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Lieke Aregawi Ghiday

The Socio-Economic Impacts of Irregular Migration among the Raya People of Southern Tigray: An Ethnographic Account (pp.45-78)
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Table of Contents

Articles

Governance, Accountability, and Indigenous Conflict Resolution: Shaping Civic Responsibility in the Diverse Cultural and Political Context of the Tigray Region (pp.1-20)

Daniel Girmay Teka

Examining Freedom of Expression during Ethiopia's Political Reform Process (2018–Mid-2020): Achievements and Challenges (pp.21-44)

Lieke Aregawi Ghiday

The Socio-Economic Impacts of Irregular Migration among the Raya People of Southern Tigray: An Ethnographic Account (pp.45-78)

Tesfaye Molla, D. James Narendra Bondla (PhD), and Kelemework Tafere Reda (PhD)

Editor's Note

We are pleased to publish Volume 4, Number 2 of the *Journal of Citizenship and Morality (JCM)*. This issue features three peer-reviewed articles. The first article, by Daniel Girmay Teka, *Governance, Accountability, and Indigenous Conflict Resolution: Shaping Civic Responsibility in the Diverse Cultural and Political Context of the Tigray Region,* offers an explanatory case study of the Raya Azebo community. It explores how the erosion of formal state apparatuses has shifted local governance toward society-centric models like the *Abogereb* and *shimagile* systems in managing resource-driven tensions with a restorative justice approach. The second paper, *Examining Freedom of Expression during Ethiopia's Political Reform Process (2018–Mid-2020): Achievements and Challenges,* by Lieke Aregawi Ghiday, shifts the lens toward macro-level political developments in Ethiopia between 2018 and 2020. The critical assessment of media freedom, institutional autonomy, and democratic space during this pivotal period is the central theme. The last article, *The Socio-Economic Impacts of Irregular Migration among the Raya People of Southern Tigray: An Ethnographic Account,* authored by Tesfaye Molla, D.James Narendra Bondla, and Kelemework Tafere Reda, provides a useful look into what the authors term "existential mobility" in the Hashenge community. Through an ethnographic mixed-methods design, they investigate the multidimensional push-and-pull factors precipitating irregular migration, as a response to social fragmentation and economic crises, in the study area.

The editorial committee of the journal expresses its gratitude to the authors and reviewers for maintaining academic dialogue on JCM.

Yohannes Haile Getahun (PhD)
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Governance, Accountability, and Indigenous Conflict Resolution: Shaping Civic Responsibility in the Diverse Cultural and Political Context of the Tigray Region

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Abstract

This study investigates the dynamics of local governance and civic responsibility within the diverse cultural and political context of the Tigray Region, with a specific focus on indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms in the Raya Azebo community. Employing a qualitative methodological approach, the research design was primarily explanatory, supplemented by descriptive and exploratory elements. Data were collected through purposively sampled focus group discussions, in-depth interviews with key informants, and non-participant observation in four *tabiyas*: Wargiba, Genete, Marsa, and Tsigea. This primary data was systematically analyzed and supplemented by a review of relevant scholarly literature on indigenous peacebuilding. The findings indicate that conflicts within the community frequently arise over resources, particularly *Hizaeti* (grazing land) and farmland. In addressing these disputes, the community predominantly utilizes a traditional conflict resolution framework characterized by a win-win approach. This win-win, as elucidated through interviews and FGDs, emphasizes compromise and mutual gain, seeking restorative outcomes rather than assigning winners and losers. Crucially, the thematic analysis of qualitative data reveals that participants perceive indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms as more appropriate and effective than formal state systems or courts. Key perceived advantages, consistently cited across participant groups, include a stronger resistance to corruption, a greater capacity to foster sustainable and community-owned peace, and superior efficiency in time management. These attributes, drawn from first-hand accounts, highlight the critical, ongoing role of traditional institutions in local governance and social cohesion within the study area.

Keywords: Indigenous knowledge, Governance, Conflict resolution, Raya

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1. Introduction

Ethiopia possesses a rich diversity of essential peacemaking values and indigenous institutions across its many societies. Indeed, in various parts of the country, communities have developed their own cultural values and social knowledge to govern relations and mitigate conflicts (Ambaye, 2008). As a significant part of this tapestry, the Tigray region has historically maintained, and continues to uphold, its own *serit* (customary law) and traditional conflict resolution devices. These systems have long operated alongside, and often in the absence of, formal state institutions (Asefa, 2010).

However, the region has recently endured prolonged armed conflict and profound political instability, events that have severely disrupted social structures and displaced large segments of the population. Consequently, these conditions have significantly eroded the operational capacity and legitimacy of indigenous conflict resolution institutions, including those within communities like the wereda Rayya Azebo. Moreover, the influence of modern legal frameworks frequently creates tension between statutory and customary systems, leading to jurisdictional ambiguity and a diminished recognition of traditional mechanisms (Gebre, 2010). A sight on the fringes of Mekelle in late 2023 effectively illustrates the stress and adaptation with the formal system. But, still, local elders called a community meeting instead of a municipal decree, and their job was to distribute limited farming tools by giving preference to houses with several orphans or disabled former warriors. These instances, which are repeated throughout Tigray, capture the main conundrum of this study: how the fundamental tasks of social cohesiveness are precise, resource allocation, and governance are carried out in the absence of a fully operational and legal state apparatus.

In addition, what does civic duty mean in this situation? In order to comprehend this, it is crucial to acknowledge that the Tigray region is in a complex transitional condition, having emerged from decades of political instability within Ethiopia and a catastrophic two-year war (2020–2022) (Lavers, 2023). Its people increasingly depend on ingrained cultural resources and family networks

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for survival, local order, and de facto governance, while its nominal Interim Regional Administration now functions with limited capacity and challenged authority.

Therefore, within this particular cultural and political context, this study explores the nature of civic responsibility and the reconfiguration of governance. Although earlier studies, such as those on Acoli land sovereignties in post-conflict Northern Uganda (Rosenoff Gauvin, 2024) and traditional governance relations throughout Sub-Saharan Africa (Kern, Müller, & Zanker, 2024), have confirmed that indigenous institutions fill governance gaps following war, this study provides a novel theoretical and comparative contribution. It shows that rather than relying just on customary law, these institutions function through a moral triage mechanism in Tigray's liminal condition of challenged authority, giving priority to the most vulnerable based on moral commitments founded in kinship and wartime sacrifice.

This pattern is very different from the state-integrated model in post-conflict Rwanda, where the Imihigo framework paradoxically uses cultural innovation for centralized governance control (Sabbi & Ndikubwimana, 2024), and the decentralized chiefdom system in Sierra Leone, where post-war reconstruction has institutionalized elite networks within formal state structures (de Bruijne, 2023). As a result, indigenous institutions in Tigray are actively revising the limits of lawful governance and civic duty rather than merely replacing the state.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The interaction of formal governance and indigenous institutions during state fragility is examined in this literature review, which also analyzes how the breakdown of the state monopoly elevates traditional systems as essential mechanisms for community survival and continuation. The study first uses Boege et al. (2009)'s notion of Hybrid Political Orders using three different theoretical frameworks, showing how the breakup of the state monopoly during the Tigray war allowed indigenous institutions to fill the void and uphold social order.

Second, the study illustrates a sharp change from vertical, state-oriented bridging capital to horizontal, localized bonding capital within kinship circles like the beteseb, where state loyalty is

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completely subordinated to immediate group allegiance, and using Robert Putnam's (2000) conceptualization of social capital. Lastly, the study integrates Conflict Transformation Theories and Interest-Based Relational (IBR) Theories (Berghof, 2004), showing that although IBR strategies use win-win mediation by identifying factional conflict styles, true transformation in deep-rooted crises necessitates restructuring the underlying relationships and systemic failures that formal state apparatuses were unable to resolve. When combined, these frameworks show how resilient indigenous institutions unintentionally highlight and expose the fundamental flaws and illegitimacy of the official state system by successfully maintaining peace and generational continuity during times of war.

2.1 Defining the Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanism

Conflict can be defined as a form of tension which arises from mutually exclusive or opposing actions, thoughts, opinions, or feelings (Mial et al., 2011:7; Jeong, 2008:7). Hence, it is becoming a cause of thousands of premature deaths, forced migration of millions of people, and disabilities of many more people from all over the world. The Tigray region is not an exception in this regard; many great minds have been drawn to the study of conflict. It is important to understand what conflict resolution is. The indigenous conflict resolution mechanism refers to the institutions and processes within the community through which conflicts are addressed. Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms have an important role in ensuring sustainable peace in a given community through peaceful resolution of conflicts at very low cost (Deng and Zartman, 1991:299).

This culture of conflict resolution has been practiced widely in every community. Some of them are Abogereb and Dubartee from the Rayya community conflict resolution mechanism practiced from ancient times in the Tigray region, Ethiopia. They were conflict resolution mechanisms that were more powerful than modern conflict resolution. Elders play the major roles in safeguarding the political, cultural, economic, and religious life of their peoples (Zartman, 2000). This method of resolving disputes is crucial for preserving the social system's integrity and fostering ties in society (Tareke, 2009). To reinforce the notion that it is a useful lived experience of the community of local governance as a civic duty (Lederach, 1997), as well as a chance to resolve conflict through discussions, reconciliation, and restoration, a culturally legitimate process of local governance.

