



**THE REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE
SOCIAL SCIENCES UNIVERSITY OF ANKARA
INSTITUTE FOR AREA STUDIES**

**EFFECTS OF ETHNICITY AND NATIONALITY ON CONFLICT
AND PEACE: THE CASES OF ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA**

Master's Thesis

Mehmet Haluk Demir

African Studies

November 2023



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Mehmet Haluk Demir
Social Sciences University of Ankara
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Dedication

To my beloved parents, whose inspiration, and sacrifices served as the cornerstone of my academic career. Your unwavering faith in my talents has motivated me to seek out information and aim for perfection.

To my loving spouse, whose patience, understanding, and endless encouragement have been my driving force throughout this challenging academic quest. Your constant belief in my abilities has been my greatest motivation.

To my precious daughters, whose presence has brought boundless joy and meaning to every moment. Your love has fueled my determination to succeed.

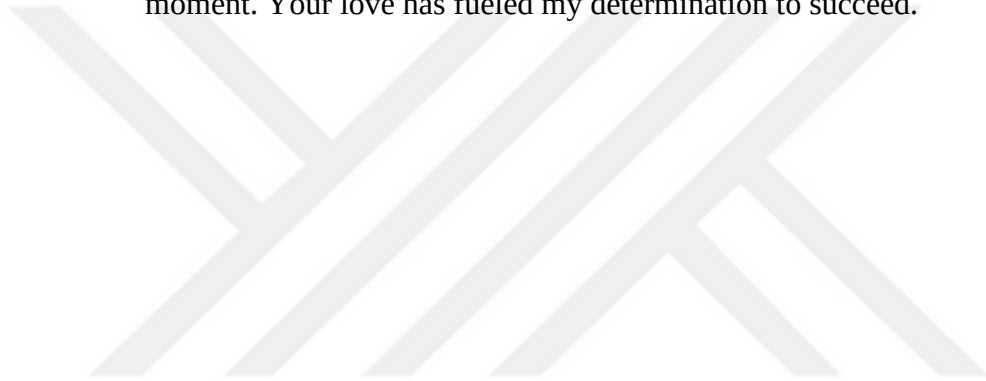


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ÖZ

ETNİSİTE VE MİLLİYETÇİLİĞİN ÇATIŞMA VE BARIŞA ETKİLERİ: ETİYOPYA VE ERİTRE ÖRNEKLERİ

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Etiyopya Eritre Federasyonu'nun 1952'de kurulmasının ardından, Eritre, Etiyopya içinde kısmi bir özerkliğe sahipti. Etiyopya İmparatoru Haile Selassie, Eritre üzerinde katı ve baskıcı bir politika izleyerek federasyonu feshetmiş ve Eritre'yi ilhak etmişti. Bu durum, otuz yılı aşkın süre bağımsızlık arayan Eritrelilerin silahlı direnişiyle sonuçlandı. Bu dönemde milliyetçi ve etnik duygular temel rol oynadı, Eritre'ye hakim olma ve asimile etme çabaları, etnik sınırları aşan Eritreli kimliğini besledi. Eritre'nin 1993'teki bağımsızlığından sonra, 1998-2000 yılları arasında Etiyopya ile Eritre arasındaki sınır savaşı, bölgedeki etnik gelişmelerde bir başka mihenk taşı oluşturdu. Etiyopya'daki etnik fay hatlarını ele almak için kullanılan etnik federalist yaklaşım, TPLF'nin Etiyopya siyasetinde ve diğer önemli alanlarda baskın olmasıyla birlikte, ülkedeki etnik gruplar arasında hoşnutsuzluk ve rekabete yol açtı. 2015-2018 yılları arasında ülke çapında protestolara ve çatışmalara neden olarak hükümetin ve yönetici elitlerin değişmesiyle sonuçlandı. Başbakan Abiy Ahmed liderliğindeki yeni Etiyopya hükümeti, TPLF hakimiyetini devre dışı bırakmaya çalışırken ülkedeki durumu yatıştırmak için liberal adımlar attı. İlerleyen dönemde, Etiyopya'nın içişlerini ve Eritre ile olan ilişkilerini milliyetçilik ve etnik güdümlü siyaset şekillendirdi. Bu tezin iddiası, yönetici elitlerin güç dinamikleri ve çıkarlarının yanı sıra inşa edilmiş kimliklerin, Etiyopya ve Eritre'de 1962'den bu yana yaşanan etnisite ve milliyetçilik söyleminin ve gelişmelerin ayrılmaz bir parçası olduğudur. Bahsekonu etnik çatışmalar ve barış süreçleri Etiyopya'daki etnisite ile Eritre kimliği ve milliyetçiliği aracılığıyla enstrümantalist ve inşacı teori tarafından açıklanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Etiyopya, Eritre, Çatışma, Barış, Etnisite

ABSTRACT

EFFECTS OF ETHNICITY AND NATIONALITY ON CONFLICT AND PEACE: THE CASES OF ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA

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Following the establishment of the Federation of Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1952, Eritrea enjoyed a degree of autonomy. Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie followed a strict and suppressing policy over Eritrea and finally dissolved the federation, and annexed Eritrea. This resulted with armed resistance of Eritreans seeking independence over three decades. During this period, nationalist and ethnic sentiments had fundamental role. Efforts to dominate and assimilate Eritrea nurtured the Eritrean identity which went beyond ethnic boundaries. After Eritrea's independence in 1993, the border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea between 1998 and 2000 set another cornerstone in ethnically influenced developments in the region. Also, the ethnic federalist approach that was used to address the ethnic fault lines in Ethiopia, along with the dominance of TPLF in Ethiopian politics and other important fields, caused discontent and rivalries between the ethnic groups in the country which led nationwide protests and clashes from 2015 to 2018, resulting change in the government and the ruling elite. The new Ethiopian government led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took liberalist steps to calm the situation while trying to sideline the TPLF dominance. Nationalism and ethnic driven politics shaped the Ethiopian domestic affairs and its relations with Eritrea the way forward. This thesis claims that the power dynamics and interests of the ruling elites, as well as constructed identities are integral part of the ethnicity and nationalism discourse and developments in Ethiopia and Eritrea since 1962. These ethnic conflicts and peace processes were explained by the instrumentalist and constructivist theory through ethnicity in Ethiopia, along with Eritrean identity and nationalism.

Key Words: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Conflict, Peace, Ethnicity

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
TPLF	Tigrayan People's Liberation Front
DERG	Committee (Armed Forces Coordinating Committee)
EEBC	Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission
ENDF	Ethiopian National Defense Force
ILA	International Law Association
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
UN	United Nations
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Program

INTRODUCTION

The delicate interplay between conflict and peace stands as a perennial subject for investigation within the academic realm. Since conflict, or ethnicity as used by some, is a worldwide phenomenon that has had broad effects for centuries, addressed by many scholars including Galtung¹, Weber², Horowitz³, Brubaker⁴, Conversi⁵, Gellner⁶, Hall⁷, Hechter⁸, Hobsbawm⁹, Connor¹⁰, and the significance of the said concept is among the reasons to encourage this study.

Africa, the continent also known as the cradle of humanity, has a vast variety of resources and potential including, but not limited to agriculture, energy, irrigation, trade, tourism, etc. Hosting a myriad of different tribes, ethnic groups, nations, and nationalities, this continent possesses unique diversity. However, diversity sometimes comes with differences which may lead to incompatibilities. That is why, Africa has a different image due to the ongoing conflicts, particularly between, or with the involvement of ethnic groups in the continent.

Additionally, the Horn of Africa has commanded attention throughout centuries due to its geopolitical significance. Situated at the crossroads of the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, this region has witnessed numerous conflicts between the powers that aimed for the control over the coasts or the sea routes. Thanks to the interaction between diverse civilizations and cultures, this region stands as a geographical and cultural linchpin. Furthermore, the Horn of Africa has been witnessing a considerable change in recent history: wars and battles between neighboring countries, long-standing disputes, protracted conflicts, military interventions, humanitarian crises, and domestic challenges, as well as peace attempts -even so rare, mark this recent period.

¹ Johan Galtung, "Peace and Conflict Studies as Political Activity", *Critical Issues in Peace and Conflict Studies: Theory, Practice, and Pedagogy*, ed. Thomas Matyók et al. (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2011), 7.

² Charles Weber – Johan Galtung, *Handbook of peace and conflict studies* (London: Routledge, 2007), 15.

³ Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic groups in conflict* (Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 1985), 95.

⁴ Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Harvard University Press, 2004), 4–6.

⁵ Daniele Conversi (ed.), *Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World* (Taylor & Francis Routledge, 2003), 4–9.

⁶ Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 171–172.

⁷ John A. Hall (ed.), *The State of the Nation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 48–50.

⁸ Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism, Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966* (University of California Press, 1975), 3–15.

⁹ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (1992: Cambridge University Press).

¹⁰ Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism, The Quest for Understanding* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994).

In this region, Ethiopia and Eritrea are the prominent states in terms of their geostrategic and geopolitical significance and due to the duration of the conflict between them which continued for decades while affecting other countries in their region. Within this understanding, to analyze and explain the effects of ethnicity and nationality on conflict and peace, this research discusses the cases of Ethiopia and Eritrea and aims to describe, gain a more in-depth understanding, with a highlight on the decades-long conflict, no war-no peace stalemate, the peace deal between the two countries and its domestic and international implications. Therefore, the main research question for this study is “The effects of ethnicity and nationality on conflict and peace: The cases of Ethiopia and Eritrea”. The answers of the following questions will also be sought in this study for the above-mentioned purpose: What are the causes of conflict and its relation with ethnicity and nationalism?

How did identity, ethnicity and nationalism affect conflicts in Ethiopia and Eritrea? Why was ethnicity more relevant for Ethiopia, while nationalism was the case for Eritrea in terms of conflict origins? Do the roots of conflicts and peace have links with primordial origins, manipulations of the elites, or the constructed circumstances? And how do these roots shape the evolution of conflict and peace?

On the following pages, we will start with the literature review, where historical, political, and legal aspects of the concepts for the study are elaborated to provide a background about the cases. This part is followed by the methodology section where the concepts are defined and explained to understand and address the aspects of the research question. The conflict types are also briefly explained there. Additionally, a context part is created to frame the concepts and the events too. Then, methodological design, and details on data collection and sources are explained.

In the first chapter, the theories of ethnicity, nationalism, and geopolitics are explained to answer the research question. On ethnicity, primordial, constructivist and instrumentalist theories; regarding nationalism, key theories -primordial, modernist, and ethno-symbolist- are discussed. Geopolitical theories are also briefly touched upon to provide a deeper context for the study. They are not discussed in detail as this study focuses on the effects of nationalism and ethnicity only.

Besides the historical background, cultural, social, and political effects of ethnicity and nationalism in Ethiopia and Eritrea are discussed in chapters two and three. Moreover, in chapter four, the events and developments in Ethiopia and Eritrea are evaluated with the peace aspect. In that chapter, the reactions of relevant parties of the conflict were also included.

Finally, in the conclusion part, the study's main points are summarized, and the significance of the research is explained.

With regard to the literature on conflict, we can begin with the fact that there was no agreed legal definition of the “armed conflict” until the United States declared global war against terrorism following 9/11. Therefore, in 2005, the International Law Association (ILA) conducted a study on this issue and worked on a report. ILA issued its final report in the following years and defined the characteristics of an armed conflict. According to the initial report of ILA, to mention an armed conflict, there should be a conflict between organized armed groups, and, these groups should be engaged in fighting of some intensity.

These characteristics are important to decide on an armed conflict situation or mention a peace situation since the states usually deny their engagement in armed conflicts. However, after 9/11, this trend has changed.¹¹

The definitions of the conflict, armed conflict, war, and related concepts vary according to research and datasets in the field. Not everything can be regarded as armed conflict. Moreover, according to Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), to define a violent incident between the parties as armed conflict, it should concern a government of a state and/or a territory; and between the conflicting sides which use armed force, there should be incompatibility, which can be on the status of a given territory in terms of its control, or on the political system of a state, formation or recognition of its government. Regarding the intensity, UCDP threshold is 25 battle-related casualties annually. The difference between an armed conflict and war depends on the battle-related deaths of a state related conflict. If the said number reaches 1000 per a calendar year, this situation is considered as war.¹²

For Galtung, conflict is a struggle that occurs in times of incompatibilities of the goals of different parties. He sees conflict, whether it emanates from identity, independence, well-being or survival, as a struggle rather than games being won or lost.¹³ In another study,¹⁴ he also highlights a parallel opinion. For him, conflict occurs when there is frustration over the blocked goals of the Self by the Other, or vice versa. And the number of factors involved in the goals correlate with the possibility of violence. If the parties in contradiction are collectivities, then the violence between them is considered as war.

¹¹ Mary Ellen O'Connell, “Defining Armed Conflict”, *Journal of Conflict & Security Law* 13/3 (Winter) (2008), 394–400.

¹² Uppsala Universitet Department of Peace and Conflict Research, “UCDP Definitions” .

¹³ Johan Galtung, *Transcend and transform, An introduction to conflict work / Johan Galtung* (London: Pluto, 2004), 5.

¹⁴ Johan Galtung, “Peace and Conflict Studies as Political Activity”, 7.

According to Lederach¹⁵, fear of losing control over the resources or a favorable position leads to conflict. In a similar fashion, Tilahun¹⁶, supporting Galtung's arguments as the others below, and asserts that competition over power and resources cause conflicts. Based on the above, Kivuva¹⁷ uses similar arguments too, and states that conflicts arise due to competition or rivalries between others, and, manipulation and mobilization of the communities by the elites.

Mitchell upholds Galtung's arguments too, and suggests that a conflict situation is seen when there is incompatibility of the goals. Then the parties experience the effects of the situation. At the end, to reach the incompatible goals, parties act accordingly. Moreover, he summarizes these views in his three components of conflict which are presented as follows:

- “i. A situation of incompatible goals,
- ii. A range of psychological conditions experienced by the parties involved,
- iii. A set of related behaviors used to achieve the disputed goals.”¹⁸

Given this information, one can see that definitions, approaches, and opinions towards conflict in the literature do not differ much, and they complement each other. Following the definitions of ethnicity and the conflict, it would be easier to address the concept of ethnic conflict, which is sometimes used interchangeably with ethnicity or ethnic violence/rivalry/tension/competition. Even though the latter terms can be considered as some sorts of conflict, except ethnic violence, we can categorize them as the causes, and sometimes the results of the ethnic conflicts. According to Kivuva¹⁹, ethnic conflict arises from the manipulation or mobilization of the population by the ethnic elite in their competition and rivalry among themselves to reach and preserve their positions in resource and power distribution or eliminate the others.

On the following paragraphs, it will be also useful to define another important concept for this study: peace. According to Galtung, Peace is often defined or determined negatively, and it is “the absence of war”. Another categorization for peace is “nonviolence”. We know peace by its absence. Besides that, Webel argues that the evolution of the process is dialectical. Which means that a change in means or goals can affect each other for constant development. Because

¹⁵ John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination, The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 60–63.

¹⁶ Temesgen Tilahun, *Johan Galtung's Concept of Positive and Negative Peace in the Contemporary Ethiopia* (International Journal of Political Science and Development, 2015), 4.

¹⁷ Joshua Musembi Kivuva, *Managing Ethnic Conflict in Africa* (United States - Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh, Dissertation, 2004), 22.

¹⁸ C. R. Mitchell, *The Structure of International Conflict* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1981), 32.

¹⁹ Kivuva, *Managing Ethnic Conflict in Africa*, 22.

both means and goals are in an ongoing and dynamic interaction process.²⁰ To him, peace is the “goal”, and the means are the methods used for attaining it. He also adds that during this dialectical evolution, at times of heightened tensions, these means and goals can regress, which mean that they can deviate from the expected results. So, instead of using peaceful ways, people might use force. On the contrary, we can talk about non or less violent progression, too. In peaceful times, it is possible to move forward and have a solution without resorting to violence.

Furthermore, since there is such a definition as absence of violence. Then, we must find out what he means by violence. Violence is defined by Galtung as "the cause of the difference between the potential and actual". Besides the definition, he also mentions about the dimensions of violence and explains the said definition by examples.

If a person dies from an incurable illness centuries ago, it is unavoidable in that actual moment. However, the same illness is avoidable today. So, if a person dies from the same illness, which is avoidable in today's conditions, then we can mention about violence. By the same logic, when some resources are monopolized or misused by a class or a group, we see that the actual level or realization is below the potential level. And the violence occurs²¹. Rather than the absence of violence, also known as negative peace, Galtung mentions about positive peace too, which involves well-being and social justice. He uses that definition in different context. And, touching upon the one in international relations would be more relevant for this study. In this context, periods when there are no border disputes, military conflicts, armaments, terrorist attacks; domestic wars, uprisings and political instability can represent instances of peace.

Like Galtung, Boulding also has similar understanding on peace but from another perspective. Boulding defines a term "inclusive peace" as not war, and he focuses on possibility boundary and taboo line. Possibility boundary is the distinction between what can be and cannot be done due to physical, social or other limitations. However, taboo line is defined within this possibility boundary, and divides things into two parts as the ones we do or do not refrain from doing. As an example, firing at civilians is a possibility boundary for an ethnic group. This group can do it or not. However, that ethnic group members can refrain from harming civilians due to the taboo or the values that prohibits such action which some do not refrain from. That is considered as taboo line. He also stresses the interpretation of history, as some may see war and peace as intervals between each other.²²

²⁰ Webel - Galtung, *Handbook of peace and conflict studies*, 7.

²¹ Johan Galtung, “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research”, *Journal of Peace Research* 6/3 (1969), 167–191.

