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An Ethiopian Anarchist Perspective on the War in Tigray

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Horn Anarchists

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An interview from The Final Straw Radio with Anner, an Ethiopian member of Horn Anarchists, an anarchist group based in east Africa. Anner talks about the group, the history of post-Junta Ethiopia, the context of the ongoing armed conflict in Tigray, the fighting factions and the displacement and violence suffered by residents of the region. Content warning: this article contains a discussion of sexual violence in the conflict.

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TFSR: Would you please introduce yourself, if you'd like, and tell us a bit about Horn Anarchists as a collective project? What are your shared values? What do you do? Where are you based, and how long have you been around?

Anner: I go by the name Anner and I use she/her pronouns. Horn Anarchists as a collective project started about a year ago with the aim of disseminating anarchist ideas and values and the politics of the Horn. Individually, we were engaged in different anti-fascist, feminist, labor, and refugee solidarity organizing, and we later came together to bring the values of anarchism and some of our works into a shared, collective organizing. Most of what you've been doing in the past year has been online, since some of our members are in the diaspora, some of us are based in the Horn of Africa, and we haven't actually been able to come together and work into a grassroots project as of yet, but we have hopes of doing

that. Recently with what is happening in Tigray and the crisis, we plan to meet in Sudan to do some refugee solidarity work in Sudan for those that have been forced to flee their homes because of the genocidal war.

TFSR: For clarification, is there a set vision of anarchism that unites folks, or is it just a set of common values, and if you could describe what those are?

A: As a collective, the values we really uphold are those of equality, kindness, mutual aid, solidarity and voluntarism, especially some of us were radicalized through the different volunteer activities we've been doing. Some of us were radicalized through reading "too much of anarchist literature", while others were radicalized by joining different organizing circles. Those are basically some of the values we all share and uphold.

TFSR: So, modern anarchist organizing in Africa that I've heard of has been mostly projects in South Africa, affiliates of the ZACF, or people like Sam Mbah and the Awakening Movement, a syndicalist movement in Nigeria or in Egypt during and after the uprisings against Hosni Mubarak. Can you talk a bit about the milieu or the movement of anarchism in the Horn of Africa, and maybe, if it relates to economic more so or religious or irreligious ideas, musical or sub-cultural genres, like metal and punk, are a big thing in a lot of parts of the world around anarchist communities, or if it relates to regional or ethnic autonomy movements, I'd like to hear your thoughts.

A: Yeah, you're definitely right about that. Well, when we came together to form Horn Anarchists, one of the things we wanted to do was to study anarchism in the "third world". Most of the anarchist literature we've been studying has been very Eurocentric, so we wanted to understand how the history of anarchism worked in our part of the world, and we haven't had much luck in that regard. The anarchist movements or any anarchist presence we could find were in very few places: there were some in Nigeria, South Africa, Algeria, a little in Sudan and Egypt, but not a lot, especially not in

HornAnarchists.NoBlogs.Org, which is mostly in Amharic and Tigrayan but readable in English via online translation services.

Links from Anner:

- tghat.com is a good source of news from Tigray as well
- Dengelat Massacre https://twitter.com/katie_polglase/status/1365442094790279170
- Axum Massacre: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/02/ethiopia-eritrean-troops-massacre-of-hundreds-of-axum-civilians-may-among-to-crime-against-humanity/>
- Ethnic Cleansing: — Ethnic Cleansing: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/26/world/middleeast/ethiopia-tigray-ethn...>
- Ethiopia Map on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/MapEthiopia>

under this idea of class in a lot of ways, as imperfect as Tito's state was. This person that I was talking to was very excited about the possibility that people had broken out of those ethnic parties that were meant to divide them against each other. And it seems like a very important and critical thing. It makes a lot of sense to me.