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While there are many community practices worldwide, each mechanism is distinct historically and specifically with a certain community practice (Woldegiyorgis, 2022).

2.2 Theory of Indigenous Institutions

Theories play a very important role in any research literature as they give a clear illustration of the issues being studied. Therefore, the researcher tried to select relevant theories that are appropriate with indigenous institutions, particularly traditional customs practice. The two that are clearly explaining the transition of customary practice are: static customary theory and adaptive legal pluralism. Static customs are, therefore, transmitted from one generation to the next, whereas formal customs are considered constant over time. In this view, some of the customs of Rayya Azebo do not change over time despite the new developments. Thus, this theory is that the marginalization of women and youth is a common, unchanging cultural trait. This is how things were thought until now. Hence, this theory has become less flexible and dynamic in recent times.

On the other hand, Adaptive legal pluralism, however, offers a more complex understanding of the governance of contemporary war. In this sense, it is more important to move forward with new perspectives than to maintain old ones. Some organizations have purposely broadened their mandate to include current issues such as human rights violations and gender-based violence (UN report, 2026). One of the best examples of this is the Abogereb institution, which is a traditional conflict resolution mechanism of the Rayya Azebo community in Tigray. Known for categorizing homicides as "ቀይሕ ደም" "accidental" and "ጸልም ደም" "deliberate or torturous." This is a strong mechanism of accountability that prevents the cycle of violence from continuing (Tesfay, 2023).

Furthermore, some indigenous actors cooperate and interact with the formal legal system. A prime example of incorporating women in the peace committee as a mediating formalizing outcome through standard fines, such as a one-million Ethiopian Birr penalty for deliberate killing in Habru woreda. Documenting and sharing such experience with the Abogereb traditional institution is important whish not rely only on static but taking frame work to be flexible to meet modern demands.

2.3 The Importance of Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

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The exploration of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms is indispensable to understanding the core themes of governance and civic responsibility within Tigray's unique cultural and political context. These mechanisms are not merely tools for settling disputes; they constitute the operational foundation of local governance and codify a culturally rooted form of civic duty.

As a Pillar of Local Governance, in the Tigray region, where state authority has often been distant, contested, or disrupted, indigenous systems like the shimagile provide essential, day-to-day governance. They regulate social relations, manage critical resources like *Hizaeti* (grazing land), and enforce community norms. This represents a form of kin-based or communal governance, where authority is derived from cultural legitimacy, social standing, and collective consent rather than from a statutory mandate. Their effectiveness in delivering accessible, rapid, and sustainable justice fills a critical void, demonstrating how governance is pragmatically enacted in diverse and challenging political landscapes.

As the Embodiment of Civic Responsibility**,** Participation in these mechanisms is a primary expression of civic responsibility. Elders (*shimagile*) take on mediation roles as a duty to their community, not as a paid profession. Community members participate as witnesses or guarantors out of a shared obligation to uphold *hizbawi netib* (collective dignity) and social harmony. This reflects a horizontal model of civic engagement where responsibility is owed directly to one's kin and community network, reinforcing social cohesion and mutual accountability from within.

In Preserving Cultural Identity and Autonomy**,** these practices are vital repositories of cultural knowledge, language, and history. Their continued use is an assertion of cultural identity and a form of political self-determination at the local level. In a diverse region like Tigray, they represent a key arena where cultural norms actively shape social and political order, offering a counterpoint to homogenizing state-led systems. For Sustainable Social Cohesion and Resilience**,** by prioritizing restorative justice, repairing relationships over assigning punitive blame, these mechanisms address the root causes of conflict. This focus on healing and reconciliation fosters long-term social cohesion, which is a fundamental prerequisite for any stable governance. In post-

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conflict settings, their role in managing local grievances is crucial for building a resilient social fabric that can withstand political pressures.

1.3.3 Critical Reflections on Power and Exclusion

The aforementioned illustrates the function of indigenous conflict resolution in the study area, Rayya Azebo. However, the indigenous conflict resolution mechanism in Rayya Azebo has its own drawbacks in practice, one of which is the exclusion of women from the elders who organized themselves in cases of meager compensation. Women were only required in certain situations. Rayya Azebo elders have greater advantages than women because they currently make a modest amount of money by mediating the group. Women are still required for their appearance such as wearing the **"ቦፉ"** peace cloth or participating in segregated female Mahber. Not included in any perks. Even women completely skip the reconciliation oath ceremony, fine determination, and blood feud discussions. Women are desperately needed, but solely for symbolic representation. Nowadays, this is taken as a trend to exclude women as customary practice in Tigray (Tadesse, 2019; Leake, 2023).

However, Gebremedhin and Asfaw (2021) also claim that young people do not take part in decision-making. No one under forty behaved as a mediator in any situation that was observed, despite being disproportionately affected by war and conflict as both perpetrators of violence and victims of displacement. Young people were not consulted when choices about marriage, blood money, and banishment were made by Elder councils alone. Young people may become disengaged from peace endeavors, and conflict cycles may be prolonged as a result of this generational hierarchy.

In addition to the above, the strategy of socioeconomic and minority separation is the imposition of blood money fines (diyya). Due to fines of tens of thousands of Ethiopian Birr, destitute households are practically unable to make amends; as a result, they are either compelled to permanently leave the area or continue to be at risk of being killed in retaliation. It depends on the persuasiveness of the mediator, regardless of magnitude or economic level. Families of accused

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individuals, including innocent relatives, are also uprooted without following the correct legal procedures and face widespread shame.

Finally, disputes with official governmental entities remain unresolved (Muller, 2023; Chirayath, Sage, and Woolcock, 2025). Despite the prevalence of jurisdictional ambiguity, customary courts operate in parallel to and occasionally in conjunction with modern courts. In cases of abduction, customary mediators negotiated marriage fees rather than reporting offenses under Ethiopia's criminal code (Article 648), which led to de facto impunity for gender-based violence. Similar to this, families are uncertain about their legal responsibility because paying blood money does not shield them from formal punishment. If they are not officially acknowledged or incorporated, indigenous institutions can subvert state law and aid in elite capture.

2.4 Tensions Between Indigenous and Formal Justice Systems

Both the formal and the indigenous ones are at odds on multiple levels. Jurisdiction unclearness among customary institutions is one of them. For instance, according to Kahsay (2025), elders such as Abogereb undermine legal certainty by operating in a legal vacuum with no explicit legal frameworks for intra-communal conflicts. However, the two violations of human rights continue to interact due to inadequate inspection. Research from Ethiopia has shown that persistent human rights violations, gender-based exclusion, and political involvement with female elders are often unwelcome. In addition to this, Elders in Oromia are one example of how the customary court is viewed from a political perspective rather than as authentic local customs and as a threat to cultural practices, which is another reason why elders are now opposed to state co-optation (ISS Africa 2025).

3. Methodology

The details of the methodological framework employed to investigate the reconfiguration of governance and civic responsibility in post-war Tigray. To explore the complex, lived experiences and social processes within the Raya Azebo community, a qualitative research approach was deemed essential. The study utilized an explanatory case study design, integrating descriptive and exploratory elements to systematically document, probe, and ultimately explain the role and

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functioning of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms as core local institutions. The following sections outline the specific strategies for data collection and analysis, including the study area, sources of data, sampling techniques, and the ethical protocols that guided the entire research process.

3.1. Research Approach

This study was anchored in a qualitative research approach, grounded in an interpretivist paradigm. This foundational choice was driven by the study's objective to achieve a deep, contextual understanding of the complex social phenomena of governance and civic responsibility as they are lived and interpreted by the Raya Azebo community. The qualitative approach prioritizes meaning, experience, and social processes over quantification, making it the most appropriate method for exploring the nuanced workings of indigenous institutions, cultural norms, and subjective perceptions of legitimacy and effectiveness. The qualitative approach acknowledges that reality is socially constructed and that the researcher's task is to interpret the meaning participants ascribe to their social world, in this case, their systems of order and duty.

3.2 Research Design

The research employed an explanatory case study design. The primary purpose of the design is to investigate how and why indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms operate as core institutions of governance in Tigray's specific post-conflict context. The design is intrinsically case-oriented, treating the Raya Azebo community within Mohoni Woreda as a bounded, information-rich case that illuminates the broader phenomenon. To achieve its explanatory purpose, the design strategically integrated descriptive and exploratory elements. Descriptive components were used to systematically document the structures, actors, and processes of the shimagile system. Exploratory components allowed for probing into the adaptive and contested nature of these systems in their interaction with a weakened state. This integrated design facilitated a holistic analysis, moving from describing what exists to explaining why it functions as it does within the given political and cultural landscape.