²² Kenneth E. Boulding, “Moving from unstable to stable peace”, *Breakthrough: Emerging New Thinking: Soviet*

On the other side, Lederach approaches peace as a process and mentions that the quality and nature of relationships which are developed with the most feared groups or individuals are the keys for peace. Even though he focuses on peacebuilding in his work, there is a link with the roots of ethnicity in this statement. In ethnically divided societies, historical grievances, cultural differences, or competition over power and resources could be counted as the root causes of the conflicts. Because such competition increases the awareness of ethnic identity²³. Besides, the fear of losing status quo or the control and dominance over the said resources can lead to conflicts too²⁴. Therefore, Lederach's perspective on peace and peacebuilding underscores the components of peace. These can be listed as, rather than absence of conflict, constructive connections between the parties, existence of mutual trust and respect, addressing of the fears and concerns, understanding the needs and aspirations, building empathy. This approach focuses on transforming relationship dynamics for building and maintaining peace.

As an understanding on some of the main concepts is provided above, we can proceed with ethnicity. The term ethnicity varies due to different interpretations. In general, it is understood by some as having common ancestors, and by others, it is in the physical specifications. We can also add to those the membership and affiliation to ethnic groups, as well as ethnic identity. Although there is an interchangeable use of ethnicity and ethnic group, the slight difference between these terms should be clearly defined. Ethnicity is about identity and affiliation. On the other hand, ethnic group is rather related to shared origin, ancestry, and culture.²⁵ In this research, ethnicity is used as a term that combines both views.

Within this understanding, Kivuva²⁶ discusses the topic with the views of Terence Ranger that ethnicity is related to self-consciousness within groups having a common origin, a shared language, and political and religious ideas to behave as a unit. He underlines the effects of unfair and inequitable distribution of economic and political power and mentions basic characteristics that define ethnicity. According to him, ethnicity underlies the heterogeneous communities consisting of groups considering each other different or distinct. These differences, be they imagined or real in language, history, beliefs, or origin, determine the attitude of the groups toward each other.

and Western Scholars Issue a Challenge to Build a World Beyond War, ed. Anatoly Gromyko – Martin Hellman (New York: Walker Publishing Company Inc., 1988), 157–162.

²³ Tilahun, *Johan Galtung's Concept of Positive and Negative Peace in the Contemporary Ethiopia*, 4.

²⁴ Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, 60–63.

²⁵ Philip Q. Yang, *From Ethnic Studies, Issues and approaches*, sad. From Ethnic Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 39.

²⁶ Kivuva, *Managing Ethnic Conflict in Africa*, 20.

For Ranger²⁷, the traditions are invented mostly to be used for political, cultural or social purposes. Together with Hobsbawm he also highlights that the said traditions could be manipulated or modified. In this context, Ranger points out that ethnic groups are subject to such manipulation since they are not fixed structures. To Ranger, ethnicity is more about self-consciousness of individuals who share these constructed common elements including language, culture, religion or political views. Moreover, he examines the nature of ethnicity too. If we delve into the origins of the ethnic identities or traditions, the relationship between history, politics, power struggle and identity construction could be understood better.

Within this framework, one may argue that his ideas align with the constructionists' in terms of fluid ethnic identities which is mentioned above. The aforementioned elements can be emphasized for the construction of a specific ethnic identity and to maintain them through power dynamics or discourse. These also include processes of identity building efforts rooted in historical context. Eritrean national awareness and consciousness are good examples in this matter. Furthermore, Ranger's work can be associated with instrumentalism too, since the dominant groups within a society often tend to manipulate the ethnic identities to preserve or fortify their power. So, the power plays a significant role in the process of forming and shaping of the identities.

To put things in a more contextual framework, we can argue that these examples are visible in Ethiopian and Eritrean political history. During the Imperial era, Amhara-Tigray dominance in politics and culture; from the early 1990s to 2018, Tigray-led federal ruling throughout the country; by 2015, the unrest related to the Oromo, Amhara, and other ethnic groups; and lastly, the conflict between the Ethiopian federal state and Tigrayans. On the other hand, we may consider Eritrean independence as a nationalist one, while having its roots still under the unfair and inequitable power distribution which can go back to the imposing of the Amhara language in the country, or the attitude of Emperor Haileselassie towards Eritrea.

Apart from the abovementioned definitions, Horowitz²⁸ makes an inclusive description of ethnicity, that it is based on a subjective belief in having common descent and despite kinship and cultural traits are distinctive. It is something that may also embrace members of groups with different colors, languages, or religions and includes tribes, races, and nationalities, even castes.

²⁷ E. J. Hobsbawm – T. O. Ranger (ed.), *The invention of tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 212–262.

²⁸ Horowitz, *Ethnic groups in conflict*.

Besides ethnicity, we should define another concept related to this research, nationality, which is used interchangeably with nationalism. Bozic-Roberson²⁹ describes nationality as an ideology uniting people around an idea of a nation and motivating them to act accordingly. It can be in the areas of politics, culture, and sports. Moreover, non-politic issues can also turn into political ones if they have political aspects. She asserts that despite there being no direct link between ethnicity and nationality, ethnicity can be used as a tool to build a nation-state, and affiliates nationalism with the ideas of sovereignty, self-determination, and ethnic solidarity. The practice of these principles can be democratic or not. Some leaders may follow undemocratic ways to build a nation and use violence to succeed in their aims. This research elaborates on the case of Eritrea within the abovementioned scope.

In this context, addressing two dimensions of nationalism is important. Nationalism can be expansionist and aggressive, or it can serve as a uniting force to integrate people. The particularist ideology does not accept the rights of culturally different people or non-citizens, which may lead to the denial of membership or belonging to a group for those. Nevertheless, the universalist approach, based on the Enlightenment principles, is more embracing and focuses on human rights and equality.³⁰

Furthermore, Eriksen³¹ explains the difference between ethnicity and nationalism by highlighting their relationship with the state. If a nationalist movement is not successful, it may turn out to be an ethnic movement since the members would be uncomfortable being under a state which they do not feel belong.

With regard to race, we must emphasize that it is a categorization to refer the difference between various human populations based on physical characteristics. Historically and commonly, it is used for determining social, economic or political hierarchies between the privileged and oppressed groups. It was often used for justifying the so-called superiority of a population over another.

Race is used mainly by colonizers as a distinguisher between themselves and the colonized communities, such as European vs. African, or White versus Black. Kivuva elaborates this issue with power relations such as privileged versus unprivileged, or plant owners versus slaves.

²⁹ Agneza Bozic-Roberson, *The Politicization of Ethnicity as a Prelude to Ethnopolitical Conflict* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Western Michigan University, Dissertation/Thesis, June 2001), 34–38.

³⁰ Bozic-Roberson, *The Politicization of Ethnicity as a Prelude to Ethnopolitical Conflict*, 40.

³¹ Thomas Hylland Eriksen, “Ethnicity versus Nationalism”, *Journal of Peace Research* 28/3 (1991), 265.

Therefore, one may say that race was used for defining and limiting the powers and privileges of people which were part of their identities. However, in the post-colonial era, role of race was replaced by ethnicity.³²

Within this understanding, we should differentiate ethnicity from race since ethnicity is a broader concept due to shared culture and identity which includes customs, language, ancestry and religion. Race is also a distinct concept from nation or nationality. As elaborated above, race does not include a common identity, territory, history or other nation-related elements. Also, unlike ethnicity, race is not fluid. We should emphasize that nation is a greater concept which is more inclusive, and it is not inherently tied to biological or physical features. Diverse races or ethnic groups may be part of the same nation. In addition to that, Wallerstein categorizes race based on its genetic and physical aspect, while he puts nation in a socio-political category, and finally locates ethnic group into the cultural category in which he highlights the tradition passing between generations. He also adds that the said categories can lead people to make some claims against current "rational processes" based on their past.³³

To sum up, we can argue that race, ethnicity and nation are interconnected but distinct concepts. The main distinction is based on the flexibility and fluidity, power relations, political and socio-economic implications, as well as inclusivity. We should underline that the definitions stated above are complementary. Therefore, this research embrace all these explanations since they can properly address the cases investigated. Besides ethnicity, on the theoretical perspectives on nationalism, it is worth to mention prominent approaches which also create base for the ethnicity theories discussed above.

Regarding the theories of nationalism, we can start with the primordial approach, which sees identities as deeply rooted and inherent. Özkırımlı³⁴ stresses the givenness of primordial specifications, while Brubaker³⁵ states the origins of this givenness ad blood link, language, religion, and customs. Moreover, Smith, even though also included among the ethno-symbolists, confirms this argument and adds that cultural and ethnic bonds lay the foundations of identity, and besides the elements above, mentions common ancestry and shared history as parts of identity.³⁶ Apart from these, kin selection, or nepotism, as well as reciprocity which envisages cooperation of groups for mutual benefit, and coercion as use of force for the self-

³² Kivuva, *Managing Ethnic Conflict in Africa*, 75–77.

³³ Étienne Balibar – Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein (ed.), *Race, nation, class* (1991), 77–78.

³⁴ Umut Özkırımlı, *Theories of Nationalism, A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 51,52.

³⁵ Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 83.

³⁶ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Penguin Books Ltd., 1991), 13.

benefit are counted by van den Berghe among the factors that shape human behavior.³⁷ Additionally, apriority, ineffability, and affectivity are considered as the fundamentals of primordialism according to Eller and Coughlan³⁸, and aprior nature of primordialism aligns with the abovementioned arguments on givenness. Connor³⁹, too supports the arguments on shared cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds by highlighting the self-awareness and self-consciousness.

In contrast to primordialism, for some, nationalism is not given or inherent, but is a product of modernization. According to Nairn, who examines nationalism from a class perspective, nationalism emerges in societies with unequal development.⁴⁰ Moreover, Hechter's research aligns with Nairn's views, as Nairn emphasizes the roots of nationalism in the social dynamics of advanced industrial societies. According to the diffusion model he developed, he suggests that national development roots back to pre-industrial isolation and goes through the stages of industrial interaction and eventually reaches cultural homogeneity. On the other hand, Hechter⁴¹, by his internal colonialism model approach the question from the core-periphery relations, and views the core regions as dominant, exploiting peripheral regions and leading to ethnic identification and potential demands for independence. He also supports the cultural aspect of identity as the ones above, by underlining the role of cultural issues like religion and language in differentiating the groups. However, according to Breuilly, nationalism is beyond class relations, economic relationships, cultural attribute or social arrangements. He rather links nationalism with the ideas and sentiments to a certain consciousness, political action or conflict.⁴²

Furthermore, Hobsbawm takes this discussion to another level by stressing the significance of understanding the traditions of nations and argues that without paying attention to invented traditions such as practices of accepted rules, values of repeated behaviors, national phenomenon cannot be understood. So, to him, nationalism and identity is something invented, constructed or instituted.⁴³

Additionally, some affiliate nationalism with the cultural or social transformation perspective. Anderson is one of them as discussed earlier. Besides, another representative of

³⁷ Ingo Brigandt, "The Homeopathy of Kin Selection: An Evaluation of Van Den Berghe's Sociobiological Approach to Ethnic Nepotism", *Politics and the Life Sciences* 20/2 (2001), 203, 204.

³⁸ Jack David Eller – Reed M. Coughlan, "The poverty of primordialism: The demystification of ethnic attachments", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 16/2 (1993), 187–200.

³⁹ Connor, *Ethnonationalism*, 104–106.

⁴⁰ Tom Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain, Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (Verso Editions, 1981), 41–47.

⁴¹ Hechter, *Internal Colonialism*, 6–11.

⁴² John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester University Press, 1993), 404–420.

⁴³ Hobsbawm – Ranger, *The invention of tradition*, 1–14.

this perspective, Gellner, argues that discontent emerges in societies that majority of the people are ruled by a person or groups from another nation, as it is the case mostly in empires or in states that an alien dominant group rules. So, when the political and ethnic boundaries are not aligned, nationalism occurs.⁴⁴ He also sees nationalism as an invention, rather than linking it with consciousness, and introduces the concept of high cultures which aspire to have their own states, and stresses that when the aspirations of the high culture cannot coexist within the current political boundaries, we witness nationalism and conflict arises.⁴⁵

As modernism considers nationalism as a relatively recent phenomenon starting with industrialization and capitalism, to address the limitations of modernism and other theories, ethno-symbolist approach is emerged. Ethno-symbolism highlights the myths, rituals, and cultural symbols for understanding the nation and ethnicity, as well as identity formation. Prominent representative of ethno-symbolism, Smith, contends that the modernist approach of seeing the roots of nationalism in modernism as the modernist scholars above did, and argues that ethnic ties are crucial for nation building. And, another assertion of Smith suggests that modernist approach that does not consider structures before 18th century as nations is misleading. He emphasizes the significance of social and symbolic effects of the conflict, especially on how the views of the elites are affected by popular beliefs, culture and memories, and he differs from Gellner, Nairn, Hobsbawm and Anderson as he claims that their approach lacks the role of ethnicity.⁴⁶

Another ethno-symbolist, Armstrong, underlines the importance of ethnic consciousness, and includes symbols, myths and communication among the factors to understand the emergence of nations in pre-modern era. He also mentions the importance of elites as they are crucial within a society to bargain their positions which creates ethnic identity.⁴⁷

In addition to the presented information, touching upon the historical context will draw a clearer picture for the exploration and explanation of the concepts too. Following the overthrow of the military regime in Ethiopia, by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) dominated coalition, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), had followed a policy that recognized the independence of Eritrea, while changing the longstanding unitarian state policy which had aimed at uniting the different ethnic groups, peoples or nationalities living in Ethiopian territories, by adopting a federal and decentralized administration within

⁴⁴ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism, New perspectives on the past* (Basil Blackwell, 1983), 1–5.

⁴⁵ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 54,55.

⁴⁶ Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach* (London: Routledge, 2009), 6–21.

⁴⁷ John Alexander Armstrong, *Nations Before Nationalism* (University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 4–7.

Ethiopia. The EPRDF also granted strong power to the ethnic or regional administrative units, which include the unconditional right of self-determination and secession from the federal government. This policy might root back in the feudal history of Ethiopia and the ethnic structure of the country, which attracts attention into the relationship between ethnicity and state in Ethiopia.

The Axumite Kingdom, which was founded in the boundaries of today's Tigray region, has left its legacy of the Geez alphabet used by Amharic and Tigrinya languages in Ethiopia, as well as Coptic Christianity. Even though imperial Ethiopia was dominated by the royals from Amhara, the Tigrayan people enjoyed the privilege of pride emanating from the said legacy. Tigrayans were imposed to use Amharic as the official language of the state, like other ethnic groups. The language was not the only challenge for the Tigrayans.

Their region faced a decline in the politics of the state, too. Although the TPLF claims that the Woyane rebellion of Tigrayans in the 1940s was a reaction against Emperor's taxation attempts and increasing Amhara hegemony, some may assert that the rebellion was rather due to the oppression. On the other hand, Ethiopian Emperors adopted policies of centralization, and, Emperor Haile Selassie was not different than his predecessors. Under his tenure, people were assimilated into the Amhara culture and language while Amhara dominance increased in politics and economy⁴⁸. This brought contradiction between the Amhara elite and the marginalized population. Various rebellions by Eritreans were witnessed, following the ending of the federal system and annexing Eritrea to Ethiopia, as well as Somali, Oromo groups, and southern peoples. These incidents were followed by the military junta of the Derg (Armed Forces Coordinating Committee), which promoted the federal structure in the country and formed a centralized state. Since the Derg could not solve the ethnic problems, Tigrayan students laid the foundation of an ethnic-based struggle against the regime. Following the EPRDF victory against the Derg, even though the top-level statesmen were not Tigrayans, TPLF dominated politics and many other fields in the country. To address the ethnic opposition, the EPRDF, led mainly by the TPLF, which was opposing the Amhara domination and pursuing self-determination of Tigray, as well as other ethnic groups in the country, used ethnic federalism.⁴⁹ Therefore, one can claim that ethnicity caused competition for the power in state in Ethiopia, while centralization paved the way for the marginalization of other peoples by the dominant ethnic group.

⁴⁸ Alem Habtu, "Ethnic Pluralism as an Organizing Principle of the Ethiopian Federation", *Dialectical Anthropology* 28/2 (2004), 99–100.

⁴⁹ John Young, "Ethnicity and Power in Ethiopia", *Review of African Political Economy* 23/70 (1996), 531–542.

Regarding the relationship between the TPLF and Eritrean liberation movements against Ethiopia, one must mention the interdependency between Eritrean and Tigrayan movements. TPLF was not enough professional to fight against the Derg army, so they applied for the support of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), and later of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). This cooperation was founded upon the principles of the recognition of the Eritrean liberation struggle as legitimate, and, the right of self-determination of the nationalities of Ethiopia. Tigrayans were focused on self-determination mainly, not only theirs but also the other ethnic groups in Ethiopia, due to the nature of TPLF which was against the Amhara dominance in the Ethiopian state. However, this alliance shook by the claim by TPLF that the right to independence should not only be applied to Ethiopian nationalities but also to the peoples of Eritrea.⁵⁰ The TPLF was also supporting the idea that only Tigray-based organizations should struggle for the liberation of Tigray, while other nationalities could follow theirs. However, TPLF was also against other movements which could challenge its hegemony in Tigray. On the other side, it can be asserted that the EPLF-TPLF alliance ended due to the growing capacity of the TPLF and that the EPLF did not see the TPLF as an equal partner anymore. Moreover, in the late 80s, both movements united again against the Derg.

Regarding the Eritrea-Ethiopia Federation, it is important to highlight the process following the Italian withdrawal from Eritrea and the United Nations (UN) Trusteeship, which is followed by the UN General Assembly Resolution 390 A(V) of 1950, which grants full autonomy to Eritrea in all domestic issues except some limitations, as well as a democratic regime in the country in short.⁵¹ However, the repeated violations against Eritrean autonomy by the Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia caused dismay in Eritrea. Furthermore, suppressing the Eritrean culture and language by imposing Amharic language, limiting freedoms, and finally ending the Ethiopia-Eritrea Federation by annexing Eritrea in 1962 caused a rising nationalism in Eritrea.