A: Yeah, there are some groups that are mobilizing to criminalize organizing around ethnic identities. What we've had throughout the history of Ethiopia is... Ethiopia is an Imperialist country. We have not struggled against these fascists of Italy, but we have not struggled against our own fascism. It's an expansionist state, it's an empire, and it has been assimilating into the dominant culture. I can't criticize when people are fighting for their group rights based on their ethnic identities, they were not allowed to speak their own language, to practice their own religion, as the state religion for so many years has orthodox Christianity. And people were forced to denounce their own identity and get in line with what was considered the state identity, which is the identity of highlanders and Christianity. But this Ethnic Federalism that most people of Ethiopia are against around nations and nationalities, complete self-determination to the point of secession. It has been the battleground for different political parties that trying to do this, to sort of force and places the arms of the federal government, or actually the regional government, activists from different ethnic groups claim that they will secede if this or that demand is not fulfilled. Honestly, I'm not against people struggling to protect their rights, especially minorities, but how long would that go? Othering is a major problem, especially nowadays when Abiy's regime is trying to construct the old state of one Ethiopia where all identities are melted into one. Ethiopia is actually called the melting pot of identity into a certain dominant identity.

TFSR: Awesome. Thank you so much for taking the time and working with me to have this conversation. I really appreciate it.

You can hear more perspectives from Horn Anarchists by checking out @HornAnarchists on twitter or visiting their website,

the Horn. And one of the things we attribute to that is that the settlers in this part of Africa, and especially the highlands of the Horn, are very hierarchical societies that are very religious as well. The two most dominant religions are orthodox Christianity and Islam, and both are very devout to their religion, and that has maintained a very strong hierarchical community that has been passing down to generations and their religion has also been highly tied with the state and people that loved their religion, their god, also had to love the state. So anarchism has not really been welcome in our part of the world.

The way anarchism came in the Horn, especially in Ethiopia and Eritrea has a very interesting aspect to it, as it did not come as a movement of its own, recognized and clearly differentiated between other movements. And actually the way it comes up in history, it is when Marxist-Leninist and other communist movements, communist organizations use it to label each other to indicate that the other was less desirable than they were. They wanted to build a strong state, though a communist state, and calling the other anarchists was a way to make sure that the public loses trust and looks at them with animosity, hostility. It was a way to smear each other's name, basically, and that's how anarchism has been used, not anarchism per se, but the word "anarchist", as a label.

TFSR: Right now we're speaking in the aftermath of a "police action" against the northern province of Tigray? And please correct me if I mistake any of this, but conducted by the central Ethiopian military that has left widespread displacement. It's been engaged from at least two other countries plus regional and ethnic militia, widespread reports of theft and sexual assault against people in Tigray. I appreciate you coming on to share what you know, especially since the Ethiopian state has done a lot to stop word from getting out about what's been going on there. For those unfamiliar with the politics and the history of the Horn, of Ethiopia in particular, the history of the conflicts and various state and non-state actors, and their motivations can be a bit confusing. If it's not too

much, would you mind giving us a rundown or a thumbnail sketch of the civil war and its aftermath and lay the playing field for what's going on right now?

A: Just to give you a rundown of the history to understand how we got here, Ethiopia boasts of having had an empire-building history that dates back to 3000 years ago. What has been central in the empire-building and state-building process has been a claimed ancestry from the biblical king Solomon in which different kings and queens claim they were descendants of King Solomon and hence had a divine right to rule. So this Salomonic tendency has been one of the strongest forces operating in the region until the 1974 Revolution in which the last monarch was overthrown in a coup d'état and a communist state was established by a military junta that took power from the last king. And this communist military junta created a very oppressive, dictatorial and balance state and started a red terror campaign against other leftist groups that were functioning in the country at the time. By this time, there were quite a number of rebel groups, guerrilla fighters and the TPLF was one of the guerrilla fighters, along with the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, Animal Liberation Front and many others. The military junta was later defeated by a coalition of these guerrilla fighters under the name EPRDF (the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) which was going to lead the country for the next 30 years. The TPLF was one of the central and dominant members of this coalition.

TFSR: Would you talk a little bit about the TPLF? I think in a past article on the blog for the Indigenous Anarchist Federation, your collective described them as a Marxist-Leninist group. Can you talk a bit about them? What their relationship is to the people in Tigray? What part they've played in this recent upsurge of conflict with the central Ethiopian regime of Abiy Ahmed?

