some believe is a fresh ideology. Nevertheless, many agree Medemer is not so much an ideology but suggests the opportunity of forgiveness of past misdeeds for the sake of common good.
- ⁶⁹Adugna, 'Regional economic favoritism and redistributive politics as a public good'; McCracken, 'Abusing self-determination and democracy',

Acknowledgement

We would like to show gratitude to the National Natural Science Foundation of China(NSFC) for their research funding support.The authors are indebted to the editor and reviewers for constructive comments.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

Amsalu K.: conceptualization, conduct the survey, data gathering and analysis, revisions, development, and proofreading of the article. Simplice A. and Zuping Z.: Supervise, revisions, development, and proofreading of the article. Hailu Kendie A. and Eshetu S.: revisions, development, and proofreading of the article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article: This paper was supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) under grant number: 19AGL017. The funders have no role in the design, development, and submission of the study to the journal.

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