Therefore, Eritreans started to see the Ethiopian army as invaders and started an armed struggle against the Ethiopian occupation. The overthrow of the emperor in 1974 gave hope to Eritreans, but the Derg continued to apply similar policies as the emperor did against Eritrea.

On the ethnic-based federalism in Ethiopia, the EPRDF coalition used ethnic federalism as a tool to resolve ethnic issues, by establishing of a federal system among 9 ethnic-based states and two chartered cities. However, this policy was not successful totally. Regarding the

⁵⁰ John Young, "The Tigray and Eritrean Peoples Liberation Fronts: A History of Tensions and Pragmatism", *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 34/1 (1996), 105–113.

⁵¹ Semere Haile, "The Origins and Demise of the Ethiopia-Eritrea Federation", *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* 15 (1987), 11–13.

secession right of the states, the federal government accepted such an option rather in theory. An interesting fact about the ethnic policy in the country was the number of ethnic political parties. Many ethnic groups had at least two political parties, one allied with EPRDF as a satellite and another independent. The dominance of a specific ethnic group in politics continued during EPRDF. For Oromo people, EPRDF led by TPLF meant that they were dominated once by Amhara, and now by Tigrayans. Even though the EPRDF was seen as following the policy of decentralization, it was kind of not true, since the EPRDF tried to control the other ethnic groups by its satellite political parties. On the other hand, some argue that EPRDF utilized ethnic federalism as means of divide and rule. This kind of policy is seen by people to keep TPLF in power and caused mistrust in EPRDF that the TPLF secured the power in its hands.⁵²

To understand and analyze the events and context better, the definitions of the main concepts for this study are defined and explained too. On the other hand, with regard to the context, we must admit that Ethiopia and Eritrea are the prominent states of the Horn of Africa region. Their geostrategic and geopolitical significance, the duration of the conflict between the two countries which continued for decades while affecting other countries in their region is another aspect to consider. These countries have been selected in line with their similarities and shared specifics such as historical, cultural and religious background (being part of the same Empire, having common Orthodox Christianity, spoken languages), and, their geographic proximity, the conflict and peace process they have experienced over the years with each other.

Moreover, independence movement in Eritrea had a national characteristic. The conflict with Ethiopia was also related to this nationalist nature, in which no Eritrean ethnic groups come forward but an Eritrean identity. Therefore, the study will mainly focus on the nationality in Eritrea and the ethnicity in Ethiopia.

Regarding the methodological design, the case study and comparative methods are both useful for this research. As Lijphart argues, case studies have the advantage of examining a case intensively.⁵³ They allow researchers to delve into the details of cases, with broad exploration on a context or a phenomenon. Yin supports this argument and adds that when the questions "why" and "how" are used more in explaining a specific situation, particularly a contemporary event in which there is limited or no control of the researcher, case study would be more

⁵² Kidane Mengisteab, "Ethiopia's Ethnic-Based Federalism: 10 Years after", *African Issues* 29/1-2 (2001), 23,24.

⁵³ Arend Lijphart, "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method", *The American Political Science Review* 65/3 (1971), 691, 692.

relevant. Besides, diverse evidence could be used in a case study, such as historical records, observations, documents, the author's three years of professional and social experience and interactions in Ethiopia, providing a firsthand source of qualitative data. This is the strength of the method.⁵⁴ It can fit with the research as we try to see the effects of ethnicity and nationality in conflict and peace, by seeking the answers why the former two are the determinants of the latter, and how these variables interact, especially in the Horn of Africa. To sum up, cases of Ethiopia and Eritrea in this methodological design will contribute to the study thanks to in-depth exploration of the peace and conflict with a holistic perspective. Such perspective involves collection of data from multiple sources and allows us to consider diverse factors influencing the outcomes. Case study method also provides contextual understanding by focusing on real world context, so that theoretical concepts and practical applications could be connected. Finally, the detailed research allows us to explore the causal relationship between the triggers of ethnicity and nationality, and the conflict, as well as peace.

On the other hand, case studies are not limited to single cases only. They include multiple cases too, which are also sometimes called as "comparative case method". As indicated by Collier, according to some, the political phenomena could be better understood when small numbers of cases are used, and recently such practice achieved more legitimacy in the realms of international and comparative studies.⁵⁵

Within this understanding, multiple case study, or comparative methodological design for some, is suitable for successfully addressing the issues related to the purpose of this study. So that the ethnicity and nationality in Ethiopia and Eritrea, as two cases could be identified and analyzed better.

Apart from the methods to be followed, it is better to limit the study within a timeframe that starts with the Ethiopia-Eritrea Federation to better focus on the ethnic structures in both countries which become more visible in terms of national and ethnic identities. Until the Italian colonization in the Horn of Africa, today's Eritrean territories used to fall under the Ethiopian/Abyssinian Empire. Following the end of the Italian rule and the United Nations Trusteeship, Eritrea had been in a federation with Ethiopia since 1952 for 10 years and was annexed by Ethiopia in 1962.

⁵⁴ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research, Design and Methods* (the United States of America: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2014), 4–14.

⁵⁵ David Collier, "The Comparative Method", *Political Science: The State of Discipline II*, ed. Ada W. Finifter (Washington, D.C.: American Political Science Association, 1993), 105.

Therefore, it will be reasonable to limit the study within a timeframe which starts with the Ethiopia-Eritrea Federation to better focus on the ethnic structures in both countries that become more visible in terms of national and ethnic identities.

Since the independence movement in Eritrea had identity linked national characteristic and the conflict with Ethiopia was also related to this nationalist nature, in which no Eritrean ethnic groups come forward, the study will mainly focus on the nationality and identity in Eritrea and the ethnic structure of Ethiopia and their effects on the conflict and peace between both countries.

Regarding the theories which explain ethnic conflicts, we can claim that primordialist theory has some limitations in explaining the cases in this study compared to the other two theories. The reason for this argument comes from the fact that Tigrayans and Eritreans have been already very close historically and in terms of their ancestral origin, or partly having the same ethnicity, but both parties had conflict with each other. Lewis summarizes this perspective by asserting that cultural similarities or differences are not always crucial factors in defining ethnic identities. To him, Eritrean elite was culturally close the Tigrayans, or to Amharan until a certain extent. However, this similarity or level of difference was not enough to prevent conflict.⁵⁶

Having said that, instrumentalism and constructivism are more suitable, since the suppression, dominance of specific ethnic groups in politics and economy; aim of the groups to have more resources or territory; and mistrust and competition between the ethnic groups existed between Eritreans and Ethiopians, in particular Tigrayans, and between the Oromo, Amhara, Tigray, and other ethnic groups and nationalities in Ethiopia.

Therefore, one may assert that the static view of primordialism can limit us explore the fluid nature of ethnic identities which evolve over time due to historical developments and political dynamics. In addition, it overlooks the constructed aspects of ethnicity and neglects the role of the manipulation of the elites for strategic gains.

However, all these theories can be considered as complementary too. We must admit that instrumentalist and constructionist theories sometimes incorporate aspects of the former. Historical and static aspect of primordialism, together with instrumental and strategic elements of instrumentalism, and constructed and evolving dimensions of constructivism can contribute to a holistic analysis.

⁵⁶ Herbert S. Lewis, "Ethnicity in Ethiopia The View from Below (and from the South, East and West)", *The Rising tide of cultural pluralism: The nation-state at bay?*, ed. Crawford Young (Madison Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 173.

Thus, one can clearly emphasize that this study does not totally exclude the primordialist theory in explaining ethnicity.

In Eritrea, nationality was emerged by ethnicity, which caused nationalist identity. On the other hand, in Ethiopia, ethnicity is a determinant in terms of conflict. National and ethnic identities are important as a variable in both countries. Therefore, this study will investigate how these developments affected peace and conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia, whether between Tigrayans and Eritreans, and Eritreans against Ethiopia; Tigrayans in Ethiopia, against Amhara dominance, and the Oromo and Amhara against the Tigrayan rule; or, the recent clashes between the Tigrayans and the Federal state.

For measuring the variables, the mistrust, competition, aspirations, actions of the Ethiopian rulers, reaction of the Eritreans, cooperation of ELF/EPLF and TPLF against Derg regime, border conflict between two countries, ethnic unrest in Ethiopia, peace deal with Eritrea, and the reaction of TPLF leadership, as well as the behaviors of Tigrayan, Amhara and Eritrean elites on the conflict and peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea, as well as TPLF will be under focus.

About the sources and the data collection, this research will use qualitative data since the study will mainly rely on historical data and the author's firsthand experience in Ethiopia. Regarding qualitative methods, for primary data, this research will use scholarly articles, books, official statements and speeches of the leaders of both countries, news reports, policy papers, newspapers and online news outlets. The following databases and online platforms will be used in this matter: ProQuest, EBSCOhost, JSTOR; electronic and hard copies of academic books; web sites of the prominent public and private news outlets in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Moreover, the research will also use the observations and experience from the interactions of the author with Eritrean and Ethiopian citizens including bureaucrats, diplomats, members of diaspora, as well as editors and journalists of leading Ethiopian press and media. Having interactions with the people from different walks of life from both countries is an important work for this research, since the diplomats are the members of the respective communities or groups in their countries who experience the developments under focus, and they oversee applying the policies of their states, so that they have official and deep information on the issues. Media representatives are another significant component of the primary data since they can observe and experience the concepts to be discussed in this research.

Regarding the professional and social interactions with individuals from diverse backgrounds, the observations and experience include author's time in Ethiopia between 2014 and 2017, which is complemented by his sustained connections and observations through 2023 too.

Apart from the abovementioned, since many researchers are mainly focused on the conflict side, this study will also touch upon the effects of the said concepts on peace as well. Since the peace is mainly inter-state, its focus will be more on Ethiopia-Eritrea recent peace deal while providing some insights on the peace between Ethiopian federal government and Tigray regional forces.

Finally, this research will contribute to area, ethnicity and conflict studies, as well as Ethiopian political history research, since the numbers of available scholarly sources regarding the above-mentioned concepts and countries "focusing also on the peace concept" have been limited until the conduct of this study.

Sharing the limitations of this study is essential for this part of the thesis as it strives to provide comprehensive exploration of dynamics on peace and conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, as well as within Ethiopia. Thus, some limitations need to be acknowledged to understand the context of the research.

The primary limitation for this study was limited amount of available information. Since comprehensive and diverse sources on the topic were scarce, the thesis had to rely on a constraint data pool. Repetitive nature of the said data constitutes another limitation for the study. Various materials recurred information due to the lack of sources in the field. However, to minimize the potential influence of this situation in the depth and diversity of the insights presented in the study, and to fill the information gap, primary data stemming from the author's professional experience in Ethiopia and his interaction with Ethiopian and Eritrean people were used.

CHAPTER 1: THEORIES OF GEOPOLITICS, ETHNICITY, AND NATIONALISM

To examine conflict and peace within the realm of ethnicity needs comprehensive framework transcending disciplinary boundaries. Therefore, in this chapter, together with theories of ethnicity and nationalism, geopolitical theories were also briefly mentioned, so that a nuanced understanding of the complex relations between the aforementioned concepts could be better understood.

1.1. Understanding Ethnicity and Geopolitics

Before delving into multifaceted theories of ethnicity, it is essential to briefly touch upon a critical perspective: geopolitics. Works of Mackinder, Mahan and Spykman provides understanding on geopolitical dimensions of power and behaviors of states. By incorporating their perspectives into this examination, we can elucidate the interplay between the abovementioned phenomena from a broader contextual framework. However, delving into the theories of geopolitics in detail is beyond the purpose of this study. Therefore, brief conceptual information is provided in the following paragraphs.

1.1.1. Geopolitical Theories: Insights into Regional Dynamics

Among geopolitical theorists, Mahan and Mackinder ascribed considerable significance to lands and seas, while some others did the same for the geographical distribution of resources, or of climate related topics.

Over and above Mahan who mostly puts emphasis on sea power and naval dominance, Mackinder focuses on the heartland concept, while Haushofer had similar views with the former two. Furthermore, Spykman emphasized that the populous coastlands with big industrial facilities, which he defined as "rimlands", were the crucial areas rather than the heartland.⁵⁷

Mahan mentions the significance of the sea in terms of serving as a highway in all directions and underlines the advantages of sea travel that it is easier and cheaper compared to land routes. For the interests of the nations, and for the superiority in the sea, Mahan lists six conditions

⁵⁷ Harold Sprout, "Geopolitical Theories Compared", *Naval War College Review* 6/5 (1954), 20–32.

affecting the sea power. These are geographical position, physical conformation, extent of territory, number of populations, character of the people and the character of the government. In terms of geographical position, depending on the location of a nation, advantage of having seashores makes it easier to defend the land, then there would not need to seek extension of its territory by land ways. Moreover, this positioning is an advantage compared to the nations with continental borders only. Besides the pluses in terms of concentration of the forces, this position is an asset as it can be used as a good base for hostile operations. Regarding physical conformation, Mahan emphasizes more on the features of gulf coasts, and states that seaboard of a country is its one the frontiers, the easier the access through this frontier by sea the more interaction its people would have with the rest of the world. Thus, having harbors in the seaboard of the nation brings the advantage of sea trade, shipping, and navy. Therefore, to him, numbers of harbors and their depths are associated with strength and wealth. About the extent of territory, he argues that the length of coastline and the character of harbors are decisive in strength aspect rather than the area a country occupies. On the number of population, Mahan adds that as it was the case for the extent of territory, similar logic may apply for the population, that besides the total number of population, the number of people available for employment on board or for the establishment of a navy counts. On the national character, he posits that if the sea power is used for peaceful and extensive commerce, the inclination of a state for commercial aims must be distinguishing. And finally on the character of the government, he emphasizes that the policies of respective governments and their institutions have influence in the development of sea power.⁵⁸

On the other hand, Mackinder introduces a new concept related to land territories, and highlights the importance of the region “Euro-Asia” by mentioning its geographical significance. He stressed that there are no available water ways in that region reaching the ocean. He calls this region as “heartland”, and the regions surrounding the heartland on the east, south and west which is accessible to sea ways as “the crescent”. Moreover, he mentions another concept: outer, or insular crescent. According to his categorization, the pivot area is wholly continental, while outer crescent is totally oceanic, and the inner crescent is partly continental and partly oceanic.⁵⁹ The vast population and resources of the heartland, which consists of Russia, and parts of eastern Europe and Central Asia is crucial in dominating the land mass in Eurasia. He also calls these territories as “pivot region” of the world politics as it is also inaccessible to the ships. To Mackinder, thanks to its ability for expansion to the lands of

⁵⁸ Alfred T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* (Dodo Press, 2009), 1–28.

⁵⁹ H. J. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History”, *The Geographical Journal* 23/4 (1904), 431–435.

Eurasia, and for reaching massive resources, the balance of power is in favor of the pivot state -which is Russia in this case. He also regards similar significance of pivot state to Germany for the European lands. Mackinder acknowledges the advantages of sea power too, while arguing that land power remains by giving the example as Russia's power reaching until Siberia while through geographical discoveries European fleets reached other continents.⁶⁰

Another prominent person for geopolitics is Spykman. While discussing balance of power, he posits that with the access to sea, a hegemony can pose a threat to far shores, and the bombing range of modern aircrafts makes air power such a menace as effective as sea power against non-adjacent states. He also stresses that sea power can contribute to the surrender of the enemy indirectly as it cannot invade a country or occupy land territories and serve as an auxiliary to land force while helping mobilize armies, providing supplies, and preventing the other party doing the same. It can also be used as an instrument to economically constrict the targets by blockade, denying raw materials or food supplies.⁶¹ He also mentions heartland like Mackinder, and states that the heartland of the Eurasia is the domain of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and these lands are suitable for agriculture and serve as beds for valuable minerals. According to him, between the heartland and the peripheral maritime zone, there is a huge buffer zone that includes western and central Europe, passing through Türkiye, Iran, Afghanistan and reaching China and eastern Siberia, and most of the great civilizations of the world were developed in this zone. Regarding the crucial position of the Red Sea region, Spykman states that control of the Strait of Gibraltar, the Suez Canal, and the Red Sea ensures the control of the entrance and exit of the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans. He also presents the Indian Ocean region as the second most important strategic zone in terms of struggle for world dominion as its rimland consists of places where there is oil production, while overland routes to the heartland pass within it.⁶²

Furthermore, the Red Sea has been a vital artery economically over centuries, and currently over 10 percent of the global trade passes through this route.⁶³ To underline the significance of the area, Kendie discusses that the Red Sea has caused more conflicts between states than any other international waterways.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History", 436.

⁶¹ Nicholas John Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, Inc., 1942), 20–32.

⁶² Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics*, 98–184.

⁶³ Charles W. Dunne, *The Complicated Nature of Red Sea Geopolitics* (Arab Center Washington DC, 27 October 2021).

⁶⁴ Daniel Kendie, "An Aspect of the Geo-Politics of the Red Sea", *Northeast African Studies* 12/2/3 (1990), 119.

Geopolitical developments in the Horn of Africa inevitably affects Ethiopia and Eritrea. While the region has been in the center of geopolitical rivalries by regional and global powers, interest is increased in the military bases, commercial ports and shares on water resources. Consequently, Getahun examines the region from that perspective and defines the states of the region as group of countries whose major security concerns are interconnected. Therefore, preoccupations regarding their national security cannot be addressed separately.⁶⁵

For years, Eritrea uses its access to Red Sea for commercial and military purposes, and as leverage to its foreign policy. So, since Eritrea's independence, and during the post border war era, as world's most populous landlocked country, Ethiopia aspires to utilize from diversified port access given its foreign trade mostly relies on seaports, while desiring to build up its naval force, too. Therefore, access to Massawa and Assab has strategic importance for Ethiopia. It is crucial as controlling maritime points affect regional power dynamics too. However, there are challenges for these countries in terms of their intentions about sovereignty which escalate tensions and jeopardize security.⁶⁶

Aforementioned facts provide insights into the territorial dynamics, maritime issues and strategic concerns which shape geopolitical considerations. Thus, we can argue that peace and stability in the Horn of Africa, and between Ethiopia and Eritrea in particular, relate to geography, history and geopolitics.