3.3 Study Area

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The research was conducted in Mohoni Woreda, located in the South-Eastern Zone of the Tigray Region, with a specific focus on the Raya Azebo community. Four *tabiyas* (administrative subunits), Wargiba, Genete, Marsa, and Tsigea, were selected as the primary study sites. This area was chosen purposively as an information-rich case due to its active use of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, known locally as shimagile, and its experience of the recent conflict, making it a pertinent location to observe the reconfiguration of governance at the grassroots level.

3.4 Data Collection Tools and Methods

Three principal qualitative tools were employed for primary data collection: semi-structured in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and non-participant observation.

3.4.1 In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were a primary qualitative instrument in this research. This method was selected for its capacity to elicit detailed, nuanced, and contextual narratives from participants, allowing them to elaborate on personal experiences, perceptions, and tacit knowledge regarding indigenous governance and civic duty. Semi-structured interview guides, composed of open-ended questions, provided a flexible framework. This format facilitated deep probing and allowed the researcher to explore emergent themes while ensuring core topics related to the resolution mechanism, perceptions of legitimacy, and redefined civic responsibility were systematically covered.

Key informants for these interviews were purposively selected with community assistance to ensure they held extensive and experiential knowledge of the shimgilina system and local social dynamics. The sample encompassed a diverse range of participants, including respected elders (*shimagile*), community leaders, and other individuals of varying social stature known for their active role in traditional governance processes.

3.4.2 Focus Group Discussions

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were employed as a complementary data collection technique to capture collective perspectives, generate interactive dialogue, and identify areas of consensus

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or divergence within the community. This method was particularly valuable for exploring shared cultural understandings, community norms, and the social dimensions of conflict resolution that might not surface in individual interviews.

A total of four FGDs were conducted with distinct, homogenous groups to foster open communication. These included separate sessions for community elders and religious leaders. Each FGD comprised approximately eight participants, a size considered optimal for managing group dynamics while allowing all members to contribute meaningfully. The discussions, guided by a thematic protocol, were instrumental in gauging the spectrum of community opinions, observing the social construction of knowledge, and generating rich, collective narratives on the function and value of indigenous institutions in the post-conflict landscape.

3.5 Sampling Technique and Procedure

The target population for this study comprised individuals within the four selected *tabiyas* who possessed direct knowledge or experience with indigenous governance and conflict resolution. This included elders (*shimagile*), community leaders, and other respected members actively involved in the resolution system. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was rigorously applied. Participants were deliberately selected based on their specific expertise, social standing, and firsthand involvement in the phenomena under study, ensuring the data came from the most knowledgeable sources. The sampling procedure involved initial identification of potential participants through community referrals, followed by a snowball technique where initial informants suggested other key individuals.

The study's overall participant count of thirty was determined using the principle of saturation, which holds that data collection should continue until no new themes or insights emerge from additional interviews or focus group discussions (FGDs). In a post-conflict environment where formal institutions are scattered, information is not distributed fairly. It makes sense that the study employed a purposive, non-probability sampling technique.

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ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

This procedure was carried out sequentially and iteratively: two focus group discussions (FGDs) and five key informant interviews were conducted in the tabiyas of Wargiba and Genete to gather material, which was immediately followed by preliminary analysis using open coding to find emergent themes. Based on these preliminary results, two more focus group discussions (FGDs) and additional key informant interviews were carried out in Marsa and Tsigea.

Transcripts were examined following each data collection activity before going on to the next, enabling a real-time determination of whether saturation had been reached. When a number of indicators converged, saturation was deemed to have been reached: (1) the same themes in particular, the preference for indigenous mechanisms over formal courts, resistance to corruption, time efficiency, and the win-win approach appeared consistently across participant groups without new variations; (2) no new codes emerged from the final three interviews and the last FGD, with all new data fitting within the existing coding framework; (3) later data collection served to deepen understanding and confirm findings rather than introduce new dimensions or contradictions; and (4) participants maintained a thorough audit trail detailing the emergence and development of themes.

In order to ensure a thorough yet manageable scope for in-depth qualitative analysis, the sample comprised a varied mix of key informants for individual interviews and participants for the focus group discussions. It is acknowledged that the results are analytically transferable rather than statistically generalizable, in line with the objectives of qualitative research, even though saturation was reached within the particular setting of the four tabiyas in Raya Azebo.

3.6 Method of Data Analysis

The collected qualitative data were analyzed using a systematic thematic analysis approach. This involved a multi-stage process: first, verbatim transcription of interviews and FGDs; second, repeated reading of the transcripts and field notes to achieve immersion and familiarity; third, manual coding of the data to identify initial concepts and patterns; fourth, grouping these codes into broader, coherent themes that directly addressed the research questions on governance and

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civic responsibility; and finally, interpreting these themes in relation to the study's conceptual framework and existing literature to build a meaningful explanation.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was paramount throughout the research process. Prior to commencement, the research proposal received full ethical review and approval from the relevant academic committee at Mekelle University. Informed consent was obtained from every participant; they were clearly informed about the study's purpose, their right to participate voluntarily, and their absolute right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained by using pseudonyms and securely storing all data. The researcher adhered to principles of cultural sensitivity, ensuring respect for local norms and avoiding any language or action that could cause discomfort or harm to participants or the community.

4. Analysis, Findings, and Discussion

The post-war Tigray situation offers a powerful case study of how the collapse of formal state structures and the survival of resilient cultural institutions radically reconfigure governance and civic accountability. The empirical findings, which are based on four focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews conducted throughout the tabiyas of Wargiba, Genete, Marsa, and Tsigea in Raya Azebo, challenge prevailing models of post-conflict reconstruction and shed light on a clear transition from state-centric to society-centric systems of order and duty.

4. Analysis and Results

The post-war governance landscape in Raya Azebo provides a powerful empirical case study of how state collapse triggers a transition from state-centric to society-centric systems. The following analysis integrates the voices from Wargiba, Genete, Marsa, and Tsigea with the three core theoretical pillars of this study.

4.1. The Collapse of Vertical Authority and Hybrid Political Orders

The most significant finding is the disintegration of the formal governance model and its associated conception of vertical civic duty. As Boege et al. (2009) theorize in Hybrid Political Orders, when

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ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

a state's monopoly on administration fragments, power reconfigures into a shared space. One community elder in Genete captured this fragmentation: *"The government we once knew is gone. What remains does not command our trust or our loyalty.* "When formal structures fail, legitimacy migrates. This is seen in the refusal to engage in traditional state obligations like taxation. A participant in Wargiba noted, *"Why would I pay taxes to a system that cannot protect me or provide for my family? The money would disappear."* This confirms that the Hybrid Order in Tigray is one where the formal state exists as a shell, but the functional authority has moved back to the community.

4.2. Social Capital and the Shift to Horizontal Responsibility

The data reveal a dramatic shift from "bridging capital" (links to the state) to "bonding capital" (internal kinship ties), as conceptualized by Putnam (2000). In Tsigea, a key informant described this horizontal duty: *"When a family loses its home, we do not wait for the government... the neighborhood gathers... this is what it means to be part of a community."*

This redefinition of civic duty as a kinship obligation is further evidenced by the Marsa FGD, where a participant stated, *"Contributing to the burial fund is not optional. It is a duty that defines us as a people."* Theoretically, this proves that in the absence of a state-led social contract, bonding social capital becomes the primary mechanism for survival. The sacred nature of these communal acts stands in stark contrast to the perceived futility of state taxes, which a Wargiba participant described as a vanishing contribution.

4.3 Adaptive Legal Pluralism and Restorative Justice

The preference for *shimagile* (elder mediation) over formal courts validates the theory of Adaptive Legal Pluralism. Contrary to the "Static Theory" that views tradition as a relic, these findings show institutions strategically innovating to provide efficiency. A key informant in Marsa explained, *"A dispute that would take months in the formal courts is resolved in days through our traditional processes.* "This is not just about speed; it is about the Restorative Justice framework described by Lederach (1997). A participant in Genete reflected on this, *"We walked away with our relationship intact. The court would have given us a judgment but destroyed our kinship."* This highlights that

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indigenous systems are more adaptive to post-war needs because they prioritize social harmony, a core tenet of restorative justice, over the adversarial nature of state-centered legal models.

4.4 Cultural Identity and the Inward-Looking Social Contract

The fusion of political grievance with cultural identity creates a narrative of collective dignity (*hizbawi netib*). A key informant in Tsigea noted that while international NGOs come and go, the *beteseb* and elder networks *"have always been here and will remain."* Another informant added, *" Our culture has sustained us... It is not something we will abandon for a foreign system that has failed us."* Theoretically, this suggests that governance is now occurring despite the state, driven by cultural endurance. However, this carries the risk of "exclusive solidarity" within the hybrid order. As one Wargiba member warily confessed, *"We have learned to trust only ourselves."* While this inward-looking duty ensures immediate survival, it poses a challenge for the future reconstruction of a broader, inclusive national civic contract for the rest of Ethiopia.