A: TPLF has a very interesting history. As an organization, it started with tough people and it later became the largest armed struggle in the country. The relationship it has with the state has

They control the media, they control the resources, and people are scared that if they will not align themselves with either this one or that one, there is no fertile ground for people belonging to different groups to come together and fight their own oppressors.

One of the reasons TPLF is known for oppression of the country. TPLF is a minority as I've told you. They haven't been going around and repressing every ethnic group, it's the structure that has been repressing and oppressing. The people of Oromia were not necessarily oppressed by people of TPLF, it was people that came from that group that were in power. People still feel like "I have been oppressed because they are a part of a specific ethnic group. And the only way I can fight this oppression is if I ally myself with my own ethnic group and fight against the others," which creates animosity almost with every other group except your own. And then it becomes hard to even talk about class struggle in that regard.

But ideally, I would love a class movement. Class is a very important element in Ethiopian politics now that the politics is based almost solely on identity, and specifically ethnic identity. So you either a certain ethnic group or you are a fascist that believes that people should not mention their identity, should believe in one country, one god, one people. The struggle is very hard.

TFSR: I spoke a few years back with someone who was organizing in Bosnia, and some of the parts of this conversation remind me of parts of that conversation, where he talked about the institutionalization of ethnic differentiation and even if not in application, the institutionalization of "self-rule" and formalization of ethnic difference as being the basis on which people lived in community together. While, ostensibly, it would protect someone from getting repressed by another group and allowing someone to practice their religions, speak their language, these things, it also institutionalizing it into the government and being the basis for the representation of administering public monies or social programs, or whatever, also solidified differentiation between people, that, after the fall of Yugoslavia, where everyone had been sort of united

lante leave Tigray, because the atrocities they're committing are very unthinkable and horrendous.

It's also important that people that want to stand in solidarity with Tigrayans hold their representatives accountable for the measures that their representatives and their governments are taking to pressure the Ethiopian government to stop this genocidal war and to pressure their countries and the United Nations to intervene and act – its responsibility to protect civilians. With how bad this is right now, we have heard of confirmed deaths of more than 50,000, but many places are still not accessible and reports have not been completed even in parts that are accessible, but we expect so many casualties, and this is continuing.

TFSR: Back to the theoretical world for a second, if you were to see after an end to the armed conflict, I'm sure that your collective has talked a lot about what it would be like to transition into a decentralized, grassroots, anti-fascist, anti-nationalist region and...

A: Yeah, we've discussed it a lot and what we've been hoping was some ... okay, there are different fascists in Ethiopia, it's very interesting. There are fascists that believe in Ethiopian and there are ethno-nationalist fascisms, but they are all right-wing, they all are fascists. And people were trying to fight a certain type of fascism, they go into another type of fascism, they go to their own group. There is quite a number of fascistic groups in the country right now that are supported, that get applauded by the government as well.

What we were hoping that we could have... Let me speak on my own behalf. Personally, I want to start a workers movement. I believe it would be crosscutting among different ethnic groups, different beliefs. And then the poor people of Ethiopia know their problem best and whoever is claiming to represent them and to fight on their behalf at the occupied of their behalf, basically are using them as a human shield. There are quite a few people dying in Ethiopia every day in different parts of the country from these fascist groups and orgs, and they are very loud on their platforms.

also been very dynamic. As it first started as a rebel group against the regime, and it would later be in power, but before that, it would craft its manifesto and its program as a political party and as an armed rebel group with the aim of self-administration or self-determination or even independence, if unity does not seem to be feasible within the country. This is what later led to ethnic federalism and then Art. 39, which is the most contested article in the Constitution. That is the article that gives nations the right to secession when unity is not possible. But the people of TPLF had a very changing relationship. At first, it was very loved and adored by the community, it was hosted by the communities when it was a rebel, a guerrilla fighter, and then it took power, and then it became an instrument of the state, and the violence that is inherent to the state continued within the TPLF/EPRDF. The EPRDF is the coalition that was led by the TPLF. The violence of the state and the violence of the party could not be told apart, and then they started to rough things up with the people that used to adore the TPLF and admire their commitments, dedication and discipline. The TPLF was used as an example of courage, discipline, and dedication, but after it got power, after they got into office and then continued the violence of the state, the relationship was somehow changing with the rest of the Ethiopian state as well as the people of Tigray. When Abiy Ahmet came to power three years back, that is when the TPLF had a chance to revisit its relationship with the people of Tigray. They resigned from their posts at the federal government and went back, members of the TPLF went back to the region of Tigray and started looking back at what they've been doing in the past years and apologize to the people for not having represented them enough, for not having done much good in the past 27 years. At this point, the people of Tigray did not really have an option. I personally think it was a siege, as roads to Tigray were blocked by the Fanno vigilante group from the Amhara region, and there was very concerning hate preaching that was done. State sponsored hate preaching that