While geopolitical theories can provide valuable insights for the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea from strategic perspective, focusing on theories of ethnicity help us explore identity based social factors which form and evolve the conflicts. Therefore, in the following sections, three main theories are examined to explain ethnic conflicts, which is also known and used as ethnicity: primordialism, constructivism, and instrumentalism.

1.2.Theories of Ethnicity

Before moving into the theoretical landscape of ethnicity and nationalism, it is essential to underline that these two realms are intricately intertwined. Vast mosaic of scholarship on nationalism serves as an origin for discussions of ethnicity. This interconnectedness of nationalism and ethnicity theories prompts us to navigate them by recognizing their dual

⁶⁵ Surafel Getahun, "The New Global Superpower Geo- Strategic And Geo-Economics Rivalry In The Red Sea And Its Implication On Peace And Security In The Horn Of Africa", *Journal Of Economics, Technology and Business* 2/5 (Mayis 2023), 377.

⁶⁶ Yirga Abebe, "Contemporary Geopolitical Dynamics in the Horn of Africa: Challenge and Prospects for Ethiopia", *International Relations and Diplomacy* 9/9 (2021), 368–369.

applicability as shown in the example of primordialism in the upcoming pages. Therefore, it is imperative that these theories are navigated with a conscious effort, so that redundancy is prevented, as discussion of the theories of nationalism and ethnicity acknowledges shared scholarly terrain.

To understand the origin and development of ethnicity, the concept of ethnicity should be well understood. In doing so, We can highlight two important aspects of ethnicity. The first one is the nature of it, whether it is a legacy coming from the past, or it is something constructed. The second one is on the determinants of ethnicity, whether it is based on identity or affiliation. Herein, the theories of ethnicity appear to explain the above-mentioned aspects.

1.2.1. Primordialism

Since this theory is mainly used as an approach for nationalism and ethnicity, the following arguments will be valid for both concepts. To prevent duplication, this theory is explained only in this section. Therefore, as we discuss its significance for both ethnicity and nationalism, primordialism is not explained among the subtitles under the theories of nationalism for this study.

Primordialism is a perspective that stresses the ongoing, deep-rooted, and inherent state of identities. These identities could be ethnic or national. As Özkırımlı suggests, it is used as an umbrella term to define nationality, as part of human beings, and it is given.⁶⁷ Primordialists assert that ethnic identities are ascribed and inherited from ancestors, that is why it is “given”. Brubaker explains this givenness concept by stating that primordial attachments originate "from these "givens" which include religion, blood link, common language, and customs."⁶⁸

With reference to the perennial, deep-seated and inherent states of identities the following explanations will simplify the concept for us. Regarding the enduring aspect, we can emphasize that identities existed in the past and continued to be part of human life throughout history. This continuity includes language, culture, and tradition. So, one can claim that identities are not invented, or socially constructed at a contemporary time. On the inherent nature, it is important to underline the natural and innate nature of the identities linked to fundamental human beings such as speech or smell. These are the ties people have to their nations, or ethnicities. To put it differently, we can mention the focus of the primordial theory on the physical specification transferred through generations, as well as on the cultural heritage coming from forefathers. For

⁶⁷ Özkırımlı, *Theories of Nationalism*, 51,52.

⁶⁸ Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 83.

instance, if a person's ancestors are Asian or Slav, this person is considered an Asian or a Slav, too. Because this person carries the physical characteristics of one of these two, having monolid eyes, or being blonde. In terms of culture, we can also use similar logic. Finally, it will not be wrong to claim that above-mentioned aspects of identity set good examples of the deep-rooted nature of it. Moreover, identity and status are about being a member of an ethnic group or not. This means if a person was born Asian or has Slavic origin, this identity is carried through life and cannot be changed. Because it is given. Another dimension is about belonging. Being part of a group, and the limits of it. The person in the example above, once born as a member of a specific ethnicity, cannot claim or be considered as an Arab, or African. Changing this membership is not possible. That is why the primordial theory sees ethnicity as a static concept, as the essential elements of identity such as culture, language and other common heritage factors stated above remain constant over time, resisting the change.

Two different primordial perspectives try to determine ethnicity. According to the culturalist perspective, shared culture is the determinant of ethnicity in a place even if there is no common bloodline between the people. For example, for this approach, being French is more about speaking a shared language, rather than having a common ancestry. This perspective is supported by Smith's arguments about the ethnic components of French nationalism. To him, these ethnic components were civic and territorial, and they included having language as an integral part, too.⁶⁹ We can include religion in these components list as well. For this approach, the cultural and ethnic bonds lay the foundations of the identity. Thus, common history and language, shared ancestry, traditions and customs are the essentials of (national or ethnic) identity as they bind people. Smith also defines groups with common origin, history and culture as ethnic groups, which suggests consideration of primordial elements.⁷⁰, while highlighting the natural and organic aspect of nationalism as its members share common and ascertained characteristics that mark them from non-members, and stresses the differentiators mentioned above. These factors reflect the understanding the incorporating elements of primordialism.⁷¹ Moreover, he emphasizes the significance of cultural givens, as ethnic and national ties are ineffable, so that we must look at the cultural essence behind ethnicity or nationalism.⁷² Besides the cultural approach, the sociobiological perspective suggests that ethnicity is directly related to kinship and based on the links between the group members. Thus, ethnicity always exists

⁶⁹ Smith, *National Identity*, 13.

⁷⁰ Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism, A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 147.

⁷¹ Anthony D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1983), 16.

⁷² Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, 151.

since the said blood link never disappears. As highlighted in van den Berghe's arguments, three main factors shaping human behavior: kin selection -which is also considered as ethnic nepotism too, reciprocity, referring to cooperation for mutual benefit, and coercion, which is related to use of force for self-benefit.⁷³ The latter two determine the relations between the ethnic groups, while the former is the cause of the ethnocentrism or ethnic discrimination. Smith too touches upon this approach and mentions van den Berghe's sociobiological perspective, by stating that ethnic groups and nations, as extended kin groups, should be understood by genetic reproduction drives of individuals.

Additionally, regarding the cultural perspective, Kedourie mentions nationalist doctrine, which sees nation as a primordial entity, and that cultural elements such as race, language and religion constitute various aspects of it.⁷⁴ Similarly, Hayes makes a definition of nationality by giving examples of physical attributes of people from different countries, and underlines that only few of modern nationalities consist of such a distinctive race. However, he continues by asserting that nationalities rather shaped by cultural and historical forces that are language, as well as historical traditions such as individual's religious, territorial, political, industrial and economic, and finally cultural past. To him, briefly, the cultural base of nationality is constituted by language and culture.⁷⁵ As he acknowledges the historical roots and the cultural background of nations. This approach resonates with primordial arguments.

Moreover, Eller and Coughlan identify three aspects of primordialism as apriority, ineffability, and affectivity. Apriority is related to givenness of ethnicity. Aspects of primordialism are natural or spiritual, rather than sociological. According to this aspect, language, culture and similar realities exist prior to interactions. Ineffable nature of primordial sentiments is about the attachment of people to their group or its practices. This attachment, be it customs or speech, are indefinable. However, an important point must be underlined here. The said ineffability is regarded by the ethnic group members themselves, not by the analysts. And, affectivity can be affiliated with emotion and affect. Feelings are highlighted on this aspect mostly. The emotional strength is towards ethnic feelings constitutes the base for primordialist focus. Nonetheless, to touch upon the limits and weaknesses of the primordial theory, we can mention its inability to explain the reasons behind the changes in identities, especially in terms of apriority that by time, given aspects of primordial realities can change over generations. They

⁷³ Brigandt, "The Homeopathy of Kin Selection: An Evaluation of Van Den Berghe's Sociobiological Approach to Ethnic Nepotism", 203, 204.

⁷⁴ Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (Hutchinson & Co. Ltd, 1960), 73.

⁷⁵ Carlton J. H. Hayes, *Nationalism, A Religion* (The Macmillan Company, 1960), 2-5.

can be updated, renewed, or regenerated. There have been instances that individuals decide on their ethnic identities too, causing change in ethnic memberships.⁷⁶

In addition, Connor highlights the importance of self-awareness, or self-consciousness in terms of defining groups. The shared cultural, religious, linguistic, racial, and even tribal and regional backgrounds create and shape the identities. The conflicts based on identities, including national ones, mainly emanate from the needs of the groups to express their uniqueness, by highlighting the differences on the above-mentioned factors such as race, language or religion. There are opinions supporting that progress of modernization causes primordial sentiments to fade away. This is partly true, however, modern countries of Europe experienced national frictions stemming from national consciousness, too.⁷⁷

Besides, we must emphasize another perspective, which is often used as a similar approach to primordialism, also described as a milder version of it. It is called perennialism, defined by Smith as a perspective that views nations as basic, ancient and immemorial communities. Perennialists consider national sentiments and consciousness among the key aspects of history. To him, however, some contend these arguments too, that nations are not immemorial or ancient. The challenge against the perennial perspective also includes the proposition that nations are not given, nor are existing in nature, as there are many nations founded recently. For those, nations are also not deep-rooted historical realities, they are rather produced by recent historical developments.⁷⁸ These counter arguments are mainly belong to the modernist theory of nationalism which will be discussed in the upcoming pages.

1.2.2. Constructivism

This theory is also known as constructionism, and, it has quite conflicting answers when compared with primordialists, for the two main aspects of ethnicity stated above. According to constructivists, social and political factors construct, sustain, and change ethnic identities. Ethnicity is dynamic. It emerges with structural changes in society.

Constructivists argue that ethnicity does not exist itself and that it is created by individuals or groups. That is why it may change due to this constructed nature. Structural conditions such as migration, class relations, the livelihood of the people, and institutions they establish per their needs and identities affect society, and as a response, ethnicity emerges.

⁷⁶ Eller - Coughlan, "The poverty of primordialism: The demystification of ethnic attachments", 187–200.

⁷⁷ Connor, *Ethnonationalism*, 104–106.

⁷⁸ Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, 18–19.

We can also list other approaches based on adversity (enmity, discrimination, and prejudgment) or ascription (to relate individuals with a specific group by other groups or institutions such as churches, media, schools, or governments), or rejuvenation of an existing ethnicity. Ethnicity can also be constructed socially by internal or external changes in its formation.⁷⁹

Since constructivism refers to the identities being built up rather than their being inherent, we can briefly mention Hobsbawm's views as his work is discussed in modernism section, too. According to him, in terms of cultural construction, human agency plays a significant role in creation of identities through meanings, symbols and narratives. Identities are shaped in a community through language, media, education, or different cultural practices.⁸⁰ The identities are not fixed, they are subject to change, or re-creation. Therefore, to respond social, cultural or political changes, the identities tend to be shifted. As new stories needed within a society, be it an ethnic group or a nation, they are written in line with the priorities of the dominant groups by highlighting specific aspects or marginalizing certain perspectives. Power relations and cultural hegemony are determinants of identity -and indirectly nation-building.

Anderson's concept of imagined communities is another important perspective to understand the ethnic identities. Though he focuses on nationalism and nations, his insights and the framework he generated influenced ethnic studies due to their relation to ethnicity. Furthermore, since nations are socially constructed thanks to the shared cultural symbols, ethnicity can be explained within the same context, too. Because ethnicity, like nationalism, is formed with imagined ties and identities that are created through shared narratives, symbols and myths. Within this framework, Anderson argues that we can understand the phenomenon of nationalism through the historical context as it is a cultural artefact. In doing so, it is essential to investigate how it change its meaning over time, and finally, why it carries a significant emotional legitimacy. He states that nationalism and self-consciousness in social field is deeply related. To him, as a socio-cultural concept, nationalism is universal, and though it is a recent phenomenon, nationalists see it antique. And nation is an imagined community that is inherently limited and sovereign. According to Anderson it is limited as after the boundaries of each nation another one lies and nations do not envisage themselves as universal or open for anyone. He continues by explaining the sovereign image as nationalism emerged following the dynastic realm based on faith was destroyed by enlightenment and revolution. Lastly, it is imagined as

⁷⁹ Yang, *From Ethnic Studies*, 44–46.

⁸⁰ Hobsbawm – Ranger, *The invention of tradition*, 6–11.

a community since a comradeship which make masses sacrifice makes nations.⁸¹ The analysis Anderson makes for nationalism is valid for ethnicity too. Therefore, one should not be against if we also replace nationalism with ethnicity in the abovementioned arguments as they can be adapted to ethnic communities. So, ethnic groups, like nations, can be considered as imagined communities that their identities are constructed by rituals, narratives, and symbols. He also mentions print capitalism, which refers to the development of print materials and thus, circulation of printed materials making it possible for increasing numbers of people to think about themselves and others. This development contributed to the process by allowing people read common materials from different dialects or languages. Finally, it led to the construction and reinforcement of shared identities.⁸²

Besides nationalism, regarding ethnic conflict, the arguments of the constructivists should be presented too. To constructivists, the ethnic conflict rises due to the clashing interests between the groups who try to build a nation state with a geographically and linguistically homogeneous society, and the ones who wish to survive their ethnic identity via demanding their own nation. Moreover, constructivists claim that they try to address the issues that primordialism or instrumentalism cannot explain such as peaceful coexistence of different ethnic groups or ethnic cooperation, and they do it through identity construction process. When a nationalist movement welcomes the existence of other linguistic, religious, cultural or ethnic identities, it is less likely to witness ethnic conflict. Once there are multiple ethnicities with strong identities in a society, possibility of ethnic conflict increases, especially if the parties insist on their demands or interests.⁸³

The constructivist theory can answer the questions that primordialism cannot. However, constructionists overlook the role of common ancestry in ethnicity. Moreover, it does not attach enough significance to the interests of individuals and groups too, which are the focus of the following section.

1.2.3. Instrumentalism

According to this theory, ethnicity is used as a tool for political or economic gains. The interest of individuals and groups is a source of motivation for their behavior. Therefore, due

⁸¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 4–7.

⁸² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 36.

⁸³ K. J. Parsneau, *Ethnic conflict in theory and ethnic nationalism among the Kurdish people in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey* (United States - Montana: University of Montana, 1996), 80–87.

to the benefits delivered from the ethnic networks, ethnic groups are seen as interest groups. Here, the comparative advantage coming with the membership of an ethnic group is important. Therefore, one may claim that the state of ethnicity is fluid for the instrumentalists. That is why the members may change their affiliations depending on their utility. The benefits of membership in an ethnic group may not necessarily be material.

For Brass, elites who compete for political power or economic resources use cultural forms, values and practices for their own purposes and transform them into political symbols to unite masses or break the competing party's unity. Such transformation of ethnic identities to nationalism is reversible for him. Which means that depending on the internal and external dynamics within groups, elites may alter their priority or behavior based on the change in the economic and political circumstances. This can lead to cooperation instead of the rivalry and conflict. Groups also use ethnicity to change their political or economic status, as well as to have more rights. In this vein, creating a nation out of an ethnic group involves forming the unity among the ethnic groups by virtue of self-consciousness, and gathering of the demanded social, economic or political rights. Thus, nations are created either by the transformed self-conscious ethnic groups in a multi-ethnic state, or the mixture of diverse ethnic groups to unite under inter-ethnic national entity.⁸⁴ The latter is observed in modern states while we can see examples of the former mainly in the pre-modern structures. People can also prefer to be a part of an ethnic group for their emotional or social needs. In addition, ethnicity sometimes can be about a rational choice of people in terms of their potential gain and loss. People tend to affiliate themselves with an ethnic group for the advantages they can get, or they can decide to have no link with a specific group to prevent any possible disadvantages.

As noted by Brass, ethnic conflict or nationalism is more likely seen when there is a disadvantaged group has democratic demands and thus making the ethnically stratified system not sustainable. In societies where there is ethnic stratification with one ethnic group dominant over other(s), ethnic nationalism occurs when the members of the disadvantaged group tries to enter the economic niche zone occupied by the competing group. In such cases, the dominant group defends its rights by mobilizing with support of ethnic sentiments. It can also happen when there is a particular distribution of economic resources or political power. Therefore, some elites rise to challenge the dominant group. The level of the competition and the persistence of the elites determine the likelihood of nationalism.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Paul R. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism, Theory and Comparison* (New Delhi, London: Sage, 1991), 15,16.

⁸⁵ Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 46, 47.

Regarding the actions taken by the elites as presented above, it is critical that we share the views of Brubaker supporting Brass. Brubaker, suggests that ethnicity is manipulated by individuals strategically. They mobilize, deploy or downplay others to suit their interests. Such deliberate and calculated manipulation leads to ethnicity.⁸⁶ However, Connor approaches to the issue from another perspective. For him, we should not seek nationalism in the ulterior motives of the elites who manipulate crowds and mobilize masses. Instead, ethnicity can be found in the sentiments that elites appeal. Therefore, elites either hide their real motives while manipulation of those sentiments or lose the support of the people.⁸⁷

1.3.Theories of Nationalism

1.3.1. Primordialism

As we have included the primordial theory under the theories of ethnicity, to prevent redundancy and duplication, we will continue with modernism.

1.3.2. Modernism

Modernism is another approach to nationalism, and it emerged as a reaction to primordialism which considered nationalism as a natural and universal characteristic of society. According to classical modernism, the nations and nationalism are inherent part of the modern world. Thus, the emergence of such modernity of nations and nationalism goes back to two centuries back only. Because they are considered as products of capitalism, industrialization, and origin of modern states. As both concepts are recent, they are seen as essential parts of modern world. Modernists also assert that before the modern era there was no need for those concepts as well.⁸⁸

There are different points of views which were used to discuss nationalism. Economic, or the class perspective is one of them, and Nairn examines nationalism from the perspective of such point of view, from class relations. He posits that nationalism is related to the "external pressures and an internal balance of class forces". He addresses the issue within the context of the British Empire and adds that nationalism cannot be evaluated independent of the class

⁸⁶ Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 84.