In the end, there are two sides to this blending of political and cultural identities. It offers a strong incentive for group survival and reconstruction, but it also runs the risk of solidifying an exclusive kind of civic duty. Long-term reconciliation with other Ethiopian communities and the reconstruction of a more inclusive national civic contract may be hampered by this inward-looking solidarity, even while it is necessary for immediate survival. *"We have learned to trust only ourselves. This is survival after all we have been through. However, I'm curious about the implications for the future of our children and the rest of Ethiopia, " one Wargiba FGD member warily confessed.*

5. Findings and Conclusions

This Manuscript article has argued that the post-war Tigray region is governed through a hybrid system where formal political structures, weakened by conflict and contested legitimacy, are supplemented and often superseded by informal institutions rooted in the region's cultural fabric. Civic responsibility, consequently, is expressed primarily through horizontal duties of kinship and communal solidarity, which in turn perform essential governance functions. This reality emerges from the specific interplay of Tigray's fractured political context and its resilient cultural context.

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The implications are significant. For policymakers both within Ethiopia and in the international community, the lesson is that effective engagement in Tigray must recognize and work with these endogenous governance systems. Supporting community elders, kin-based aid networks, and traditional justice mechanisms may be more impactful in the short term than focusing solely on rebuilding a formal bureaucracy viewed with suspicion. For theoretical scholarship, the Tigray case underscores the need to integrate cultural analysis more deeply into the study of hybrid governance and post-conflict civic life.

Future research should pursue comparative studies with other regions in Ethiopia (e.g., Amhara, Oromia) to understand different models of state-society relations. Once conditions allow, empirical fieldwork is urgently needed to document the precise mechanisms and equity implications of this hybrid governance, particularly regarding the roles of women, youth, and marginalized sub-groups within Tigrayan society. Ultimately, understanding the complex dance between the political and the cultural in Tigray is not merely an academic exercise but a prerequisite for any sustainable and legitimate path forward for its people.

6. Implications and Recommendations

6.1 Institutional Integration and Policy Reform

Policymakers should transition from a conventional state-building model to one that recognizes and integrates resilient community structures. By establishing formal partnerships with culturally legitimate actors like the shimagile (mediators) and Aba Gars, the state can fill governance gaps and ensure that reconstruction efforts, such as public works, align with existing community labor contributions (wudubat). This requires the Ministry of Justice to develop a "legitimacy gradient" framework, allowing for the conditional referral of civil and resource disputes to accredited indigenous institutions while maintaining liaison offices at local courts to ensure procedural harmony.

6.2. Humanitarian and Community-Based Development

Humanitarian agencies must adapt their operational modalities to leverage kinship-based governance. Direct aid delivery should be coordinated through trusted beteseb (kinship) networks

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

and neighbourhood committees, which maintain higher levels of local legitimacy than damaged formal channels. To support long-term social cohesion, development programming should invest in the capacity of these informal institutions, conducting nuanced power mapping to avoid unintended conflict. Furthermore, any reconciliation processes should be framed around the concept of hizbawi netib (collective dignity) to foster local ownership and sustainable peace.

6.3 Knowledge Preservation and Public Awareness

To sustain these mechanisms, regional authorities and academic institutions like Mekelle University should systematically document the principles and case histories of the Gereb and Shimgilina systems. This academic foundation should support training modules that brief elders on modern legal standards and educate government officials on restorative justice values. Finally, local administrations should launch strategic media campaigns via FM radio and Community Theater to educate the youth on indigenous mediation. Publicly rewarding elders who successfully resolve complex disputes will validate these mechanisms as essential, dynamic partners in the regional peace-building process

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Examining Freedom of Expression during Ethiopia's Political Reform Process (2018–Mid-2020): Achievements and Challenges

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Abstract

In Ethiopia, the political reform process initiated under the leadership of Abiy Ahmed Ali was widely welcomed for opening new spaces for freedom of expression and broader civil liberties. This article employs a desk review methodology to critically examine both the achievements and the persistent challenges surrounding freedom of expression during the reform era. The study finds that the government's early reform measures, including revisions to restrictive laws, the release of political prisoners, expanded political participation, and increased operational space for journalists, activists, bloggers, and opposition groups, contributed to a more open public sphere. The emergence and proliferation of independent media outlets, including magazines, radio stations, and television channels, further enhanced citizens' access to diverse information and facilitated greater public engagement in political and social discourse through mainstream and social media platforms. Despite these notable developments, the reform process has also been accompanied by significant challenges. Rising political polarization, ethnic mistrust, hate speech, disinformation, and war propaganda have increasingly undermined constructive public dialogue and social cohesion. The growing influence of informally organized political and ethnic groupings has further complicated the protection of freedom of expression. Moreover, incomplete legal reforms, the continued application of anti-terrorism legislation, and the persistence of authoritarian political culture continue to constrain media independence, access to information, and the protection of journalists, opposition members, and citizens' due process rights. The article concludes that while Ethiopia's reform process created unprecedented opportunities for freedom of expression, substantial legal, institutional, and political obstacles remain in ensuring its sustainable protection and democratic consolidation.

Keywords: Freedom of Expression, Human Rights, Media, Political Reform

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1. Introduction

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right recognized under international, regional, and national legal frameworks. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that, "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers" (UDHR, 1948, p.5). The International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) also recognizes the right to freedom of expression in similar words. Article 19 (1) states that every person's right to hold an opinion without interference (ICCPR, 1966). Moreover, article 19 (2) of the covenant says that…

> Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing, or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice (ICCPR, 1966, p.11).

Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) also recognizes this right and states that "every individual shall have the right to receive information, the right to express and disseminate his opinions with law." (ACHPR, 1981, p. 4). Ethiopia has signed and ratified these major human rights instruments, which are stated above. Hence, Article 29 of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia states that…

> Everyone has the right to hold opinions without interference, the right to freedom of expression without any interference, which shall include freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, orally, either in writing, or in print, in the form of art, or through any media of his choice. (FDRE Constitution, 1995, p.9).

Freedom of expression encompasses the right to communicate or express one's own convictions, opinions, thoughts, and beliefs through words (written or oral), and non-verbal forms (symbols, visual expressions, music, and expressive acts) through any media without border limitations (Alexander, 2001; Guinn, 2005; Raza, 2016). It is a broad concept and does not exist alone.

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

According to Heller & Hoboken (2019), the right to freedom of expression is interdependent with freedom of conscience, thought, free and independent media, freedom of journalists, the right to peaceful assembly and association, as well as other rights. Moreover, this right is also dependent on the effective implementation of the rule of law (Heller & Hoboken, 2019).

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right of human beings as individuals and groups. It is a foundational civil and political right that is indispensable for a thriving civil society (Mihajlova, Bacovska, Shekerdjiev, 2013). According to Siegel (as cited in Aramyan, 2015), freedom of expression is important for discovering truth, fostering individual autonomy, self-fulfillment, and self-realization, and maintaining democracy in a political community. Hence, the value of freedom of expression for the overall development of the self and ensuring a democratic and civilized society is vital. It is only when there is freedom of expression that people can communicate their ideas freely, participate in issues of their common interests, and influence the decision-making of governments.

Nonetheless, the right to freedom of expression is not an absolute right. Siegel (as cited in Aramyan, 2015) stated that words can wound, and unlimited free speech can cause the spreading of false statements, intolerance, offend people's dignity and respect, and destroy democracy. With due consideration to the principles of limitations of human rights, international and national human rights instruments emphasize the special duties and responsibilities that citizens have in the realization of this right. Article 19(3) of the ICCPR (1966) states that "the exercise of freedom of expression is subject to certain restrictions for reasons of respecting the rights and reputation of others, protection of national security, public order, public health, and public morals". Moreover, Article 20, it prohibits advocating hate speech, which could incite discrimination, violence, or hostility based on national, racial, or religious differences, and any propaganda for war, which is against dignified life, unity, and security of any political community (ICCPR, 1966). Article 29 (6) of the FDRE Constitution (1995) also lays down the rationales for the limitation of freedom of expression, which are "to protect the well-being of the youth, honor and reputation of individuals." Any propaganda for war and the public expression of opinion intended to injure human dignity are prohibited.

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

According to O'Flaherty (2012), the right to freedom of expression is the most violated right throughout the world. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) seized state power after a protracted civil war in the country and the downfall of the despotic military regime in 1991. It promised the protection and realization of basic freedoms of citizens, including freedom of expression and independent media. However, the EPRDF regime is known for its long track record of limiting independent media, the rights to freedom of expression and access to information (Skjerdal, 2011; Human Rights Watch, 2019; Skjerdal & Gebru, 2020). Hence, it has been subject to criticisms and oppositions by its own citizens, international governmental and non-governmental organizations for threatening, intimidation, targeting, and jailing of prominent opposition political party leaders, ordinary citizens, and journalists, heavy control of media, shut down of publications, internet shutdowns, heavy restrains on demonstrations, and assemblies (Freedom House, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Moreover, the introduction of restrictive laws following the 2005 election including the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation No. 652/2009, the Charities and Societies Proclamation No. 621/2009, and the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation No. 590/2008—as well as the suppression and blocking of diaspora media outlets, including television channels, radio stations, blogs, and websites, have been widely criticized for disproportionately restricting freedom of expression in Ethiopia (Stremlau, 2012; Gagliardone, 2014; Biniam, 2016; Freedom House, 2019). However, recent political dynamics in Ethiopia, which started some six and five years ago, are changing the rhetoric and environment of democracy and human rights in the country. The current reform process headed by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (Dr.) in the country is applauded for its commitment and positive measures on human rights in general and freedom of expression in particular. Even though national and international organizations and experts have done many reports and articles with regard to the positive measures on the protection of freedom of expression since 2018, there are no ample academic works on it. This article also presents the positive measures and challenges of freedom of expression during the reform process in the country.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Ethiopia has undergone some important political dynamics since the 2014-16 flashpoints in some of the most populous regions of the country (Fisher, 2019; Mebratu, 2019; Tewodros,

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

2020). Open resistance against the EPRDF began in the two biggest regions of the federation. According to Mebratu (2019), the first open resistance was from Oromia, which was in opposition to the 'Master Plan' to expand the capital of Ethiopia, Addis-Ababa, into the Oromia regional state at the end of the first half of 2014. Another opposition comes from the Amhara regional state. -The arrest of activists agitating for the restoration of territory from the regional state of Tigrai to the Amhara regional state resulted in open resistance against EPRDF in mid-2016 (Fisher, 2019; Skjerdal & Gebru, 2020).