was done against Tigrinya-speaking people. Tigrinya is the official language that people in Tigray speak. They were not labeled as ethnic Tigrayans, but a state propaganda machine used the phrase “Tigrinya-speaking” to tell of atrocities that have been done by the state apparatus in the past 30 years.

Abiy was applauded to be a reformer, a democrat and a neoliberal force in the region. In his attempt to prove this, he was making sure to document different documentaries that were run on state-owned media, which were basically exposing the violence of the state and especially how prisoners were treated, how there were prisons that were not even official, underground prisons, garage prisons and all that sort of thing, very atrocious stuff that was happening. The accountability was given to the TPLF. The TPLF was expected to be accountable for all these atrocities that happened all over the country. Although the TPLF was only one part of the coalition that was running the country, the EPRDF, it was just one member of the EPRDF, the other members of the EPRDF were still in power. They still held office, but later they changed their name from EPRDF and made it Prosperity Party, which is the party that is now in power, the PP. The PP is a very sharp contrast that has been seen from the EPRDF, as it is almost a one-man party where Abiy is the chairman and the leader. And the party basically reflects what Abiy as a person is – very narcissistic, authoritarian, aiming to control everything that goes around. That is one of the threats that many people felt it was a threat to the ethnic federalism and the self-determination of different ethnic regions in the country. The war against Tigray right now... One aspect of it is this ideological difference between a unitary state that is Abiy, the one that is led by Abiy, that wants to control everything, that wants to assign regional presidents from the center, and then the resistance from a party like TPLF, it was a very strong party. It has been in power for 30 years and it has a well-built structure, it's very dominant in the region, controls the region and has almost all of the seats in the regional council. It was a force that could contend the central

that could be a place to apply pressure or any diplomatic, governmental buildings.

A: There are different ways in which the international community can show solidarity with the people of Tigray. The most basic one is tweeting, using the hashtags, making sure that word gets out, making sure there communication and media blackout does not mean the world does not know what is happening. We need to be as loud as possible to make sure that people are aware of what is happening. I personally believe that Tigray should be the center of the world at this moment. Every eye should be looking towards Tigray because there's another genocide happening in the 21st century, and we can almost be sure that our leaders are going to come out tomorrow to say that never again, to say that they will not let this happen ever again, but this is happening right now and we're living through it, and we can't let it happen. And especially, we can't let it happen in silence. The least we can do is raise awareness, make sure everyone knows about it, make sure our local representatives know about it, respond to it and report to the people that have elected them what they're doing to try and stop it.

There are also options in helping refugees that have been displaced, most of which are in Sudan right now. Our collective was organizing mutual aid support with refugees that are in Sudan. There are also other initiatives trying to support refugees in Sudan, as well as those in Tigray. Access is relatively better now. We cannot say it's unfettered and free, but it's relatively better and there are also initiatives to try and distribute aid in Tigray, though it remains limited. There's also the option of helping Tigrayan organizers, there are different Tigrayan organizers all over the world, trying to organize protests, rallies and appealing to the United Nations and the governments of the countries in which they reside to pressure Abiy to stop the genocide, to make sure that the Eritrean army leaves Tigray, that the Amhara militias and the Fano vigi-

ment and the ENDF would not allow access, and that was the main difficulty in helping the people that were starving and that were dying from hunger, thirst and lack of medicines.