⁸⁷ Connor, *Ethnonationalism*, 161.

⁸⁸ Özkırımlı, *Theories of Nationalism*, 81.

structure. It occurs in societies in which there is unequal development, either backwardness or colonization. In such conditions, some conscious, middle-class elites mobilize the masses to ensure the balance.⁸⁹ Moreover, to Nairn, uneven development is the primary factor in nationalism. To see the uneven development, he stresses the need to observe the world or continental history, and defends that ethnic or language related factors are secondary to the material ones. While positing that nationalist elements are always subordinate to economic realities, he also continues that dilemma stemming from socio-economic development cannot be separated from the idea of nationalism. This dilemma is directly linked to capitalism of 19th and 20th centuries.⁹⁰ As stated above, his understanding of nationalism is related to historical and socio-economic context.

Regarding socio-economic context of nationalism, we must mention Hechter's research too. Like Nairn, he defends that nationalism is rooted at the social dynamics within advanced industrial societies. As he approaches the concept through the explanation of the core and peripheral groups in such societies, one can claim that nationalism is not expected to be seen in pre industrial communities. Therefore, to Hechter, nationalism is a phenomenon of the modern world. Because, unlike current nationalities that almost everyone in today's societies feel belonging or identify themselves, in earlier eras we can only mention the families, clans or communities. The concept of nationality is used for delineating the boundaries between socially different entities, or the core and peripheral groups, in modern era. Moreover, sometimes this social significance may change or erode and we can observe national development, resulting with a single national culture. The other scenario in this case is nationalism.⁹¹

To elaborate more in the historical context, we can add that Nairn endorses Gellner's opinion on nationalism that it is not so much connected with modernization or industrialization, but with its uneven diffusion. The said uneven diffusion showed its extreme effect by the French Revolution and Industrial Revolution, impacting whole Europe. Smith elaborates on this issue and states that Nairn gives the concept of underdevelopment a new direction by linking it to the idea of '*uneven* development', a notion which he takes from Gellner's theory.⁹²

Finally, Nairn does not consider nationalism as a natural phenomenon, while accepting Gellner's comment which emphasizes that under specific circumstances, like the modern era, nationality becomes a natural phenomenon. he adds, that besides being bourgeois

⁸⁹ Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain*, 41–47.

⁹⁰ Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain*, 71–72.

⁹¹ Hechter, *Internal Colonialism*, 3–5.

⁹² Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, 49.

phenomenon, nationalism is also linked with intelligentsia and the masses. He quotes Anthony Smith's words that "The intelligentsia ...play a definitive part in ...nationalist movements - everywhere". Regarding the masses, He goes on to assert that as intelligentsia spread nationalism downwards, the carried message needs a recipient. In this case, the recipient is the masses.⁹³ This is how the social awareness is created and the masses are mobilized.

In addition, with regard to social change and national development, it is worth to touch upon the two models developed by Hechter: diffusion model and internal colonialism. Before starting with the two models, we must explain the concepts of core and periphery which are used in his evaluations. Core represents the dominant and powerful region which benefits from the economic and political advantages while the peripheral regions are economically, culturally and politically subordinate to core, experiencing economic exploitation and political marginalization. Core is located often in national capital where economic and political institutions are concentrated. Political decisionmaking takes place here, and this region has influence in national identity. Core region also imposes the cultural norms to the periphery. On the other side, peripheral regions are relatively less developed, and the resources of the periphery is mostly exploited for core's benefit.

As the two concepts are explained, we can go on with the diffusion model which asserts that national development consists of three stages. As Hechter⁹⁴ explains, the first stage is pre-industrial era when there was no interaction between core and peripheral regions. The difference between the economic, political and cultural institutions of both regions are significant as they are isolated. As the second stage starts we see initial contact and interaction between the regions. So that national development occurs. This happens with industrialization. Thanks to the interaction, the culture of the core diffuses into the periphery. As the cultural, economic and political differences fade away, in long term we can talk about a culturally homogenous community. Finally in the last stage, equal regional wealth is observed while cultural differences are no longer socially meaningful. Regarding internal colonialism, which sees core as a dominant region while the periphery is exploited by it. Uneven wave of modernisation causes advanced and less advanced groups. So, we witness unequal distribution of resources and power. While core tries to keep the stratified system alive in which the periphery is not allowed to reach the roles which were allocated to advanced group members only. This situation contributes to distinctive ethnic identification and by time the periphery starts to assert its own culture to challenge the core's. Finally this may lead to periphery considering itself a separate

⁹³ Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain*, 96–101.

⁹⁴ Hechter, *Internal Colonialism*, 6–11.

nation and seeking independence. To sum up, as diffusion model expects a lower economic inequality, the internal colonisation model suggests otherwise, the former foresees functional political cleavages characterizing in political behavior while the latter suggests such cleavages reflecting the cultural dissimilarities. Regarding the conflict aspect, Hechter also adds that due to cultural issues like religion and language, as the competing ethnic groups differentiate themselves by their distinct cultures and differences.

Variants of modernism are not limited to the abovementioned. To discuss nationalism as a political form, we can check what Breuilly tells. To this end, he makes definitions first. For him, nationalism refers to "political movements seeking or exercising state power and justifying such action with nationalist arguments." And the said nationalist arguments should be based on the following. First there should be a nation. Then, the interests and values of it precedes all others. And finally, this nation should be as independent as possible, with political sovereignty.⁹⁵ Breuilly states that there are many definitions of nationalism, and all stay as general statements. He sees this as a problem since for him nationalism is beyond any class interest, economic relationship, psychological need, cultural attribute or social arrangement, structure of communications, and social function or objective.⁹⁶ He also adds that nationalism is linked to the works of intellectuals or historians, and it can refer to ideas, sentiments, to a consciousness on a specific culture, or it can be about political action and conflict. However, at the end, nationalism is emerged thanks to the modernization process.

Furthermore, we must mention Hobsbawm's work too. Hobsbawm distinguishes nationalism from other group behavior by stating that nationalism necessitates a political duty overriding all other obligations. He is against the view that nation is a social, unchanging entity, and sees nation as a recent phenomenon. He also posits that nations are constructed from above which should be analyzed from below too, in line with the assumptions, needs, hopes and interests of ordinary people.⁹⁷ In this vein, understanding the traditions of nations is essential. Because the most modern nations claim to have deep roots which are natural. However, the national phenomenon cannot be understood without paying attention to the invented traditions which seem old, though, might be recently constructed, invented, or instituted. They are practices of accepted rules or rituals with symbolic nature, carrying specific values or repeated norms of behavior. They should be separated from customs as traditions impose fixed practices, which are invariant as opposed to customs. Tradition is a repeated and ritualized action.

⁹⁵ Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, 2.

⁹⁶ Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, 404–420.

⁹⁷ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, 9, 10.

Moreover, as political institutions and ideological groups need historical continuity, a tradition is invented to secure historical continuity. As part of national movements and states, we see national anthems, national flag, or national image or symbol to personify the nation. All of these symbols and traditions are parts of some social engineering as historical novelty requires innovation.⁹⁸

Additionally, the last approach could be mentioned as it stresses cultural, or social transformation. The representatives of this approach are Gellner and Anderson. As Anderson is mentioned in constructivist theory earlier, the former's arguments will be presented here. Gellner defines nationalism as a political principle that envisages the congruency of political and national units. He emphasizes on the sentimental nature of nationalism that it can bring frustration when it does not reach the aspired goal or deliver satisfaction in the case of its fulfillment. This frustration happens as the number of independent states are limited, and the possibility of having new states is not high considering the demand for satisfied nationalism exceeding the number of viable new states. According to him, when the rulers belong to another nation than the one which constitutes the majority of a society, the discontent occurs. Such incidents are visible in empires or states which a local alien group dominates. So, one can claim that nationalism emerges when political boundaries are not aligned with the ethnic ones.⁹⁹ Gellner also states that nationalism was invented in Europe in the 19th century, not directly related to modernization or industrialization but with its uneven diffusion. This type of diffusion causes social stratification. He also adds that nationalism is not about the self-consciousness, but it invents nations. For this, differentiating specifications are needed such as culture, or pigmentation as they can be distinctive in using identifying the underprivileged.¹⁰⁰ As we see that he highlights the invented nature of nationalism, too. On the cultural aspect, worth to mention his views stressing that various groups within a society or in a state have different cultures with sharp or blurry boundaries. Not always this wealth of differentiation converges with the state boundaries, at least with the consent of all parties involved. Therefore, we see the emergence of nationality that can be defined in terms of shared culture. As people with distinct cultures have the need to live together in a more homogeneous community, that they can only live in units defined by that shared culture, they tend to change this status. Besides, Gellner posits that the process of having standardized system of communication with literacy and education base creates the high cultures. Also, each high culture aspires to have its own state.

⁹⁸ Hobsbawm – Ranger, *The invention of tradition*, 1–14.

⁹⁹ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 1–5.

¹⁰⁰ Gellner, *Thought and Change*, 151–168.

The ones that fight for the available space for their states lead to nationalist or ethnic conflict. If the high cultures with such aspirations cannot coexist within current political boundaries, conflict arises, and nationalism breaks out.¹⁰¹ Gellner mentions three eras of human history. In terms of nationalism, during the hunter-gatherer era there was not many developments related to nationalism as we did not see any form of states. However, in the era of advanced agrarian based civilizations cultural diversity is used for differentiating purposes among sub-populations politically or economically. The last era is industrial one, in which industrial societies exist and cultural homogeneity seen as an essential part within each political unit. If the said homogeneity does not exist, it can be ensured by updating political or cultural boundaries. He also argues that in such political units, to create mobility, sense of solidarity and continuity, culture is overtly used. To conclude we can claim that, as Gellner did, nationalism is engendered in industrial societies.¹⁰²

1.3.3. Ethno-symbolism

Ethno-symbolism is emerged as a reaction to the limitations of other theories, especially of modernism. Introduced by Anthony Smith, this approach highlights the significance of myths, rituals, and cultural symbols to understand the symbolic and emotional aspects of identity in terms of forming of the nation and nationalism.

Smith argues that modernism observes the history through the lens of modern nationalism, and adds that to modernists, nationalism, like nations, is a novel and recent phenomenon as they both are products of modernization. Thus, we cannot expect them to seek the origins of nations or nationalism in pre-modern eras. He refutes the downplay of ethnic ties by the modernists, and states that ethnic identities are crucial in nation formation. Besides that, ethno-symbolism not always disagrees with modernism. Both approaches agree that nations are conceived as sociological, dynamic, and purposeful communities. However, both approaches defend different arguments in some key areas too, including symbolic resources such as the concepts of –“la longue durée”, “ethnie”- and nation, conflict, and its reinterpretation, as well as elites and masses. Regarding symbolic resources, Smith mentions cultural and political variables that they are romanticism and populism for Nairn, while official rites and ceremonies for Breuilly, social communications and language for Deutsch, language and culture for Gellner, cultural solidarity for Hechter, invented traditions for Hobsbawm, and finally language and print

¹⁰¹ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 54,55.

¹⁰² Ernest Gellner, *Culture, Identity, and Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 18.

capitalism for Anderson. Smith asserts that in all those perspectives political factors depend on capitalism or industrialization. Second difference in the arguments is that modernists do not consider structures before the 18th century as nations in modern sense. This tendency can be misleading in terms of seeking national roots before that century as Smith puts forward. He also questions the abovementioned scholars that they relegate or omit ethnicity when discussing nations and nationalism. So that ethnicity is marginalized. Regarding elites and masses, Smith criticizes the view of seeing the roles of elites to make the masses as object of their attention. For him, ethno-symbolists are rather more concerned in how memories, cultures and popular beliefs affect the views of the elites. Lastly, Smith touches upon the work of other scholars such as Deutsch, Gellner and Nairn that they see nationalism as necessary factors in modernization process. He continues to mention Gellner's high culture in terms of conflict, and about Nairn again, he underlines the oppressed peripheral region and its resistance. He goes on and states that Hobsbawm's invented tradition is used by elites for social control while for Anderson elites form nations through imaginative power of print. According to Smith, these approaches lack the social and symbolic effects of the conflict between and within nations. He upholds that national cultural wars or internal rivalries are developed by ethnic memories and myths.¹⁰³

Regarding the importance of symbols and myths on the development of pre-modern identities, we must mention Armstrong's contribution in the literature too. Referring nationalism as dominant doctrine after the 18th century, he states that people chose the states they belong to, and this brought forward territorial political structures, reflecting the consciousness of the group identities. He also shares that his examination involves the period until the consciousness of ethnic identity became key force in forming independent political structure, such as nations, and adds that a perspective putting the period including many centuries in the middle of attention is crucial to understand the modern nationalism as part of ethnic consciousness. To him, symbols, communication, and myths are the critical elements for understanding the emerging of nations in pre-modern periods. Armstrong also mentions the significance of focusing on the boundaries, by referring Fredrik Barth, regarding group identities, that how a social interaction model examining the perceptions of group members to distinguish them from others. In this vein, Armstrong posits that ethnicity is defined by these boundaries, and that groups define themselves by exclusion rather than by referencing to their own characteristics. This is done by comparing strangers with themselves, and thanks to that, people from large ethnic groups start to be aware of their own close relationships within groups.

¹⁰³ Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach*, 6–21.

As the focus of investigation is redirected to the perceived boundaries it can be considered as a start in examining ethnicity in history. Besides, Armstrong asserts that some assumed that ethnic groups have exclusive territory.

However, ethnicity for him is continuum of social collectivities including class and religion. In line with his assertion, it is hard to mention ethnically conscious collectivities in sedentary societies since there are no elites in those communities to bargain the positions of their boundaries. These communities lack the counter-elite needed for a resistance against the manipulation of the elites. Once such counter-elite is created, they can interact with the dominant elite instead of submission to their manipulations, and a conscious bargaining starts. So that ethnic identification is created.¹⁰⁴ On the national symbols and institutions, while defining elements of nations, Smith argues that sentiments, attitudes and beliefs are not enough alone. Therefore, myths, values, memories, and traditions constitute the symbolic elements of nations. In terms of institutions, he mentions educational practices, rituals, and customs.¹⁰⁵ Besides, with reference to Armstrong's arguments on boundaries and the exclusion of other groups, we can add how Smith backs this and defines ethnic groups as social groups having common origin, sharing common history and culture, with mutual solidarity which distinguish them from others. Sometimes this membership feeling may go beyond this distinction and members can believe the centrality and superiority of their groups. This situation is called ethnocentrism, which is a cultural or religious sentiment rather than biological one.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Armstrong, *Nations Before Nationalism*, 4–7.

¹⁰⁵ Anthony D. Smith, "Dating the Nation", *Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World: Walker Connor and the Study of Nationalism*, ed. Daniele Conversi (Taylor & Francis Routledge, 2003), 63–65.

¹⁰⁶ Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism in the twentieth century* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1979), 90.

CHAPTER 2: ETHNICITY IN ETHIOPIA

As discussed earlier in the introduction chapter, Ethiopia's experience with ethnicity roots back to its imperial history. To ensure the control over the people, Ethiopian rulers tried to use cultural homogenization, one-language policy through a centralized state structure. In imperial era, especially during emperor Haile Selassie's reign, cultural assimilation was a solution to keep a unitary state. Amharic used as the sole language while Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity formed the basis of Ethiopian identity. Obviously, the ethnic and regional discontent rose due to such policies. In addition to this, Derg regime tried to use Marxist-Leninist approach for the maintenance of the unitary state, through limited autonomy and cultural pluralism. However, EPRDF coalition regime attempted to keep the state intact by applying ethnic federal system in the country.¹⁰⁷ As triggering factors in ethnicity, suppression with linguistic, cultural, and political domination fed the increased frustration of the groups under pressure. Therefore, the Eritrean national identity was created and formed starting from the colonization of Eritrea, while the Oromo, Tigrayan and other ethnic groups started to rebel against the Derg.

2.1. Imperial Ethiopia and the Junta Regime

To maintain the political and cultural hegemony of the Amhara elite, imperial administration was very careful to avoid mentioning any ethnic, linguistic, or religious diversity, so that assimilation to homogenize non-Amhara groups could be smooth. Such Amharanization strategy did not also let these marginalized groups to develop loyalties to the state, as the system did not consider them as equals. This kind of domination inevitably caused challenges against the ruling elite. In the aftermath of the imperial rule, Derg regime followed a socialist orientation and recognized the equality of national groups within the country while promising unapplied regional autonomy.¹⁰⁸ Derg regime has played similar role as the imperial rule, in triggering the nationalist movements due to their authoritarian approaches. Ethnic federalism of the EPRDF era also played an important role in deepening the rift between the ethnic groups and bringing the inevitable ethnic struggle throughout the country. Amhara

¹⁰⁷ Habtu, "Ethnic Pluralism as an Organizing Principle of the Ethiopian Federation", 99–100.