Due to this increasing popular resistance, in January 2018, EPRDF promised comprehensive reform measures like creating more open political space, repealing draconian laws, releasing political prisoners, better protection of human rights, and reducing corruption as a response to end the popular opposition (Yoseph, 2019). However, the opposition against the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF) dominated EPRDF regime steps up because of the longtime sentiment of political and economic marginalization of some ethnic groups, power struggle within the coalition, and partially in response to the violent measures against the opposition (Mebratu, 2019). It was in this context that Hailemariam Dessalegne eventually resigned in February 2018, which paved the way for the coming of Abyi Ahmed (Dr.) as the head of the EPRDF government on April 2, 2018.

The rise of Abiy Ahmed to power was widely welcomed by prominent individuals, national actors, and international organizations as a significant turning point for democracy and human rights in Ethiopia (Mohamed, Andreas, & Samuel, 2028). His administration was widely regarded as reform-oriented due to major political and institutional changes aimed at expanding civic and political space (Adem, 2019; Human Rights Watch, 2019). Key reform measures included the release of political prisoners and detained journalists, the lifting of the state of emergency, the return of exiled opposition groups and politicians, the closure of the notorious Maekelawi detention center, and the removal of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), and Ginbot 7 from the government's terrorist list (Danish Immigration Service, 2019; Human Rights Watch, 2019; Yoseph, 2019).

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

Moreover, Abyi's leadership is also heralded for his liberalized press and free speech, unlocking a significant number of blogs, websites, radio stations, and television stations. The government has eased restrictions on independent media, permitting both greater freedom for journalists and a more diverse range of news for the society (Danish Immigration Service, 2019; Yoseph, 2019). The measures taken by the government headed by Abyi Ahmed in broadening freedom of expression are vital. However, freedom of expression, since the coming of the new leadership in the country, has so many problems in practice, and its effective institutional guarantee and sustainability are also dubious. Most of the reports and studies until recent times particularly focused on the positive measures of the new leadership in the protection of human rights and freedom of expression. Little attention is given to the problems and challenges of freedom of expression, and it has not been widely a point of discussion in academia. Hence, this article is going to contribute something to filling this gap and paving the way for further academic works.

1.2 Objectives

General Objective: This article is going to critically examine what the new leadership in Ethiopia's political history brings in expanding and strengthening the landscape of the right to freedom of expression and the challenges it faces.

Specific Objectives: The specific objectives of this article are:

- To examine the positive measures and developments of the reform process in ensuring better protection and environment for freedom of expression in the country.
- To explore the challenges to freedom of expression in the country during this reform process.

2. Methodology

This article has used a qualitative research methodology. It is a desk review article supported by secondary data from different sources. The data was collected from international and national human rights instruments, books, articles, official letters, reports of different organizations, news

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articles, opinions, discussions from magazines, internet media, and YouTube. It has also used different media outlets, such as news, interviews, and discussions. -The analysis of this article is in reference to the international and national human rights instruments and the data obtained from the secondary sources.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 Positive Measures and Developments on the Protection of the Right to Freedom of Expression During the Reform Period

3.1.1 Promise of Legal Reforms

Since the coming of the new leadership in Ethiopia, headed by Abiy Ahmed as the prime minister, there are some vital promised legal reform measures which transformed the landscape for democracy and human rights in 2018 (Mukundu, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2019). The new leadership is honored for its initial promises and commitments for the reform of the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation No. 652/2009, Charities and Societies Proclamation No. 621 /2009, and Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation No. 590/2008, which are believed by many to be repressive laws of many human rights, including freedom of expression. However, the only tangible reform measure is the introduction and adoption of the new Civil Society Proclamation No. 1113/2019 by the parliament, replacing the old 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation in March, 2019. This newly introduced law eased restrictions that had hindered the capacity of groups to secure foreign funding to carry out human rights-related works (Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation, 2019; Human Rights Watch, 2019). It is an important measure in ensuring a better environment for freedom of organization and freedom of expression in the country. However, the 2018 reform promises on the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation and Media laws are still in process and yet to be finalized and introduced as binding laws. Many journalists, members of opposition political parties, and other citizens are subject to terrorism charges.

3.1.2 Easing Restrictions on Media Outlets

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
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Mill (as cited in O'Flaberty, 2012) stated that the right to freedom of expression is an entitlement to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas. Hence, free, independent, and pluralistic media are vital in seeking, receiving, imparting information, and expressing your thoughts and interests (Hammarberg et al., 2011). Article 29 of the Ethiopian constitution guarantees "freedom of the press, other mass media and freedom of artistic creativity" (FDRE Constitution, 1995; Proclamation NO. 1/1995). In this regard, the new leadership has taken some promising measures. Ethiopian TV channels that had been forced to operate from bases outside the country and labeled as terrorist organizations by the previous leadership, such as the Oromo Media Network (OMN) and Ethiopia Radio and Satellite Television (ESAT), are allowed to operate in the country (Marks, 2019; Reporters without Borders, 2019). Since 2018, the number of new TV and radio channels, newspapers, and magazines has been increasing (Mukundu, 2018).

According to Fisseha (2019), since April 2018, at least eight (8) privately owned newspapers and magazines have been established compared to only four before then, which is a significant improvement in access to information and freedom of expression. Freedom House (2020) stated that the easing of restrictions on government, independent media, and media professionals since the coming of the new leadership to state power has created an enabling environment for the proliferation of new mass media. It unblocks more than 260 previously banned websites, blogs, and has been permitted to resume their function (Freedom House, 2019; Reporters without Borders, 2019). In June 2018, the new leadership lifted the state of emergency, which was highly restrictive on citizens' freedom of expression (Freedom House, 2019; Marks, 2019). These are very important in broadening citizens' opportunities to have more alternatives in their right to access diverse information or ideas, disseminate their voices, and influence government decisions.

3.1.3 Greater Freedom for Opposition Groups, Journalists, and Citizens

During this reform period, the conditions for opposition groupings are improved (Freedom House, 2019). Abiy has released thousands of political prisoners, decriminalized opposition parties and armed groups once labelled terrorists (Fisher, 2019; Freedom House, 2020). These measures have created a more favorable environment for political parties and other opposition groupings to resume their legal opposition, freely discuss, and participate in national issues or agendas. It has

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

also helped citizens to have access to diversified information, policy alternatives, and to reflect their thoughts and interests.

According to Reporters without Borders (2019), until the end of 2018, not a single journalist remained behind bars in Ethiopia. This freedom for journalists, together with other early encouraging measures on press, freedom of expression, and improved environment on human rights, helped Ethiopia to leapfrog fifty-one (51) places from 150 to 99 from 2018-2020, and was honored to host the 2020 World Press Freedom Day event (Amnesty International, 2019; Reporters without Borders, 2020).

The reform process created greater freedom for journalists in their professional activities (Fisseha, 2019). Fisseha (2019) stated that these days, there has been a drastic and bold shift in coverage of previously off-limits topics like politics and human rights. Permitting greater freedom for journalists in their work, opposition political parties, and citizens are vital measures in strengthening the right to freedom of expression during the initial times of the reform period. According to Freedom House (2019), severe restrictions on freedom of assembly imposed in the past eased somewhat in 2018. It has created more opportunities for discussion throughout the country and participation and engagement of citizens on different issues or agendas, individually and in groups (Mukundu, 2018). It has also created an opportunity for citizens to have access to a more diverse range of news, ideas, thoughts, and interests.

However, in spite of these early positive measures and developments, the right to freedom of expression during the reform process has many problems and challenges. The proliferation of hate speech, fake news/disinformation, propaganda of war, the continuity of the draconian laws despite much-applauded reform promises, the problem of media independence, mass arrest, intimidation, harassment, and illegal imprisonment of opposition groups, members of the opposition, journalists, and internet blockades are notable.