TFSR: I definitely saw a number of critiques in the social media for Horn Anarchists around the distribution of aid and what was actually happening to it. I imagine that some of it is a response to western social media users may be saying, “Look, someone’s already doing something, I don’t have to think about what’s going on over there” or saying, “I can send a few dollars, I just make a few clicks and then I have no responsibility or relationship to this anymore. I have done my part”. Is there any way to... while the wheels are turning in the UN, to try to get some intervention of peacekeeping troops, is there anything that you can think of that people from abroad can do to actually aid the people in Tigray and to send material, to get people fed?

A: Our critic was mainly because of the different gofundme accounts that were being started by warmongers that were supporting the war. We feel like it was dishonest to collect money and aid in the name of the Tigrayan people saying that you distributed to the people in Tigray when you have no means of reaching Tigray. The problem was not that there was a shortage of food or medical supplies. There were aid organizations that were ready to distribute, they had truckloads of them. They just could not get access, and regardless of how much money one was collecting in the name of Tigrayans and the people of Tigray, it wouldn’t matter how much money they collected as they would not have any means to distribute it. So our critique was mainly on these honest attempts to try and be sympathetic towards Tigrayans by collecting aid and by organizing gofundmes.

TFSR: Maybe people in the audience who are concerned about this similarly could look up and find, for instance, businesses like Ethiopian Airlines, if they live in a city where there is a large international airport – and maybe there is an Ethiopian Airlines stall –

government, perhaps the only regional force that could contend Abiy and the federal government, as all of the others were under Abiy’s wing and he could assign any person to be the president of any region, and the people would not have a chance to either elect them or even have a say in who was elected to administer their regional state. That’s one of the aspects of the ideological side of the war: self-administration, autonomy versus unitarism and unitary dictatorship.

TFSR: What sparked the attack on the ENDF by the TPLF forces?

A: Depending on who you ask, the war in Tigray had different causes. One is the one I’d already mentioned. The strength of TPLF was a threat to Abiy, that Abiy as a person that wants silence and criminalizes dissent, would naturally be against a region that is powerful enough to contend what he is saying and have consequences. One of the ways this has been seen is with the election that the Tigray region held, despite the central government, the federal government deciding to postpone the election using COVID-19 as a pretext. Tigray region has established their own electoral board and managed to have elections, local elections in a way that took the pandemic seriously. They made sure people kept their social distance and they took the necessary measures but made sure the elections happened. That is perhaps one of the strongest measures taken by the TPLF that made Abiy very unhappy. The other one, especially the one that the state mentions is the attack on the ENDF by the TPLF forces. We don’t know how true this is, regardless there are claims that, after a posed threat, TPLF allied forces attacked the northern command of the Ethiopian National Defense Force, which resulted in a full-blown war.

TFSR: In terms of the communication blockade, I know that a lot of journalists have made a big row about the fact that they can’t get in and also that they can’t get the word out, and I’m very happy that you and I get to talk, but is the communication blockade limited or has it been limited to Tigray, is still ongoing? I have some reasons why I think that the military would do this, but could you

explain why you think it's important for the military for the ENDF to impose this?

A: The ENDF and Prosperity Party reacted very violently, it made sure to cut all sorts of communication in Tigray, including telecom, internet, phone line, services, electricity and even water services were cut down. The entire region was in a complete blackout. We could not get what was happening. We had family there. We could not hear from our families for months, and there was a complete media blackout as well. And the ENDF was going wild in the dark without needing to think about consequences, believing that maybe the word would not get out.

TFSR: Thank you for that. You mentioned that Abiy Ahmet has gotten a lot of credit internationally. I think he got a Noble Peace Prize for whatever that's worth for signing this treaty with Eritrea and since the conflict has escalated, there have been reports of incursions by military troops from Somalia and Eritrea, and also a conflict between the Ethiopian government, and I think the government in Sudan, where a lot of people were fleeing violence in Tigray, fleeing displacement, if that's a thing. Can you talk a little bit about the way that the borders play into this crisis and the way that other international actors are taking part?