¹⁰⁸ Aklilu Abraham, "Ethnicity and Dilemmas of State Making: Ethnic Federalism and Institutional Reforms in Ethiopia", *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 2/1/2 (2005-2006), 88.

domination in culture, language and power relations can be seen as a main reason why the Amhara define themselves as Ethiopian while the Tigrayan and Oromos have felt excluded from political power and resources by the Amhara. While others feeling oppressed, the Amharan identity was amalgamated within Ethiopianization policy of the empire. So, being an Amhara during the imperial rule was more an identity rather than primordial belonging.¹⁰⁹

Moreover, the imperial rule had its own way in administering the country. However, it is hard to claim that the dominance of Shoan Amhara culture led to the extinction or loss of others. People in rural areas, comprising most of the population, did not lose their religions, traditions, customs or ethnic identities. We can say that they were not totally assimilated since after years they still knew who they are and their ancestors, and also remembered their kins. We have witnessed the effects of this memory later by the awareness among students, their protests, and farmers' movements in Ethiopia. Furthermore, the policies of imperial rule and Derg regime to Ethiopianize the people from different ethnic backgrounds under Amharic language and culture resulted with concerns among other ethnic groups, and perception of threat to their identities. So that, as a reaction, the marginalized groups attempted to build their own nations. ethnic loyalties and the constructed identities were influential in this vein.¹¹⁰

Regarding the inconvenience of the Tigrayans in Ethiopia, we must admit that the legacy of Axumite Kingdom for the Tigrayans is important. Despite the pride from this historical background, Amhara nobility dominated the politics in the country until Derg regime took control of power in the country.¹¹¹ These excluded nationalities used armed struggle to reach the said power and resources which toppled the Derg regime in 1991. However, following the demise of centralism within the country, ethnic federalism was used by TPLF to control the power through other nationalities.¹¹²

2.2.The Ethiopian Experiment with Ethnic Federalism

Imperial rule tried to control the ethnic groups by assimilating them under Amharan culture. However, this brought the reactions of the ethnic groups over time. These groups started to be more aware of their identities. This was the proof that unitary system did not work for Ethiopia

¹⁰⁹ Semir Yusuf, *Drivers of ethnic conflict in contemporary Ethiopia* (Institute for Security Studies, December 2019), 11.

¹¹⁰ Lewis, "Ethnicity in Ethiopia The View from Below (and from the South, East and West)", 166.

¹¹¹ Young, "Ethnicity and Power in Ethiopia", 532.

¹¹² Tricia Redeker Hepner, "Pride, Prejudice and the Ethnicization of the Eritrean Nation", *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 28 (2-3) (2000), 100.

in the past and EPRDF had to try a different policy especially since there were various ethnic liberation fronts in Ethiopia. After the ousting of the Derg regime, EPRDF tried to prevent ethnic conflicts by dividing the authority and territories among ethnic groups. So, 10 ethnic based regions were established. Apart from the capital Addis Ababa administration, the rest nine regions were Tigray, Amhara, Oromia, Benishangul/Gumuz, Afar, Southern Nations, Somali, Gambela and Harar. Normally, the idea was giving the regions cultural and political autonomy until they are integrated enough, and the interdependence is built among all. So that the role of ethnicity in politics could be lessened or kept under control. This was planned to be a temporary measure. However, time proved it otherwise. Therefore, there are opinions that TPLF used ethnic federalism to divide and rule.¹¹³

The ethnic tension in the country during the EPRDF rule is seen as a legacy from the imperial policies and the ones pursued by the Derg regime. As majority of the Ethiopians do not have strong civic identity and citizenship awareness, separatist and isolationist trends easily gain momentum in the country, and this leads to the fostering of ethnic nationalism. Creation of an Ethiopian identity was not that successful during the imperial, Derg or EPRDF rules due to the alienated ethnic periphery, poor economy, financial issues, and the political instability.¹¹⁴ Besides the pre-EPRDF era, some flaws are spotted in the ethnic federal system of Ethiopia, including the dominance of the ruling party, shortages in human capacity and resources, politicization of ethnicity, and the persisting authoritarian traditions.¹¹⁵ As a result of ethnic federal structure, politicization of ethnicity was also a cause for the unsettled ethnic unrests. And one of the root causes of the ethnic unrest in the country was the dominance of the ruling party. Therefore, Ethiopian politics have been in a vicious circle. Additionally, ethnic federalism in Ethiopia led to distribution of authority. And this type of governance was not able to secure the country against regional rivalries and ethnic polarization.¹¹⁶ Therefore, in Ethiopia, ethnic federalism caused violence between various ethnic groups throughout the country due to border disputes, territorial claims, and power relations among the regional administrations. Since the regional administrations had the understanding and perception of the ownership of their territories, such result was inevitable. Groups which criticize EPRDF and its ethnic federalist model based their arguments on the fact that TPLF-led policies were not so different

¹¹³ Mengisteab, "Ethiopia's Ethnic-Based Federalism: 10 Years after", 20–22.

¹¹⁴ Roza Ismagilova, "Ethnicity and Federalism: The Case of Ethiopia", *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* 59/2 (2004), 197–198.

¹¹⁵ Lahra Smith, "Voting for an Ethnic Identity: Procedural and Institutional Responses to Ethnic Conflict in Ethiopia", *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 45/4 (2007), 575.

¹¹⁶ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, "Ethnicities and multiculturalisms: politics of boundaries", *Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Minority Rights*, ed. Stephen May et al. (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 39–40.

than the imperial regime's. They accused the EPRDF administration of being a successor of the imperial rule which caused friction among the groups in the country.¹¹⁷

Regarding the roots of discontent against the EPRDF that was dominated by the TPLF, a visible disproportionate distribution of power is experienced. As a result, unhealthy ethnic competition emerged. When we take the composition of the military leadership of the Ethiopian armed forces as an example, before 1991, it is seen that the majority of the military commanders defined themselves as Amhara, with 65% while 20% identified as Oromo. However, post-1991 numbers show another scenario. During EPRDF regime, out of 64 high level commanders, 49 of them (around 77%) were Tigrayan and the closest group following them was the Oromo with eight generals, which is 12,5% only.¹¹⁸ This is a reflection how the Amhara was dominant before the EPRDF regime and after the Derg, how the conditions turned in favor of the Tigrayan.

2.3.Struggling for Solidarity: Ethnic Unrest and Discord in Ethiopia (2015-2018 and beyond)

Efforts of EPRDF on ethnic federalism to keep the country intact was successful for some time. TPLF-led rule stayed in power almost 30 years. However, multi nationalism based on Amhara identity caused stronger nationalism among the Amhara. One can see the shift of ethnic identity from a uniting nature to a divisive one. Because, during Emperors' reign, Ethiopianism was built upon Amharic language and culture. With EPRDF, the ethnic federalism is enforced but its centrality in culture and language was upon the Amhara heritage.

Furthermore, the revenue sharing mechanism and many others supposedly favored the Tigray region. this situation increased the discontent among other regional administrations, especially the two most populous ethnic groups in the country: the Oromo and the Amhara.¹¹⁹

Moreover, as TPLF was dominating the internal politics in the country, while party loyalties preceded shared economic development, unmanageable contradictions increased over time and in 2014, as a reaction to federal government's Addis Ababa Master Plan to widen the territories of city administration over the lands of Oromo region. The Oromo protested the developments and called the politicians as "corrupt elites". The protests spread wide and in 2016 the federal

¹¹⁷ Yusuf, *Drivers of ethnic conflict in contemporary Ethiopia*, 13.

¹¹⁸ Yonas Adaye Adeto, "Violent ethnic extremism in Ethiopia: Implications for the stability of the Horn of Africa", *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 20/2 (2020), 14–16.

¹¹⁹ J. L. de Maio, *Confronting ethnic conflict: The role of third parties in managing Africa's internal wars* (Los Angeles: University of California, 2005).

government declared state of emergency. Main reason of this spiral of chaos lays behind the economic conditions, unaddressed grievances, ethnic polarization and the lack of leadership to control the situation in the country.¹²⁰ In another words, the anti-government protests originated mainly for demand over land rights, freedom of the press, under-representation of coalition partners, as well as inequalities in political, economic and social fields among ethnicities.¹²¹ During the 2015-2018 era of ethnic tension over the country, the elites of regional administrations, in particular the Amhara and Oromo benefited from the situation or tried to do so. Their demand for acquiring more resources, or not losing the existing ones led to rivalries between the ethnically governed regions. Hence, ethnic groups are mobilized, and even violent acts have been observed. As the protests against the TPLF domination in the politics and many other key areas intensified, TPLF lost its influence over the EPRDF, and finally the reformists won, and liberalization policies were followed in the post-TPLF rule in Ethiopia. The liberalist policies adopted by the government led by Abiy Ahmed brought new hopes for the peace prospects in the country and beyond. The government took steps about political opposition, lifted their bans, and released political prisoners while it worked on freedom of press and created an optimistic atmosphere. However, this period did not last long since the country witnessed serious political disorder, mainly due to the dissatisfaction of the ethnic groups. Once they used to complain about the Amhara hegemony, then frustration turned into some kind of complaints against the increasing Oromo influence in politics. As balance of power was held by the Amhara during imperial rule, and it was in the hands of TPLF during the EPRDF era, after 2018 it is claimed that the Oromo is wielding the power. Therefore, the concerns that the Oromo will subdue other ethnic groups catalyzed tension and violence between groups, too. When the Tigrayan influence on Ethiopian politics ended and the Oromo started to be more visible in the politics, competition became more visible between the Amhara and the Oromo. So, the legacy of TPLF-led rule over decades showed itself with the distrust and frustration between the Oromo and the Amhara.¹²²

Apart from the longstanding conflicting Amhara-Tigray nationalisms, Kemise and Qemant conflicts are also worth to mention. The nationalism in the autonomous Oromo Special Zone has risen over time, especially after the change of power in Ethiopia after 2018. Moreover, The Amhara Administration was also disturbed by the situation and wanted to protect other Amhara

¹²⁰ Giovanni Faleg, *Resetting Ethiopia: Will the state heal or fail?* (European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2019), 2.

¹²¹ Amsalu K. Addis et al., “The recent political situation in Ethiopia and rapprochement with Eritrea*”, *African Security Review* 29/2 (2020), 105.

¹²² Yusuf, *Drivers of ethnic conflict in contemporary Ethiopia*, v–14.

in the Oromo Special Zone and limit the said Oromo nationalism within its territories, which led the conflict later. On the Qemant case, violence was caused by the irreconcilable interests of Qemant and Amhara groups. This is also seen by the Amhara regional authorities as a Tigrayan move to weaken Amharan identity, while the Qemant groups accused the Amhara, in particular the young militia group called “the Fano” of perpetrating violent acts against the civilian Qemant groups in times of instability.¹²³ Regarding the Kemise case, similar incidents occurred, in 2021 violence escalated between TPLF forces aligning with OLF-Shane fighters, and the Amhara regional special forces with associated Fano militia. Both Oromo and Amhara sides accused each other on the escalation of the situation.¹²⁴

Besides the political representation problems, other border disputes and territorial issues also led conflict between the groups in the country. For instance, borders were not defined properly between Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromo regions, in addition, ethnic based land distribution caused the peasants dispute over ownership. In 2018, ethnic mobilization led conflict in the region and many Oromo and Amhara people were forced to leave their lands. Moreover, in 2019, claims of the Amhara over Benishangul-Gumuz region led to clashes between the respective ethnic groups, too.¹²⁵

¹²³ Ethiopia Peace Observatory, “Qemant Conflict” (Access September 29, 2023).

¹²⁴ Ethiopia Peace Observatory, “Oromia Special Zone and North Shewa Zone Conflict” (Access September 29, 2023).

¹²⁵ Yusuf, *Drivers of ethnic conflict in contemporary Ethiopia*, 18–26.

CHAPTER 3: FORGING ERITREAN IDENTITY: ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION

There are nine ethnic groups in Eritrea with Nilotic, Kushitic and Semitic origins: Afar, Bilen, Hidarb, Kunama, Nara, Rashaida, Saho, Tigre and Tigrina. Tigrinya, English and Arabic are used predominantly throughout the country especially in government and trade affairs, while other languages are also used locally by respective ethnic groups. Eritrea's nation building strategy and national identity is strongly linked with its diverse culture. Therefore, religious and cultural freedom is an integral part of the harmony within the society, which is also linked with the unity in the country.¹²⁶ For Eritrea, since these groups are coexisting for years without any significant issues, there has been no major ethnic issues among them.

As Hepner states, the information on the ethnicity in Eritrea is quite limited. The Eritrean nationalism, which is above and stronger than any ethnic identities in the country, unites the people. Multiethnic structure of the population in Eritrea is a part of Eritrean national identity. The state also supports this understanding about identities and belonging in the country.¹²⁷

Primordial factors can play important role in ethnically motivated groups' behaviors. However, cultural similarities or differences are not always crucial factors in defining ethnic identities. As Lewis states, Eritrean elite was culturally close the Tigrayans, or to Amharan until a certain extent. However, this similarity or level of difference was not enough to prevent conflict.¹²⁸ Therefore, as stated above, the Eritrean rebels fought almost three decades for their independence since the 1960s and the border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea happened in 1998.

3.1.Colonial Legacy: Eritrea under Imperial Domination

Eritrea which had diverse religious and ethnic communities experienced multiple interactions with Ethiopian imperial rulers, especially from the end of the 19th century until the Federation of Ethiopia and Eritrea. These interactions had an important role in shaping the awareness and consciousness among the Eritreans. After the return of Emperor Haile Selassie to the Ethiopian throne in 1941, until 1952, Eritrea was governed by British administration.

¹²⁶ Eritrea Ministry Of Information, "Eritrea's 9 ethnic groups" (Access October 8, 2023).

¹²⁷ Hepner, "Pride, Prejudice and the Ethnicization of the Eritrean Nation", 92.

¹²⁸ Lewis, "Ethnicity in Ethiopia The View from Below (and from the South, East and West)", 173.

Following the debates on UN General Assembly, the Federation of Ethiopia and Eritrea founded in 1952. However, the emperor denied some of the fundamental rights to Eritreans. Strict policies were followed to suppress the autonomy of Eritrean government, imposing Ethiopian flag and culture, Amharic language forcefully. These actions were followed by the dissolution of the federation and annexation of Eritrea by Ethiopia in 1962.¹²⁹ During the struggle of independence, against Ethiopian domination, Eritrean diplomats sought support of the world, including of the US. However, their efforts failed to outweigh Ethiopia's. Therefore, Eritreans started the military confrontation with Ethiopia.¹³⁰ Finally, the developments united the Eritrean patriots around a national identity. Sharing a common history and shared cultural heritage were not enough to keep Eritrean people under the imperial hegemony without any disputes. The attempts of the rulers to assimilate the people of Eritrea reinforced their identity.

3.2.Identity Forged in Struggle: Eritrea's Pursuit of Independence

The annexation of Eritrea served as a historic factor to solidify Eritrean identity. The Eritrean rebellion and their struggle over decades united the Eritreans around a common goal, independence. The pursuit of Eritreans crowned with the independence of their country in 1993 which was a milestone for Eritrean national identity. In this context, it is important to mention that nationalism can be expansionist and aggressive, or it can serve as a uniting force to integrate people.¹³¹

Against any possible fragmentation or rivalries, Eritrean state used ethnicity as a uniting tool among its people. For constructivists, to preserve its existence, nation states should build a national culture. This is essential to unite people around a myth or identity. Nationality, then, can be seen as a fabrication, created by nationalists to justify statehood.¹³² Having said that, Eritrea has built its national identity upon its culture and history. The history is about the stance of Eritrean people against the colonizers.

Furthermore, solidarity was essential in nation building and during and after the war with Ethiopia in particular. Ethnic identity, which was highlighted by the Ethiopian state, was a significant factor in Eritrean nationalism. Thus, against the imperial rule, Eritrean nationalism

¹²⁹ Haile, "The Origins and Demise of the Ethiopia-Eritrea Federation", 9–16.

¹³⁰ Mursel Bayram, "The Fact and Fiction in Eritrea's Middle East Policy", *International Journal of African and Asian Studies* 43 (2018), 68.

¹³¹ Bozic-Roberson, *The Politicization of Ethnicity as a Prelude to Ethnopolitical Conflict*, 40.

¹³² Parsneau, *Ethnic conflict in theory and ethnic nationalism among the Kurdish people in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey*, 76.

has emerged as a reaction of the Ethiopian policies. Following the annexation, various ethnic groups came together under the same roof for a shared goal against Ethiopian rulers. The Ethiopian hegemony served as a uniting force among the Eritreans. However, after its independence, due to the border war with Ethiopia, Eritrea's nationalist course kind of morphed into an expansionist one. So, we can say that the course of nationalism was shaped depending on the historical context for Eritrea.

Against the Derg regime, TPLF and Eritrean liberation movements developed close military relations. In return of the assistance provided by the Eritreans, TPLF had to accept that Eritrea was a colony and would support its secession from Ethiopia. Due to the territorial interpretation of ELF for Eritrea went beyond the colonial borders, and its relations with the rival fractions of TPLF, Tigrayan rebels got closer with EPLF. At the end of the 1980s, military and political cooperation ended due to different approaches of the two allies. There was only one goal to keep both engaged, ousting the Derg regime. While Eritreans were fighting for their independence, TPLF's goal was ensuring self-determination. Political differences between these two organizations shaped the course of the actions taken in the following years ahead. For example, EPLF was not in favor of the idea that the right of self-determination should be applied for Eritrea's plural society.¹³³ Both organizations were on the same side in terms of achieving self-determination for their peoples. However, they had different understanding about the application of this concept for their respective communities. EPLF's interpretation was more about independence from Ethiopia, rather than securing the right to self-determination for its peoples. This was due to the concerns of Eritrean leadership about the potential unrest that could be caused if self-determination was applied for the multiethnic population in Eritrea.

Even after the demise of the Derg regime, the unrest among the ethnic groups in Ethiopia went on. In addition, Tigrayan and Oromo elites were perturbed by the independence of Eritrea. The Amhara was disturbed by the fact that they were no longer associated with a united Ethiopia due to independence of Eritrea and ethnic federalism in the country, as well as the claims of other nationalities regarding the Amhara being oppressor in the past.