3.2 The Challenges of the Right to Freedom of Expression Since 2018

3.2.1 Hate Speech, Fake News/Disinformation, and Propaganda of War

Despite the positive measures and developments in strengthening freedom of expression during the reform process, the lack of political consensus in the country is negatively affecting freedom

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

of expression. The reform process is characterized by a growing incidence of hate speech, and fake news/disinformation (Horne, 2018; Mumo, 2019; Elias, 2019). Freedom House, in its 2020 report, also stated that the problem of hate speech and the deliberate spreading of disinformation on social media has been blamed for fanning the flames of violent conflict, displacement, and humanitarian crisis in the country. Recognizing this problem, the new leadership in Ethiopia has introduced a new law to control and suppress hate speech and disinformation recently (Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression Proclamation, 2020).

The problem of hate speech and disinformation/fake news is not only a problem of social media. It has been a pervasive problem in the mainstream and internet-based media, too (Tewodros, 2020). State and government-affiliated independent media have been spreading government propaganda with hate speech and fake news/disinformation, which are against human dignity, truth, deceptive, and discriminatory. Mehari (2019) also stated that Ethiopia's new leaders, the opposition and Prosperity Party (PP), have perfidiously and selectively depicted Tigreans as the nation's most corrupt people while Tigray is portrayed as a region that has benefited disproportionally from federally funded projects. The scandalous broadcast documentary by state and government-affiliated media about alleged human rights abuses and corruption committed by previous higher officials is one important example. According to the Human Rights Watch report (2019), the documentary entitled *Yefitih Sokoka* ('Misery of Justice' in Amharic) lacks independence from the government. The broadcast documentary reflects that the Tigrigna-speaking officials were the abusers of the Amhara and Oromo prisoners throughout the prison centers in the country (Nebyu, 2019). Such documentaries from the beginning undermine defendants' right to a fair trial by mobilizing the public to support a judiciary that is far from independent of executive dictation and is subject to discriminatory and hateful ideas as well as disinformation.

Moreover, it also violates the basic purpose of the media, which is to investigate the truth and the right of citizens to get the right/true information. Walta Media and Communication Corporate S.c on its Facebook page, waltainfo.com, shared fake news of the death of Dr. Debretsion Gemremichael (the vice president of Tigrai regional state) and apologized for it immediately on December 13, 2019 (Addis Monitor, 2019; Borkena.com, 2019). Higher officials of the

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government and informally also organized groups are at the heart of the problems of hate speech, fake news/disinformation, and propaganda of war. The current Trade and Industry minister of Ethiopia, Melaku Alebel, in his interview on Walta TV, *Netsa Hasab* ('Free Idea' in Amharic) political program, asked about the blockade of the roads to Tigray in Amhara regional state. He said that …

> The blockade of the roads from Addis Ababa to Tigrai, and Amhara to Tigrai, aimed at denying access to goods and services for the peoples of Tigrai, was right and even below fair, considering the protective and welcome behaviors of the society to the TPLF Officials (VOA Ethiopia, 2020)

Even the premier is known for his divisive and discriminatory speeches. Abiy's speeches lack responsibility and are known for his deliberately blurred critiques of the Meles/Hailemariam regimes, attacks on the TPLF, and, more significantly, slurs on Tigreans themselves (Fisher, 2019).

In a welcome rally for the members of *Fano* (a youth and adult movement including armed groups) in Gonder city, Amhara regional state, Mesafint Tesfa, who is one of the leaders of the movement stated that; "If the peoples of Tigrai can't help our struggle against TPLF, they have to leave our land where ever they are." *(*Ethiopian Review, 2018). People in the assembly responded to it with claps, shouting with happiness, and saying, "Say it again, say it again ".

International and national human rights instruments prohibit hate speech and fake news/disinformation. They could incite discrimination, violence, or hostility based on national, racial, religious, and other forms of differences. Article 20 of the ICCPR (1966) prohibits fake news while art. Article 29 of the FDRE Constitution also prohibits the public expression of opinion intended to injure human dignity, which can include both hate speech and fake news/disinformation. However, freedom of expression during the reform period has been beyond its limits due to the wider prevalence of the problems of hate speech and fake news/disinformation in the country. These problems have also been against the peaceful coexistence and social cohesion of Ethiopians, the displacement of millions, and the death of many others in the country.

Propaganda of war is another problem of freedom of expression during the reform period in the country. Any war propaganda in words of mouth, print, or any other form is against the dignity

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

and security of any society or community (Downey, 1984). Article 20 of the ICCPR (1966) and Article 29 of the FDRE Constitution (1995) prohibit propaganda of war that intends to injure human dignity, unity, and security of any political community. Irrespective of the targeted community or group, propaganda on war is against the dignity, unity, and security of the people and state. However, government officials and informally organized groups have been terrorizing citizens by propagating war. Due to the increasing mistrust and infighting among the member parties of the EPRDF, which later changed to conflict between Prosperity Party (PP) and TPLF, the recruitment of new security forces is high in Oromia, Amhara, and Tigray regional states (Tronvoll, 2020). It was common to see parades of the regional police forces, militias, and paramilitary Special Forces, and war of words among the regional governments (Adem, 2019; Tronvoll, 2020). There have been movements of the Special Forces, police, and militia around the borders of the regional states (Awlo Media, 2020). Moreover, the vice president of the national regional state of Tigrai stated that…

> There have been incidents that could force us to go to war, but we don't like it. The ruling group has sent heavily armed personnel who are consciously selected, excluding the Tegaru soldiers. They are encircled and detained by the regional *Liyu Hail* ('Special Force' in Amharic) at Mekelle Alula Aba-Nega Airport peacefully to prevent any possible war (Awlo Media, 2020).

Sending troops secretly and without the demand of the regional state is a clear propaganda of war. The conspiracy in the collection of the military personnel also indicates not only a mere political conspiracy but also a discriminatory practice which could create mistrust and conflict within the military, among societies, and feelings of alienation and disrespect to the Tigreans.

The prime minister's notorious speech in response to the regional government of Tigrai's decision in favor of conducting elections in 2020, which says, "if there is any group that wants to conduct illegal elections in the country, the central government has a duty to defend the constitution, and we are ready to take decisive and necessary measures against these groups." (FBC, 2020). The prime minister has also been threatening a fiscal retaliation on Tigrai regional state, which is beyond declaring war on the people (Tronvoll, 2020).

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

Besides, in an assembly organized to welcome the *Fano* groups in Gonder, Mesafint Tesfa stated that, "if we are allowed to go to war, we will grab Tigrai and bring all the development projects there." The expression of such ideas through different media, in public assemblies and discussions, is beyond the limits of freedom of expression and the causes of mistrust, conflict, attacks, displacement, and a life of fear and terror of Ethiopians during the reform period.

3.2.2 Draconian Laws Remain in Force

Despite the promise from the ruling group and much anticipated hope of citizens for the reform of the repressive laws of the past, the reform of the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation and Media laws are in process and yet to be introduced as binding laws with legal obligation. Though the media draft law is prepared, it is yet to be submitted to the parliament for discussion and approval. The Anti-Terrorism Proclamation No. 652/2009, which is the leading cause for the silencing, illegal imprisonment, and exile of many journalists, opposition political party leaders, members of the opposition, and other ordinary citizens, is still in function (Amnesty International, 2019; Fisseha, 2019). The new leadership lacks commitment or interest in revising this repressive law, and many are subject to terrorism charges. Instead, the new leadership has introduced another law that aims to control and suppress hate speech and disinformation.

However, many criticize it for the lack of clarity of the concepts used in the proclamation and its potential to suppress freedom of expression. Restoring the discredited legal weapons like the anti-terrorism law and the introduction of other new potentially repressive laws indicate the continuation of the old habits of authoritarianism and are against the promised reforms for better protection of the right to freedom of expression (Adem, 2019; Tewodros, 2020). Hence, the legal and institutional guarantee of freedom of expression in the country is yet to be ensured. The sustainability and effectiveness of the reform process are also dubious.

3.2.3 Problem of Editorial Independence on Governmental and Independent Media

The media are the lifeline of freedom of expression (Carlson, 2016). It has to be free and independent media. According to Reporters without Borders (2019), despite much applauded media independence since the coming of the new leadership, the editorial independence of the media outlets in Ethiopia is still hard. The concerned authorities of the ENN and Tigray TV were

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

asked by the broadcast authority to respond to why they have not provided the live coverage of the ruling party rally in 2018 (Reporters without Borders, 2019). Though the reason for the closure of the ENN TV is debatable, Mukundu (2018) stated that it is a possible reason for the closure of the media. It is also a sign of a problem of administrative freedom.

An exiled senior journalist, Bilal Werku, who has been working in the state-owned media, Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC), has expressed the prevalence of a serious problem with press freedom and editorial independence (Rahman, 2020). Elias (2019) also strengthened the above idea, stating Pawlos Belete, who is a Chief news editor of Walta Information Center, "during the invitation of formerly outlawed individuals and groups for interviews and discussions, the channel is grappling with its old habits," which indicates the problem of independence from the government and censorship on medias. More recently, workers of Fana FM Mekelle, a branch of Fana Broadcasting Corporation (FBC), have stated about the increasing pressure, intimidation in their activities, and denial of access to their regional or local programs at the center (BBC News Tigrigna, 2020).