A: Neighboring nations like Sudan have responded interestingly. Sudan has been hosting refugees that were displaced, because of the war, it has hosted more than 60,000 refugees. The numbers would have increased if the borders were not blocked by the Ethiopian National Defense Force. On the contrary, Eritrea has been involved in this war in a very violent manner. The TPLF and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front used to be allies during the Derg regime when they were both guerrilla fighters and then Eritrea seceded and the Ethio-Eritrean war what happened, and there was animosity that lasted for almost three decades. And bringing peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea was one of the main reasons Abiy was nominated and later got the Nobel Peace Prize, but this peace process with Eritrea has never included the

Tigrayans could not even speak their language on the street and in coffee shops or in hotels, as they were very alarmed and scared of what that would result in, hearing their language would make the state and security forces, even fascists, do.

content warning that there is a graphic description of sexual assault coming up. If you're concerned, please skip the following paragraph

I've recently been seeing that there was footage that was circulating on social media of civilians being killed by the Ethiopian National Defense Force, being massacred in a very gruesome manner. One of the biggest concerns is also rape. There is widespread rape in the cities that are controlled by the ENDF. Both the ENDF and the Eritrean soldiers are engaged in gang rapes of very young girls. At first, it was teenagers and then the reports coming now are of children less than the age of thirteen. And the reason behind what is being said is that the Eritrean soldiers were warned against HIV. So the assumption was that young girls would be free from HIV and they were safe options, so they're engaged in gang rapes of very young girls. And what is happening, what they're doing to these people... We recently read a report and also saw a video of this young woman that was gang-raped by 23 soldiers for five days, and then they stuffed some dirt and plastic bags and even nails into her vagina, and there was a video circulating of the doctors removing all the stuff that was stuffed in her. The cruelty is unthinkable, it's inhumane.

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TFSR: How is the response from the international community in your eyes been to the conflicts in Tigray and the repression of the Tigrayan people?

A: When talking about distribution in the region, we need to understand what is at play here. There are international aid organizations that had food, medicines, medical supplies, food supplies, ready and packed, and they had truckloads of these items, waiting to distribute but could not get access to the regions. The govern-

ing, the hate speeches against ethnic Tigrayans, the labeling... They were called daytime hyenas by the prime minister, and this was something that has been building up for quite a few years.

The international community, I believe, was just being hopeful and wanted to take Abiy for his word. But later it became clear that this was not a surgical operation and that civilians were the receiving end of this wrath from Abiy. And now the international community is very alarmed and is trying to influence and pressure Abiy to make sure that he at least provides access to distribute humanitarian aid and takes necessary steps to protect civilians, not even protect, but just stop killing civilians. Now there are also threats of economic sanctions, cutting of aids, and now the international community really seems alarmed about what is happening and keeps mentioning it to Abiy. Although not much has changed about what he's doing. Ethnic Tigrayans were facing repression. Not only were they illegally detained, illegally searched, even arrested, they're also harassed and tortured on the streets if they had a Tigrinia-sounding name or if their ID said that they were of the Tigrayan ethnic origin, they were also unable to board international flights, as Ethiopian Airlines was asking people to provide their local IDs to make sure what ethnic group they were from to bar them from flying.

There were also a few indications that there was something like a concentration camp. We have not been able to verify if this was true or not, but you've definitely heard about a concentration camp as well. Many ethnic Tigrayans were getting laid off. They were being suspended from work, especially those that had government jobs. Every member of the military that is an ethnic Tigrayan has been suspended. Also, members of the federal government and organizations functioning under the federal government that were working in different parts of the country were also suspended from work because they were ethnic Tigrayans. Many landlords were also evicting people and telling them to leave their house because and only because they were ethnic Tigrayans. This had gotten so bad that

major warring parties, which was the TPLF, and it was a peace deal between Abiy and the dictator Isaias Afwerki. Members of the media were not told what the peace deal meant and what it constitutes and in retrospect, it seemed more like a war deal, a genocidal war deal than a peace process. As a genuine peace process, this would have first and foremost involved the major, belligerent parties which this peace deal did not. And maybe the whole point of trying to make peace with Eritrea was to eliminate TPLF.

TFSR: There have been reports of massacres in, among other places, Mai Kadra. 600 civilians, mostly ethnic Amharans and Wolkaites. It's been accused of the atrocity that was conducted by TPLF-sympathetic militia and police. This is one example where it's considered to have been conducted by people from one side, and yet there have been also attacks and massacres that have been reported by Amharans against Tigrayans, as well as all of these reports that are coming out from the Human Rights Watch and other organizations about assaults by the uniformed military. It's a hard subject, but can you talk about it? I guess some of the things that you want the international audience to know about, what you've heard about what's going on, and could you read it as a sign of a wider breakdown of the multi-ethnic communities of the country?