Regarding the Eritrean independence, some of the views on the decision of the EDRDF on the recognition of Eritrea's independence focus on the power relations too. For those, EPRDF adopted such a position not because they owed it to the Eritreans but rather to prevent any rivalries or conflicts after the victory against the Derg. These opinions are based on the fact that challenging with EPLF, which was the strongest movement against the overthrown regime,

¹³³ Young, "The Tigray and Eritrean Peoples Liberation Fronts: A History of Tensions and Pragmatism", 105–119.

would not be a smart decision. The policy makers in the EPRDF would not want to compete with EPLF for power in Ethiopian politics.¹³⁴

3.3.Eritrea's Odyssey: Navigating Conflict and Peace

As discussed earlier, identity within a group can be reinforced by external factors. For Eritrea, decades long conflict with Ethiopia shaped this identity together with the otherization by the Ethiopians. Otherization of the Eritreans in Ethiopia, be it during the imperial rule or after the border war, served as ethicizing these people. This development was the proof of Ethiopians accepting the Eritreans as a distinct identity. Even though in such a way, being recognized by the Ethiopians paved the way for a fostered Eritrean identity.¹³⁵ The struggle for independence, by shared resistance, pain, losses, sacrifice, and determination created and amplified the solidarity among Eritreans. So, Eritreans were united around common cause leaving behind any kinds of differences. Since Ethiopia adopted ethnic federalism as a way of rule in the country, some may think that Eritrea has no exemption on this policy. Even after the independence and post border war era, the memory of national struggle has been in the center of Eritrean politics.

Until the border war in 1998, two countries had close relations in economic, security and cultural areas. Thousands of Ethiopians were employed in Eritrea and many Eritreans were working in Ethiopia.¹³⁶ During this period, both countries enjoyed close cooperation in various areas. In terms of security, they cooperated in Somalia. In the economic field, there was strong interdependence due to the ports of Eritrea which were crucial for landlocked Ethiopia, as well as high number of Eritrean and Ethiopian employees working in both countries. However, this course was about to change later. Many Eritreans used to work in various parts of Ethiopia as businessmen, teachers or technicians. However, not all Eritreans were satisfied with the current status. Therefore, some of them joined ELF forces by fleeing abroad.¹³⁷

Furthermore, after the independence of Eritrea, there was no border demarcation between the two countries. Therefore, there was contention about the territories around the disputed town of Badme, which belonged Eritrea. Moreover, economic disagreements and political

¹³⁴ Lester R. Kurtz, *Prevention of Violent Conflict by Structural Accommodation*, *Encyclopedia of violence, peace, & conflict* (Amsterdam, London: Elsevier, 2008).

¹³⁵ Hepner, "Pride, Prejudice and the Ethnicization of the Eritrean Nation", 98–100.

¹³⁶ Eritrea Ministry Of Information, "Eritrea and Ethiopia: Hopes for Peace and Progress" (Access October 11, 2023).

¹³⁷ Paul B. Henze, "Ethiopia", *The Wilson Quarterly* 8/5 (1984), 118.

differences increased the tension. For example, Eritrea started using its own currency as part of its sovereignty policies, and this was not welcomed by Ethiopia. In 1998, the border dispute escalated into a full-scale war. Hundreds of thousands of people were killed and many more were replaced. The war ended in 2000 with the Algiers Agreement. To limit and demarcate the border, the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) was formed. The EEBC awarded Badme to Eritrea in 2002. However, as Ethiopian leadership refused to apply the decision, the border dispute continued for many years.

Following the border war, thousands of Eritreans were deported from Ethiopia. According to some media sources and deported Eritreans, the issue was not about the territory but about the Eritreans. It seemed for the Ethiopians, who were disturbed by the socio-economic status of the Eritreans in the country. For some, the border war created the excuse for the Ethiopian rulers to ethnically cleanse the Eritreans from Ethiopian soil. We also see the attitude of the two nations, the Ethiopians and the Eritreans towards each other. This attitude can be seen as a factor for the otherness and building identity, or even bolstering it. During the border war between the two countries, some interviews of the prominent Ethiopian and Eritrean politicians prove it. For instance, the Ethiopians describe Eritreans as people who think and behave as if they are superior to Ethiopians, pointing upon the colonial past of Eritrea while expressing pride for not being a colony ever in the history. On the other side, Eritrean side claimed that the Ethiopians are accusing the Eritreans of being arrogant and see Ethiopians as inferiors.¹³⁸

Apart from the distancing behaviors, we cannot overlook the fact that the peoples of both countries sometimes may share sentimental feelings towards each other. Regarding this, Tronvoll argues that political, economic, and cultural manifestations and territorial boundaries can be perceived differently according to context. To him, contrary to the abovementioned opinions of people from inlands, highlander communities approach the issue differently. People from these regions had brotherly feelings for the ones living other side of the border. On the other side, despite the feelings, perceptions may change due to their layers of identity. Because the understanding of border is interconnected with the layered nature of identity for the said communities. These layers of identity start from families and kins, and goes up to the levels of communities, ethnic groups and finally nations while the sense of belonging expands.¹³⁹ Within this structure, the sociopolitical hierarchy exists. It means that people may accept the arguments of the higher authorities without questioning in times of contestations. This hierarchical

¹³⁸ Hepner, "Pride, Prejudice and the Ethnicization of the Eritrean Nation", 93.

¹³⁹ Kjetil Tronvoll, "'Brothers at Peace': People-to-People Reconciliation in the Ethiopian-Eritrean Borderlands", *War & Society* 39/1 (2020), 60.

obedience is a major determinant in territorial conflicts. Because the border communities align themselves based on the developments during such disputes.

Lastly, Tronvoll posits that the elites can exploit identity categories to mobilize crowds for their political goals, as Tesfaye and Gebrehivot¹⁴⁰ endorse the same opinion. We will elaborate on this issue in the upcoming section on the steps taken by Tigrayan, Eritrean and Oromo elites in regional national and international levels.

Since deportations and war are seen as the results, or origins at times, of the differences of both peoples, some may argue that the peace could also depend on the shared values and similarities, rather than focusing on the factors that tore these two nations apart. However, despite their common history, culture, or shared territories, the geopolitical complexities and power dynamics shaped the relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Therefore, for the case of Eritrea, we can state that the problem was rather related to the power politics.

¹⁴⁰ Mitiku Gabrehiwot Tesfaye – Mahlet Alemu Gebrehiwot, “A “party” at the border: An anthropological take on the Ethio-Eritrean peace deal of 2018”, *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 7/1 (2020), 6.

CHAPTER 4: PEACE PROSPECTS

After the period of ethnic unrest from 2015 to 2018 in Ethiopia, the TPLF-led EPRDF had to be sidelined mainly by the Oromo opposition. In 2018, TPLF member Hailemariam Desalegn resigned from Prime Ministry. Later that year Abiy Ahmed was chosen as the Chairman of the EPRDF, as the first Oromo person who held this position, and he assumed his duties as the new Prime Minister of Ethiopia.

After this development, a radical shift was seen on Ethiopian domestic and international policy. The new government tried to address the long-lasting ethnic disputes by liberalist steps. Release of the political prisoners, rapprochement messages between the government and the opposition, which was declared illegal throughout the years, and ensuring better conditions for freedom of press were some of these steps taken in domestic politics.

Along with these, Ethiopia's foreign policy also took its fair share. Abiy Ahmed declared that Ethiopia would accept the EEPC decision on the disputed border with Eritrea. This brought winds of change towards a new era of peace and blossomed hopes among the peoples of Ethiopia and Eritrea. Following Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's paroles and peace messages, on 9 July 2018, in Asmara, Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship between Eritrea and Ethiopia was signed by the leaders of both countries and a new period of peace has started.

4.1. Peace Deal with Eritrea

After the declaration on June 2018 by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed on Ethiopia's will to implement the EEBC decision Eritrean authorities welcomed this development. Eritrean Ministry of Information announced that this decision, which was refused by the TPLF throughout the years, was the key factor in bilateral relations. It should be also highlighted that Eritrean authorities consider this policy change in Ethiopia as a result of elimination of TPLF leadership. So, one can assert that the rapprochement between the two countries and conditions for peace were linked with TPLF's dominance in Ethiopia's politics.

We can see that from the articles published by the Eritrean Ministry of Information which stress that since TPLF is ousted, there would not be contention between Ethiopia and Eritrea.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Eritrea Ministry of Information, "Improvement in Eritrea-Ethiopia Relations and the Way Forward" (Access October 8, 2023).

According to the Joint Declaration, besides the message of peace, two states agreed to have close cooperation in the fields of politics, security, economy, social and culture¹⁴². Moreover, they shared their wills to resume diplomatic relations, trade and transportation links, as well as communication channels. The implementation of the decision of the border commission was also one of the main pillars of the Declaration. On the other side, there have been concerns over the implementation of the Agreement signed in 2018, due to the questions about the ideological disparity between two countries -Eritrea adopts socialist ideology while Ethiopia has been pursuing neoliberal policies since 2018. Moreover, for some, the peace deal is elite-driven, which undermines its sustainability. And lastly, the TPLF is seen by Eritreans as a disruptive factor on the relations with Ethiopia.¹⁴³

Following the declaration, two countries signed an Agreement on Peace, Friendship and Comprehensive Cooperation in September 2018.¹⁴⁴ These steps of the Ethiopian government were welcomed by international community. And, thanks to his efforts on peace, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed was nominated and awarded Nobel Peace Prize 2019. However, Asiedu counters the argument that the peace deal was a result of Abiy Ahmed's efforts alone. He asserts that joint efforts of regional and international organizations, and the diplomatic community contributed to the process; albeit Abiy Ahmed's unique characteristics played a part. Asiedu also maintains that without diplomatic efforts, we would not see the same results.¹⁴⁵

The rapprochement and developments of peace are typical examples on Galtung's positive peace to create social justice and equitable societies¹⁴⁶. Addressing the root causes of Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict formed a milestone towards positive peace as he defines. Acknowledgement of the EEPC decision and pursuing close cooperation were critical steps toward addressing the structural problems that fueled conflict.

The common will of two countries in cooperation in the fields of politics, security, commerce, and culture; as well as resumption of diplomatic relations were clear proofs of reconciliation efforts which would serve for mutual understanding and respect. And finally, this would also eliminate perceived cultural violence of the Ethiopian side.

¹⁴² One Earth Future Foundation, "Ethiopia-Eritrea Rapprochement and the Economic Dynamics of the Horn of Africa" (December 2018).

¹⁴³ Amare K. Aweke – Mohammed Seid, "The Ethiopia–Eritrea rapprochement: highly personalised and less-institutionalised initiative", *Third World Quarterly* 44/4 (2023), 769–770.

¹⁴⁴ Eritrea Ministry of Information, "Improvement in Eritrea-Ethiopia Relations and the Way Forward".

¹⁴⁵ Michael Asiedu, *Diplomacy, The Eritrea-Ethiopia Peace Deal and Its Implications* (Global Political Trends Center, 2019).

¹⁴⁶ Webel - Galtung, *Handbook of peace and conflict studies*, 7–8.

Moreover, according to Webel's dialectical evolution of means and goals in the process of peace, the means could be identified as the shift in Ethiopian foreign policy and its willingness to implement the decision of the border commission while the goal is sustainable peace and cooperation. Here, both goals and means interact dynamically and constitute parts of a process of change and adaptation.

In addition, it was explained in the previous parts of the study that the peace is affected by human actions. This aspect was described as the terrestrial creation of peace. We have seen that political decisions and human agency were crucial factors in forming the geopolitical structure of the region. In this vein, the said joint efforts of Ethiopia and Eritrea in the process of reconciliation and peace align with this terrestrial creation.

Besides, developing trust and confidence by building relationships with adversaries is a critical element in the process of securing peace. It is not an easy task. However, as Lederach highlighted, for sustainable peace, the quality and the nature of relationships especially with the most feared party in a conflict is decisive in addressing historical contentions¹⁴⁷. Both countries had concerns over the control of power and resources, maintaining the favorable dimensions of status quo, and existential fears. Elimination of these factors impact positively in the peace agenda.

Following the discussions above, it is essential to recognize that journey of peace is a complex and intricate process. While signs of mutual respect and will of collaboration outlined earlier pose positive turning points, once we examine specific incidents deeper, the fragility of peace process apparently shows itself. The said incidents include conflicts in Tigray and Afar regions, as well as Eritrea's stance over the developments which unraveled tensions in the region. Therefore, understanding these complexities is imperative for a detailed analysis of the delicate balance between peace and conflict in the region.

4.1.1. Unraveling Tensions: TPLF's Actions and the Conflict with the Federal Forces

The peace deal between the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments was a significant step towards stability in both countries and in the region. However, sidelined TPLF was not delighted by these developments. TPLF and Eritrean authorities shared same sentiments towards each other. Regarding the border war, President Afewerki of Eritrea mentioned that it

¹⁴⁷ Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, 60–63.

was not the Tigrayan people who sought war against Eritrea. He states that the reason behind the war was the aspirations of TPLF, mainly of the leadership. According to him, TPLF spared no efforts to destroy the peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea too, since it considered this development as a great threat and started the offensive against the Northern Command Post.¹⁴⁸ Besides the change of power in Ethiopia in favor of the Oromo, TPLF felt sidelined during and after the peace deal between Ethiopia and Eritrea. This incited the existential fears of the Tigrayan elites.

First, the TPLF perceived threats by the newly formed government and its policies. Then, rejected to join the new formation replacing the EPRDF.¹⁴⁹ Later, Ethiopian government postponed the general elections in the country which was supposed to be held in August 2020 due to pandemic. However, TPLF was against this decision, and it held the regional elections in September 2020. Federal government stated that it will not recognize the results and that the elections were illegal. Later, the budget support to Tigray region was suspended. Demonizing the EPRDF era, in particular the acts of TPLF, caused distressing relations between the TPLF and the new administration. Therefore, the situation is exploited by the TPLF leadership to mobilize the mass in Tigray region against a new enemy.¹⁵⁰

Amidst these developments, on 3 November 2020, military forces of TPLF carried out an operation against the Northern Command Headquarters of the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF). The said command was the biggest arsenal of the ENDF, once fortified against the Eritreans. The Federal government retaliated the attacks of the TPLF. Federal forces and regional ones including Amharan Special Forces were deployed against the TPLF and a new conflict started. After shelling from Tigray region to Eritrean territories, Eritrean troops were also deployed in Ethiopian territories to fight against TPLF forces.

Moreover, rising Amhara nationalism paved the way to annex Tigrayan territories. It was more about the occupation of a disputed land rather than the legitimacy of the Amharan aspirations, to seize those lands taking the opportunity of the federal intervention.¹⁵¹ The TPLF-ENDF conflict claimed the lives of over a half million people and humanitarian crisis over the conflict zone. However, two years after the start of the conflict, both sides agreed on a peace deal on November 2020.

¹⁴⁸ Eritrea Ministry of Information, “Interview with President Isaias Afwerki – Part II” (Access October 8, 2023).

¹⁴⁹ Michelle Gavin, *The Conflict in Ethiopia’s Tigray Region: What to Know* (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021).

¹⁵⁰ Yusuf, *Drivers of ethnic conflict in contemporary Ethiopia*, 14.

¹⁵¹ Moges Zewdu Teshome, “We must end the civil war to save Ethiopia - Ethiopia Insight” (Access October 20, 2021).

According to author's observations, Ethiopian nationals, including journalists and members of press and some diplomats agree that the conflict between the TPLF and federal forces erupted due to the aspiration of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to end the TPLF dominance in Ethiopian politics. TPLF defiance against Abiy Ahmed's rule was another factor to this end.

4.2.Eritrea's role in the Tigray and Amhara Conflicts

4.2.1. The Tigray Conflict

To Eritrean authorities, TPLF is considered as an existential threat due to its expansionist agenda against Eritrea including gathering power within Ethiopia and seizing Eritrean territories. In this vein, Eritrean administration claims that TPLF have pursued a motive for almost three decades during its rule in Ethiopia, to expand the lands of Tigray region by gaining some territories from Eritrea. Besides that, it was alleged that in the case of losing its hegemony in Ethiopian politics, military and economy, TPLF's backup plan entailed seizure of Eritrean territories to initiate Greater Tigray¹⁵² according to the 1976 manifesto which was considered by some as one of the reasons behind the Tigrayans reluctance in supporting Abiy Ahmed's peace plan.¹⁵³ Therefore, President Afewerki's apparent goal has been elimination of TPLF.¹⁵⁴

In this framework, Eritrea supported Ethiopian forces against TPLF forces in Tigray conflict. This step can be considered as a strategic move to neutralize the TPLF militia which has posed a threat since Eritrea's independence.

Based on the observations of the author, for Ethiopians, despite the military cooperation against TPLF, Eritrean leadership has concerns about the peace deal between the TPLF and federal government. Therefore, it was claimed that the Eritrean government backs ethnically motivated Amharan Fano forces despite the denial by its authorities. Since Ethiopian government aims at disarming regional special forces of Amhara, and limit the Amharan community within Ethiopia and abroad, which supports Fano forces, Abiy Ahmed has concerns about the capabilities and aspirations of the Amhara. Hence, any support to Fano could be considered as an act against the current Oromo dominated Ethiopian federal government.

As the complexities of the conflict in Tigray is navigated above, the intricate status of alliances and suspicions that root in fear emerge as crucial factors in the delicate dynamics in

¹⁵² Eritrea Ministry of Information, "TPLF's War of Insurrection: Fundamentals of the Conflict and Chronology of Events" (Access October 10, 2023).

¹⁵³ Addis et al., "The recent political situation in Ethiopia and rapprochement with Eritrea*", 114.

¹⁵⁴ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, *Red Lines* (2021).

the region. Therefore, it is critical to explore the web of alliances in ethno-political fields. Thus, we must have a glance on the Amhara conflict, too.