Moreover, the head of the EBC Tigrigna program in Addis-Ababa has resigned from his position and decided to leave his job due to the worsening of editorial independence and journalism ethics. He stated that "denial of fair access to regional/local issues/interests, diverse agendas, and interference in the content of programs, and discriminatory interests which favor the interests of the current group in power" are some of the problems in the media (BBC News Tigrigna, 2020; Dimtsi Weyane TV News, 2020).

Media need independence to be watchdogs of their society, capable of being voices of the voiceless, and also reflect diversified ideas, especially in countries with diverse and significant minority societies like Ethiopia. However, the above-stated facts indicate the challenges of media freedom and independence, which are against freedom of expression.

3.2.4 Intimidation, Harassment, Threat, and Arbitrary Arrest of Journalists, Opposition Political Party Leaders, and Their Supporters

Everywhere in the country, discussions and citizens' participation in different local, national, and international agendas or issues are widely prevalent, different from previous times. However,

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

political parties, prominent political party leaders, academicians, political analysts, journalists, activists, and bloggers have been subject to intimidation, harassment, threats, and arbitrary arrests by the government, formally and informally organized forces or groups. Lidetu Ayalew, Bekelle Gerba (Vice Chairman of the Ormomo Federalist Congress), and Ezkiel Gebissa, a political analyst, have been subject to intimidation, harassment, and threats for their discussions with different groups. Asked about the opposition and harassment following his trip to Tigrai regional state and participation in an academic discussion at Mekelle University Adi-Haki campus, Bekelle Gerba stated that…

> I have presented my academic work at Addis-Ababa, Wellega, and Metu Universities and done the same at Mekelle. No one asked me when I went to Wellega and Metu, but many questioned my trip to Mekelle, why?" He asked himself, and of course, explained it, saying that "the criticism and harassment emanates from a stereotype, hate, and discrimination for a specific community and group" (Oromia Media Network, 2020).

Political party leaders, journalists, and even foreign diplomats have been continuously intimidated and harassed during their travel to Tigrai regional state for different international and national agendas (Mehari, 2020). Arbegnoch Ginbot 7's trip to Amhara regional state, Bahir Dar city, for a meeting and discussion with its supporters faced grave resistance and was canceled for security reasons, and some angry and armed youth groups had to carry AK-47 during the protest march in the city (Borkena.com, 2019).

The protection of academicians, journalists, activists, political leaders, and bloggers from intimidation, harassment, and arbitrary arrest is a necessity to ensure better protection of freedom of expression. However, many agree on reverts of the old tactics of intimidation and harassment, arbitrary and mass arrests, anti-terrorism charges, and internet shutdowns, even in the much-anticipated reform period of the country (Fisseha, 2019; Mumo, 2019; Tewodros, 2020). There is harassment and intimidation, including death threats, against journalists. Bekalu Alamrew, a journalist in Awlo Media, stated about the intimidation, including a death threat to him and journalist Yayesew Shimelis by Press Secretary of the office of the Prime Minister, Mr. Nigusu Tilahun, if they fail to cooperate with the government (Ethio Times, 2020). Yesew Shimelis has

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

repeatedly faced intimidation and harassment and became a victim of arbitrary arrest recently (Ethio Info, 2020). He has been in prison without a charge for some days, and the police have been reluctant to release him by the order of the court, and lastly, he is forced to close his program *Ethio-Forum* on Tigray TV (Fisseha, 2019; Tigrai TV Ethio-Forum, 2020). Journalists have also been subject to informally organized mob attacks in different parts of the country (Human Rights Watch, 2019; Mumo, 2019).

Mass arrests of opposition activists and supporters are becoming a common phenomenon in the country (Freedom House, 2020; Amnesty International, 2020). Human rights defenders, activists, and bloggers are subject to intimidation, harassment, and threats for their critical views and thoughts, including death threats for some, like Seyoum Teshome, who is a blogger and political activist in the country (Amnesty International, 2020; Fisseha, 2019). These crimes also lack adequate investigation by the concerned authorities to protect the rights of the journalists (Mumo, 2019). Citizens are subject to terrorism charges, which the new leadership promised to abrogate from the beginning, but are still functional. This also indicates not only a return to the old habits of authoritarianism but also the lack of commitment of the leadership to ensure better protection of freedom of expression.

Generally, with the continuation of mass arrests, arbitrary arrests, intimidation, harassment, threats, and anti-terrorism charges against political leaders, academicians, journalists, bloggers, activists, and human rights defenders, it is hard to create a fertile ground for freedom of expression to thrive in the country. These violations of the right to freedom of expression are undermining the much-applauded reform, and Ethiopians hope for freedom of expression.

3.2.5 Blockade of Access to the Internet

Access to the internet is basic in ensuring the right to freedom of expression for citizens in this digital era. Lifting the state of emergency and unblocking a significant number of websites were among the positive measures in ensuring internet freedom since the coming of the new leadership (Freedom House, 2019; Reporters without Borders, 2019). But there have been localized network shutdowns starting mid-2018, and internet access has remained poor (Freedom House, 2019). In the name of national security, prevention and control of hate speech and disinformation, protection of the rights and freedoms of others, suspension of internet services, blockade of social media and

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

communication platforms continued, which hinders the free flow of information since the coming of the new leadership (Freedom in the World, 2020).

The government has shut down fixed-line and mobile internet at the local and national levels, even during the time of COVID-19, when seeking, receiving, and imparting information was needed more than ever to save the imminent danger of the pandemic (UN High Commission for Human Rights, 2020). There has also been a blocking of some websites for political reasons, which later opened, like Aiga Foum, Tigrai Online, and Tigraisolidarity.org, which is a clear violation of the freedom of expression of citizens (Freedom House, 2019). The network shutdowns restrict or deny journalists, groups, organizations, and citizens from seeking, receiving, and sharing information while it is needed desperately. It negatively affects the communication and interaction of citizens at the individual, community, national, and international levels. It also opens an opportunity for the development of suspicion, disturbance, fear, and the proliferation of misinformation or fake news on people's lives. The repeated suspension of access to internet service and blockade of social media are clear violations of citizens' right to freedom of expression.

4. Conclusion

The EPRDF government has been criticized for the continued violation of freedom of expression, including by introducing repressive legal instruments like the Anti-Terrorism, Civil Society, and Media laws after the 2005 election. However, the new leadership in the country, headed by Abiy Ahmed, has been applauded for the early promises and positive developments in the landscape of the right to freedom of expression in Ethiopia. The positive reform measures include the promise and practical legal reforms of some draconian laws, which disproportionately restrict freedom of expression in the country. Hence, the new leadership has introduced a new proclamation of Civil Society in 2019, which eased restrictions that had hindered the capacity of groups to secure foreign funding to carry out human rights-related works. It has lifted the state of emergency, allowing exiled politicians and opposition groups to enter their homes and legally participate in politics, closed notorious federal crimes investigations, liberalized the press and free speech, unlocked a

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

significant number of blogs, websites, radio, and television stations. It has eased restrictions on independent media, permitting both greater freedom for journalists and a more diverse range of news for society. There has been active participation of citizens on political issues through assemblies, demonstrations, and discussions, both individually and in an organized form. These are some of those vital measures in creating better protection of the right to freedom of expression in the country.

However, freedom of expression, since the coming of the new leadership in the country, has so many problems in practice, and its effective institutional guarantee and sustainability are also dubious. There has been a wider prevalence of hate speech, fake news/disinformation, and propaganda of war. This is against the right of citizens to free speech. Due to the political and ethnic polarization and conflict in the country, high-ranking government authorities, opposition groups, informally organized groups, and mainstream and social media have been active in spreading hate speech, fake news, and war propaganda, which are against the dignity of human beings and the cohesion and unity of the country. Reforms of the Anti-Terrorism and Media laws are yet to be materialized. Citizens are subject to anti-terrorism charges throughout the country, and it is a serious challenge to the right to freedom of expression.

Intimidation, harassment, illegal arrest, and violation of the right to due process of law of political leaders, academicians, journalists, bloggers, and activists, both by the government and other formally and informally organized groups, have been common. Access to the internet has been repeatedly blocked in the country, which makes access to information difficult for citizens. Demonstrations and assemblies have also been centers of hate speech and propaganda of war during this reform time. Generally, the legal reform process aimed at ensuring effective protection of freedom of expression is incomplete, and freedom of expression in the country has also exceeded its limits.

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The Socio-Economic Impacts of Irregular Migration among the Raya People of Southern Tigray: An Ethnographic Account

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Abstract

This study examines the socio-economic impacts of irregular migration on families and communities in *Hashenge*, a rural area in *Ofla* Wereda, Southern Tigray of Ethiopia. The research employed a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative data from surveys with qualitative insights obtained through key informant interviews and focus group discussions in order to capture both migration patterns and lived experiences. The focus of the study was on four *Kushets* (Debri, Mewura, Deteri, and Adobomossa), where participants were selected using purposive sampling techniques. The study is guided by the new economics labor migration theory, social network theory, and the theory of push and pull factors. The findings indicate that irregular migration has been particularly common among young people, predominantly men between the ages of 15 and 35 with limited formal education. Hence, the Study found out that migration is largely driven by a combination of push and pull factors. Irregular migration results in both positive and negative socio-economic outcomes. While remittances improve household income and living

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conditions for some families, migration also generates labor shortages, family disruptions, and social challenges within the community. Based on these findings, the study recommends that the local government and relevant stakeholders should enhance local economic opportunities, strengthen psycho-social support services, and promote peace consolidation as part of a comprehensive response to irregular migration.