A: The media blackout had really influenced the international response to the war. In the first few months of the war only the Tigray regional state media was accessible, and that was also state propaganda, and then there was the federal state propaganda from here, but there was no way to actually know what regular people were going through. They were both just spreading propaganda and not reporting what was happening on the ground. The first atrocities we started hearing were from refugees that managed to make it to Sudan. They would tell what they've seen what they've passed through and the horrors of the war. Although Abiy even went to parliament to discredit these reports by saying that these

refugees were murderers and that they were youth organized by the TPLF, he basically labeled them a killing squad and tried to make them and their accounts lose credit. But international media was talking to refugees that made it to Sudan from Tigray and those were the earliest news we heard about what is happening. Survivors' accounts, those were the first survivor accounts we could hear from the war. Later people came to Addis, especially people that had other citizenship, maybe dual citizenship. There were some: Ethi-Americans, German Ethiopians, and their embassies found a way to bring them back to Addis and fly them back to their countries. And they had more stories of what they had gone through. But the first reports we heard were from refugees in Sudan and then later the phone lines were accessible in a few areas in Mekelle and a few other cities. The connection was really bad, but we could still get a picture of what was happening, and later videos and pictures and other evidence footage started coming up.

The massacre of Mai Kadra has been used to justify the war. It was the second biggest event that's the federal state used to justify the war against Tigray. The first was the attack on the northern command of the ENDF and the second one was the massacre at Mai Kadra. We still don't know who the perpetrator was, there are different claims. Some claim it was TPLF allied forces. Others claim it was the ENDF. Others claim it was the Amhara militia or the Fanno vigilante group. Regardless, there hasn't been an investigation that every group agreed on, but what we know is that there have been retaliations. Whether it was the Amharans that were killed or whether that was the Tigrayans. We know for sure that there has been retaliation and any other aspect of the war, including the retaliation, the different massacres we've heard about, the massacres in Aksum... we've heard of massacres in quite a few number of places, the biggest so far being in Aksum where 800 people were killed inside a church, and none of these were reported by the state, as was Mai Kadra. It has been almost four months, but the Mai Kadra still occupies air time and not the others. So the way it

was used as a tool for propaganda makes one doubt the genuinity behind the reports.

So I don't know, I wouldn't see it as a breakdown of the multi-ethnic federalism. I mean there are signs of the breakdown, but not this war. I just see it as years-long hate preaching and fascism, to be honest. One of the reasons the Amhara militia and the Fano vigilante group went to war was because they had claims over some of the lands that were occupied by Tigrayans and that is mostly in the western part of Tigray, which we still expect were the worst hit. They were the worst affected. There was an ethnic cleansing almost. Nowadays, one barely finds any Tigrayan living in that region that was occupied by Tigrayans and Amharans have taken over, and this was one of their causes to get into the war. So I would attribute it to fascism than I would to the breakdown of the multi-ethnic federalism.

Without clear evidence of what actually was happening on the ground, despite what the two warring parties were saying on their state-owned medias, I believe the international community was hopeful and optimistic and wanted to take Abiy for his word and that this would be a surgical operation to remove the TPLF without no further damage, but it has clearly been anything but that. If anything, this is a collective punishment on any and every ethnic Tigrayan that not only lives in Tigray but also lives outside Tigray. They have been ethnically profiled – I'm talking about people that were not in Tigray – they've been arrested, detained, they had their house searched without a warrant, and then they were harassed, tortured, abused on the streets by people as well as by security forces. And this collective punishment actually dates back, I would say, to 2016, when ethnic Tigrayans were forced to flee their homes. The place they've been living in for years, for decades, because they were ethnic Tigrayans, they were forced to flee and go back to Tigray. And since then roads were blocked, inflation was really high, the road to Eritrea was also opened, so inflation was pretty high in the city and as I mentioned before, the hate preach-