4.2.2. Amhara Conflict

There was a wartime coalition between the Amhara, Eritrean and the federal forces against the TPLF since 2020. However, following the peace agreement in 2022, many Amhara fought alongside the federal forces against TPLF have been alienated and Eritrea was kind of sidelined. The Amhara felt betrayed as Abiy Ahmed was accused of handing of the disputed territories they seized from the TPLF.¹⁵⁵ Because Amhara elites expected some concessions in exchange for their support for the government during the war in Tigray. Eritrea was vaguely displeased by the Tigray peace talks which both the Amhara region and Eritreans did not participate. Finally, another conflict emerged as Amhara forces refused to disband after the Tigray deal, and joined the rebel militia, known as Fano.¹⁵⁶

4.3. Sovereignty at Sea: Ethiopia's Existential Quest Amid Regional Turbulence

In the Horn of Africa, as usual, the geopolitical landscapes keep evolving. For the landlocked Ethiopia, the significance of the access to sea has been vital since the country lost its access following the border conflict with Eritrea. Consequently, and ironically, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed underscored the importance of the sea access for Ethiopia's national security in July 2023. Prime Minister underlined that his country is world's most populated landlocked country with 125 million people. He also gave reference to the Ethiopian emperors that they prioritized access to the sea. Moreover, there have been rumors that he stated in a private meeting that if not by peaceful means, Ethiopia would consider use of force for getting a port.¹⁵⁷

The Assab Port of Eritrea in the Red Sea is in the epicenter of this geopolitical equilibrium. After the closure of border between two countries, Ethiopia navigated solutions for the loss of sea access and directed its trade route to the ports of Djibouti, where 97 percent of Ethiopia's

¹⁵⁵ Clionadh Raleigh – Braden Fuller, *Ten Conflicts to Worry About in 2021* (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, 2021).

¹⁵⁶ International Crisis Group, *Ethiopia's Ominous New War in Amhara* (International Crisis Group, 16 October 2023).

¹⁵⁷ Alex de Waal, "Ethiopia PM Abiy Ahmed eyes Red Sea port, inflaming tensions", *BBC News* (October 8, 2023).

imports are made.¹⁵⁸ However, despite the practicalities of the new route with the logistic advantages and their feasibility, Djibouti ports are not Ethiopian territory either, and this means that Ethiopia's ambitions highlight the questions of security and sovereignty.

There are also arguments that Abiy Ahmed's words were not only related to the ambition of Ethiopia to reach the Red Sea directly. They were rather a reaction to the claimed involvement of Eritreans into the conflict between Amhara regional state, Fano militia in particular, and the federal state forces. There have been allegations by a prominent Prosperity Party activist, Seyoum Teshome, in social media and national television channels that Eritrea provided military training and support to Amharan Fano rebels, and despite repeated warnings, since Eritrea did not stop the alleged support, Ethiopia threatened its neighbor¹⁵⁹. Arguments stress that Eritrea's interference to internal affairs of Ethiopia, and any support to the rebel or opposition movements justify possible steps of Ethiopia in gaining control over the Assab port by a false flag operation. According to Teshome, due to the failed attempts to make President Afewerki stop destabilizing the country, Ethiopian government welcomed Brigade Nhamedu, Eritrean/Tigrayan opposition, at a military camp in Adigrat. He adds that there are 300 thousand Eritreans in Ethiopia to be armed and used against Eritrea (around 150 thousand of the 600 thousand Eritrean refugees worldwide were registered in Ethiopia by April 2020¹⁶⁰), and, once Eritrea reacts to the developments in Adigrat, a war will start, and it will be the opportunity for Ethiopia for seizing Assab.

One may think that Ethiopian Prime Minister came up with this idea to distract people from the losses of Ethiopian federal forces in Amhara region. Additionally, the idea of seizing Assab could galvanize people around Abiy Ahmed for a purpose. However, it does not seem easy as Ethiopia is facing instabilities in Tigray, Amhara and Oromia. As Ethiopia buys more weapons, we can expect other neighbors to follow, too. And, while the beats of war drums are heard in the region, there is still a possibility of even a small incident to ignite another war.

¹⁵⁸ One Earth Future Foundation, "Ethiopia-Eritrea Rapprochement and the Economic Dynamics of the Horn of Africa".

¹⁵⁹ Twitter, "How a war between Ethiopia and Eritrea will breakout according to the prominent Prosperity Party activist Seyoum Teshome Some will say Seyoum Teshome is just a YouTube activist who can't be taken seriously, but this is far from the truth. Seyoum is a PP cadre who makes frequent... <https://t.co/N9EP8JLfrN>" / X" (Access November 3, 2023).

¹⁶⁰ Tekalign Ayalew Mengiste – Hans Lucht, *Peace and Plight* (Danish Institute for International Studies, 2020).

CONCLUSION

As the intricate tapestry of bilateral relations of both countries is woven with geopolitical, historical and cultural threads, their interaction has been defined by a complex pattern that is affected by the said threads. This research has covered chapters delving into the complex relationship within ethnic communities, and with the ruling groups in Ethiopia through decades. Moreover, regarding the Eritrean aspect, this study examined the colonial legacy, the formation of the Eritrean identity, the independence pursuit, and the eventual peace prospects. Based on the theories and perspectives presented in the text, it is possible to distill some key insights.

In imperial Ethiopia, under the rule of Emperor Haile Selassie, as the ruling elite of the Amhara tried to forge a national identity throughout the country by suppressing the other ethnic groups, and imposition of Amharic as official language together with the efforts on dominating and assimilating the non-Amharans, paved the way to the reactions against the ruling elite.¹⁶¹ Core and periphery relations are visible in this matter. As the core imposes its identity as superior, it causes solidarity among the peripheral communities.¹⁶²

Similarly, the Derg regime exercised unitary policies as their predecessors, which furthered the marginalization of ethnic groups that considered the state policies against their identities, attempting to build their own nations.¹⁶³ According to constructivists and ethno-symbolists, attempts of imposing homogeneous identity is the cause of conflict.¹⁶⁴ In this vein, the struggle against the Derg, especially by the TPLF is a good example of groups seeking ethnic recognition in a diverse national framework.

With regard to the EPRDF and its policies of ethnic federalism, the attempts to address the historical and ethnic grievances, the rulers aimed at recognizing diverse ethnic identities by distributing authorities to ethnic groups based on territory.¹⁶⁵ As distribution of authority caused regional rivalries and ethnic polarization,¹⁶⁶ inevitably, these policies led to fostering of identity politics within those territories and contributed to ethnic tensions as seen in the Oromo,

¹⁶¹ Abraham, "Ethnicity and Dilemmas of State Making: Ethnic Federalism and Institutional Reforms in Ethiopia", 88.

¹⁶² Parsneau, *Ethnic conflict in theory and ethnic nationalism among the Kurdish people in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey*, 19–26.

¹⁶³ Yusuf, *Drivers of ethnic conflict in contemporary Ethiopia*, 7–12.

¹⁶⁴ Parsneau, *Ethnic conflict in theory and ethnic nationalism among the Kurdish people in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey*, 80–87.

¹⁶⁵ Mengisteab, "Ethiopia's Ethnic-Based Federalism: 10 Years after", 20–24.

¹⁶⁶ Pieterse, "Ethnicities and multiculturalisms: politics of boundaries", 39–40.

Amhara, Tigray and other regions resulting government change until 2018 and having their effects even beyond.

During the almost three decades of EPRDF rule which was dominated by the TPLF elites, Ethiopia witnesses unequal distribution of resources and power as the TPLF occupied most critical places for their members. Eventually, the other ethnic groups, Oromo and the Amhara in particular, expressed their discontent due to effects of core-periphery relations as part of the internal colonialism and diffusion model discussions by Hechter¹⁶⁷ and Nairn.¹⁶⁸ Besides, as for constructivists claim that conflict is a result of the incompatibilities between the ruling ethnic group and the others, the oppressed groups tend to defend their rights and identities against the TPLF clique. This is in line with Anderson's suggestion, as other constructivists, that ethnic conflict emerges due to the incompatibilities between the dominant and the oppressed groups, originating from the alienation of the others.¹⁶⁹ Therefore, as a result of the reactions of the oppressed ethnic groups in Ethiopia against the TPLF-led EPRDF regime, ethnic unrest started in 2014 and intensified in 2015 throughout the country.¹⁷⁰ Inequality between the ethnic groups in political, economic and social frameworks ignited the anti-government protests all around the country.¹⁷¹

Following the inability of the EPRDF to address the causes of spreading protests, Prime Minister Desalegn stepped back and Oromo origin Abiy Ahmed took over Prime Ministry in 2018. This pivotal moment of shift in policies reflects the focus of Abiy Ahmed on keeping the power and maintaining ethnic identity through the power dynamics as Hobsbawm¹⁷² argues, by eliminating the others, as in the examples of foundation of the Prosperity Party and the otherization of the TPLF, especially through the peace deal with Eritrea. Additionally, Abiy Ahmed's efforts in reconciliation to address ethnic problems, encouraging press freedom, and release of political prisoners resonate with Galtung's positive peace concept,¹⁷³ as the policies focused on structural changes to address the root causes of conflict.¹⁷⁴

Furthermore, ethnic conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and, among the other ethnic groups in Ethiopia have roots in constructed identities, as is the case for Amhara and Tigray.

¹⁶⁷ Hechter, *Internal Colonialism*, 6–11.

¹⁶⁸ Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain*, 65.

¹⁶⁹ Parsneau, *Ethnic conflict in theory and ethnic nationalism among the Kurdish people in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey*, 7.

¹⁷⁰ Faleg, *Resetting Ethiopia: Will the state heal or fail?*, 2.

¹⁷¹ Addis et al., "The recent political situation in Ethiopia and rapprochement with Eritrea*", 105.

¹⁷² Hobsbawm – Ranger, *The invention of tradition*, 212–262.

¹⁷³ Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research", 167–191.

¹⁷⁴ Webel - Galtung, *Handbook of peace and conflict studies*, 7,8.

Inequal distribution of power¹⁷⁵ in politics, economy, and other areas in Ethiopia, during Ethiopia-Eritrea Federation; including suppression of Eritreans and other ethnic groups in Ethiopia; gaining more power or territory which created fault-lines between Ethiopian and Eritrean rebels all reflect the constructed nature of these identities, leading to ethnic conflict which later turned into a nationalist movement.

Regarding the historical context in Eritrea, the processes of domination, frustration, otherization and struggle for independence should not be directly linked with the ethnicity or the ethnic structure of Eritrea. It is rather about the reaction against the colonizers and the right to self-determination. This was also confirmed by the experience and observations of the author. However, Eritreans were ethnicized by the policies of the Ethiopian ruling elite. One can assert that the said processes are products of the ethnically motivated policies of the Ethiopian rulers, as well as the results of the behaviors of the ethnic elites for their control over sources, political advantages and power. TPLF is a good example in this matter since it enjoyed the alliance of ELF and EPLF during the rebellion against the Derg. However, once the conditions shift, the alliances and priorities changed¹⁷⁶.

Moreover, the border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea has instrumentalist roots too. The economic and political relations after the independence of Eritrea, and its steps for more sovereignty, as well as the territorial control over Badme region and the access to the Red Sea were the drivers of the conflict motivation. So, this conflict was not over the independence of Eritrea but rather related to the disagreements between the ruling elites of both sides.

We can see the peace deal between both countries in this perspective as well. Abiy Ahmed administration was motivated for political gains over TPLF dominance and for economic reasons to benefit from the ports of Eritrea. On the other side, access to sea is a critical agenda item for Ethiopia since it became landlocked after independence of Eritrea. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's rapprochement efforts with Eritrea and initiatives with neighboring countries that has sea access are results of Ethiopia's geopolitical desires.¹⁷⁷

The impact of instrumentalist and constructivist motives is seen in TPLF-ENDF war too. The parties have conflicting interests either for gaining more dominance in politics or resources, or for not losing the current status quo which is in their favor. The same argument apply for the 2015-2018 conflicts in Ethiopia as well. All these components of the said situation are

¹⁷⁵ Hechter, *Internal Colonialism*, 6–11.

¹⁷⁶ Young, “The Tigray and Eritrean Peoples Liberation Fronts: A History of Tensions and Pragmatism”, 105–119.

¹⁷⁷ Osman Kağan Yucel, “Afrika Boynuzu'nun Hegemon Devleti: Etiyopya”, *Doğu Afrika'da Siyaset ve Diplomasi*, ed. Mursel Bayram (Çizgi, 2023), 51.

considered as root causes of conflict by Lederach.¹⁷⁸ Additionally, TPLF's reaction to the peace deal with Eritrea is also a reflection of Hobsbawm's approach illustrating how changes in power dynamics¹⁷⁹ trigger resistance, as the said peace ignited the existential fears of the Tigrayan elites.¹⁸⁰ It also mirrors ethno-symbolist views that emphasize the endurance of historical contentions.

Regarding the regional conflicts in Ethiopia, it is worth to mention that first TPLF was on the forefront of the conflict with Eritrea. Then, after the peace deal, once the Tigray war erupted between TPLF forces and the federal army, Eritrea sided with Ethiopia. Amharan forces were also on the sidelines of the federal ones. However, we also witnessed the confrontation of Amhara forces and Fano militia against the federal government since April 2023.

About the Eritrean interference on the Tigray conflict, the driving force for Eritrea's involvement was its strategic interests which were aligned with Ethiopia's. Furthermore, both governments shared the same rivalry: TPLF dominance. However, strategic calculations of Eritrea focused on elimination of TPLF threat and ensuring regional stability. We can add to this list the existential fears of both Eritrean and TPLF elites too.

As the Ethiopian government experienced the bitter taste of military-only response to Tigray crisis, it is expected to be more careful with the Amhara conflict. However, since the start of the problem, Abiy Ahmed followed a policy to suppress the Amhara using force. Although the Amhara elite supported him for his efforts in ending the Tigray dominance, the recent developments frustrated them. Thus, a holistic approach to end grievances and discontent would serve better for the resolution of the conflict as high-ranking government officials with Amhara origin suggest.

In addition, the developments stated above are the clear examples of the fluidity and instrumental use of ethnicity. We have explored the changing allegiances and adaptability of ethnic identities when there are changes in the circumstances. The change in the status relations between the EPLF and TPLF after their victory over the Ethiopian military junta sets another example on adaptability. Additionally, we have seen that ethnicity is used deliberately for strategic goals by the political leaders by manipulating ethnic identities to divert attention, consolidate more power or mobilize stronger support.¹⁸¹ As explained earlier, Abiy Ahmed's words regarding the seaports are claimed to be for the said goals.

¹⁷⁸ Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, 60–63.

¹⁷⁹ Hobsbawm – Ranger, *The invention of tradition*, 212–262.

¹⁸⁰ Moges Zewdu Teshome, “We must end the civil war to save Ethiopia - Ethiopia Insight”.

¹⁸¹ Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 84.

Besides the cases of ethnicity above, another factor shaping the process of peace and trigger conflict is nationalism. It is something constructed or imagined based on common history, memories, and shared background¹⁸². These shared experiences on the way to independence contributed to the collective sense or nationhood in Eritrea. The struggle for independence and the border war enhanced a distinct identity among the Eritreans.

Finally, we can claim that the aspirations for power, resources and fight over political dominance shaped the Ethiopian domestic policy, and its relations with Eritrea through years. Though, for Eritrea, the politics were mainly shaped by the external powers such as Ethiopian colonizers and their successors. So, masses were mobilized and centered around a unifying identity, which developed Eritrean nationalism.¹⁸³

Furthermore, among the geopolitical complications in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia and Eritrea pose an important example for the intricate interplay of regional players, changing historical discourse, and diplomatic efforts. Therefore, geopolitical considerations take center stage with regard to Ethiopia's ambition for sea access. Abiy Ahmed's emphasis on Ethiopia's aspiration to sea access resonates with desires for economic prosperity and national security as Red Sea has its significance throughout the history.¹⁸⁴ Within this framework, one can claim that sustainable peace necessitates deep-rooted historical contentions to be addressed besides diplomatic efforts. The complex layers of power relations, identity, and geopolitical aspirations must be carefully navigated for sustainable peace and stability.

Besides, as the insights gathered from this study are observed, we must acknowledge the limitations of the research with its multifaceted subject matter. The scarcity of the varied and comprehensive sources was the greatest challenge. The lack of sources underscores the need for intensified academic attention to these key geopolitical events. The repetitive information among the available sources and the recurrent nature of the narratives indicates another limitation pointing at the need for an increase in marginally planned views to provide more holistic understanding of the realities evolving the region.

While a snapshot of the relationship between peace and conflict, with the ethnicity and nationality within a specific timeframe is provided with this study, it is important to have persistent examination of the evolving narrative as the progressive nature of geopolitical demands.

¹⁸² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

¹⁸³ Parsneau, *Ethnic conflict in theory and ethnic nationalism among the Kurdish people in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey*, 76.

¹⁸⁴ Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics*, 98–184.

To keep the analyses relevant in the face of dynamic developments, it is necessary to revisit this unfolded tapestry.

In terms of its contribution to the existing literature, at first, we can highlight that in navigating the complicated domain of peace and conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, this study explored broader implications for regional stability, future track of political relations, and identity dynamics besides examining and analyzing diplomatic maneuvers. By delving into the insights of the peace deal, and using a multifaceted view, the study brings a new layer to the literature, too. It also provides deeper understanding on the complexities of peace and security while presenting a holistic comprehension of the geopolitical terrain of the region by dissecting the dynamics of ethnicity, evaluating the role of geopolitical theories to interpret conflicts, and underlining the interrelation between peace, ethnicity and geopolitics. Integrating these three layers within the Ethiopia-Eritrea cases serves as a bridge connecting boundaries of disciplines. This interdisciplinary nature of the study provides richer tapestry for the ones interested in peace research, international studies and ethnic research.

This study also offers a comparative perspective with a synthesis of local and global dynamics, by recognizing the importance of the grassroots experience of the individuals and their ethnic groups, local and national narratives, and international discourse on the peace deal. Regarding the existing literature, many aspects of prevalent narratives, including the complexities of ethnic dynamics, influence of geopolitical theories, and the role of diplomacy are reaffirmed by this research, too.

To sum up, a more holistic approach on the peace and conflict in the Horn of Africa, between Ethiopia and Eritrea in particular, is presented in this study. Fluid ethnicities with changing alliances, constructed identities and the role of nationalism contribute to a narrative going beyond geopolitical arrangements. Given the complexity of the interplay of identity, history and power relations, this study presents a subtle perspective in which the interested parties can explore the sophisticated dynamics in the Horn of Africa.

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