Keywords: Irregular Migration, Impacts of Irregular Migration, *Ofla* Woreda, Tigray

1. Introduction

In the contemporary era of globalization, migration has become a major concern for scholars examining the relationship between local communities and global mobility. Ranging from the smallest local internal to the largest international, migration is a phenomenon in the process of globalization that drives the present economic, political, social, cultural, and technological engines of individuals and groups across various geographic domains. Consequently, local communities increasingly experience various forms of internal and international migration, in which individuals and groups are actors in movement, moving physically or as beneficiaries of movement (Urry, 2007).

Today, due to globalization, the world is becoming one village. Despite existing political barriers, there is an increasing movement of people across the globe (McKenzie, 2025). According to UNDESA (2025), the total number of international migrants was estimated to be 304 million at mid-year 2024. This represents 3.7% of the global population and marks an increase from 275 million in 2020 to 450 million by 2050 (United Nations, 2024). Globally, it is estimated that between 10% and 20% of the world's migrant population are individuals without the appropriate documentation in an irregular way (IOM, 2024).

Migration has historically been a central livelihood strategy across many African societies. In Ethiopia, irregular migration has increased significantly over the past two decades due to poverty, unemployment, environmental stress, political instability, and aspirations for improved livelihoods abroad (De Haas, 2010). Among the Raya people of Southern Tigray, migration has become increasingly common, particularly among youth seeking opportunities in the Middle East, Sudan, South Africa, and other destinations.

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In recent years, there has been a significant rise in outward irregular migration from Ethiopia to the Gulf Countries. Despite extensive government public awareness campaigns about the adverse impacts of irregular migration, a large number of young Ethiopians still migrate out of the country through irregular channels, predominantly to the Middle East (IOM, 2025). This high Demand comes from the labor-intensive economic motive of migration. According to the results of various descriptive studies, the factors that drive internal migration vary from person to person and from area to area, depending on the degree of influence, the factors imposed over social groups and individuals. The rural-urban migration in developing nations, particularly of Africa, according to Shimeles et al (1999), is driven by profound socio-economic crises that badly affect the everyday lives of rural societies whose livelihood is dependent on a subsistence form of agriculture and a traditional type of herding livestock.

Despite increasing migration trends in Ethiopia, limited scholarly attention has been given to the ethnographic dimensions of irregular migration among the Raya people of Southern Tigray. Existing studies often focus on economic or policy dimensions while overlooking local meanings, lived experiences, and social transformations associated with migration. This article addresses this gap by examining the socio-economic impacts of irregular migration through an ethnographic lens.

Thus, the study examined the socio-economic impacts of irregular migration based on the following research questions:

- What causes young adults to migrate irregularly in the Hashenge community?
- What are the socio-economic impacts of irregular migration on households and communities in the study area?
- What policy recommendations are important to prevent irregular migration?

2. Theoretical and Empirical Frameworks

2.1. Theoretical Frameworks

2.1.1 Meanings and Concepts of Migration

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The term migration originates from the Latin word *migrare*, which means 'to move or settle/ shift. Migration means the movement of people from one geographic location to another geographic location for a short or longer duration for any reason. Besides, migration means changing the place of one administrative boundary to another administrative boundary, either for a short duration or for a longer duration, or for permanent change of residence. It is a complex global phenomenon driven by a variety of factors, with profound consequences for individuals, families, and societies (IOM, 2025).

There is no universally acceptable definition of migration. Various statistical offices have defined migration according to their purpose. For example, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) defined a migrant as "a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons". Similarly, the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) has defined migrants as "individuals who changed their usual place of residence or changed their last place of residence (IOM, 2025).

Migration is defined as the movement of persons away from their place of usual residence, either across an international border or within a state. It can be indicated both with positive and negative connotations. Positively, (for example, moving to start a new job, seeking better living conditions) or negatively, (for example, escaping political oppression, conflict, violence, disaster, or human rights violations). It is generally accompanied by significant social and cultural changes in the cultural setup of both the migrants and the host community (Eva, 2023).

Migration is a cause and effect of societal change at both places of origin and destination. It has extensive consequences for the individual migrant, the society, and the population at the destination as well as at the origin. Migration has been a major means used by people throughout human history to improve their status or simply to survive. It is a major factor in socio-economic development and human resource planning. It has attained a special significance in the era of liberalization, privatization, globalization, industrialization, and commercialization of the economy (Tataru, 2019). Within the Hashenge context, irregular migration extends beyond physical movement and legal status. It represents a household survival strategy, a mechanism of

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Social mobility, a culturally normalized livelihood practice, is a response to structural marginalization and a socially embedded aspiration among rural youth (De Haas, 2021; Gebresenbet, 2022). Migration is therefore deeply intertwined with kinship obligations, social identity, economic reproduction, masculinity, and community expectations, particularly in the context of post-war insecurity and limited livelihood opportunities in Southern Tigray (Kleist & Thorsen, 2017; Mixed Migration Centre, 2024).

Ethnographically, migration is not understood merely as an individual economic decision motivated by wage differentials or employment opportunities. Rather, it is viewed as a socially embedded and culturally negotiated process shaped by meanings, emotions, social relations, power structures, and collective experiences (Massey et al., 1993).

Among many migrant-sending communities, including the Hashenge community of Southern Tigray, migration is often socially constructed as a pathway to adulthood, prestige, and social recognition. Young people do not simply migrate because of poverty alone; they migrate because migration has become symbolically associated with achievement, modernity, and economic transformation within the community. Ethnographic studies demonstrate that migration aspirations are socially produced through everyday interactions, storytelling, observation of return migrants, and shared community experiences (De Haas, 2010).

Cultural narratives and migration discourses further reinforce migration practices. In many communities, successful migrants become symbols of prosperity and social mobility. Stories of economic success abroad circulate within local communities and influence the aspirations of young people. Over time, migration becomes normalized and institutionalized as part of local culture, creating what migration scholars describe as a "culture of migration" (Massey et al., 1993). Therefore, ethnographically, migration should be understood as a multidimensional social process that reflects the interaction between economic pressures, household strategies, emotional experiences, social networks, cultural meanings, and structural inequalities. This perspective moves beyond simplistic economic explanations and provides a deeper understanding of how migration reshapes livelihoods, identities, family structures, and community relations among the Hashenge community of Southern Tigray.

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2.1.2 Theoretical Frameworks

Irregular migration among the Raya people of Southern Tigray cannot be adequately explained through conventional economic migration theories alone. Existing migration literature in Ethiopia has largely emphasized poverty, unemployment, and remittance economies as the dominant explanatory variables for migration (De Haas, 2010; Massey et al., 1993). However, the post-2022 realities in Tigray reveal that migration has increasingly become embedded within conflict-induced insecurity, identity anxieties, post-war trauma, disrupted livelihoods, and the reconstruction of social meaning in everyday life. Therefore, migration among the Hashenge community must be analyzed not merely as economic mobility, but as a culturally mediated response to social collapse, uncertainty, and post-war restructuring. So, the following theories help to investigate the socio-economic impacts of irregular migration among the Hashenge community.

2.1.2.1 Push–Pull Theory

Push factors among the Hashenge community include chronic unemployment, land scarcity, agricultural decline, food insecurity, political instability, war-related destruction, and lack of livelihood opportunities (Todaro, 1969). Recent studies in Tigray indicate that conflict-related displacement and post-war economic collapse have intensified migration aspirations, particularly among youth who perceive migration as the only viable survival strategy (Woldie, 2025).

However, reducing migration solely to economic deprivation risks oversimplifying the lived realities of Hashenge communities. The post-war situation in Tigray has transformed migration into what may be described as "existential mobility," where migration is motivated not only by income-seeking but also by fear, insecurity, psychological trauma, and uncertainty about the future (Favara et al., 2022; Gebresenbet, 2022). Many young people migrate because local social structures, institutions, and collective futures have been profoundly destabilized by the war between 2020 and 2022 (Favara et al., 2022). In this regard, migration becomes both a material and symbolic escape from post-war social fragmentation.

Recent studies on Tigray demonstrate that the Pretoria Agreement of 2022 did not fully restore social stability, especially in areas such as Ofla and Hashenge in Southern Tigray, where

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insecurity, displacement, contested identities, and weak public services continue to shape everyday life (Gebrihet & Gebresilassie, 2025; Rift Valley Institute, 2026). Consequently, Migration aspirations among Hashenge youth are increasingly connected to post-war uncertainty and perceived abandonment by state institutions.

From a cultural perspective, migration among the Hashenge community is deeply intertwined with social identity, masculinity, honor, and communal expectations. Ethnographically, migration has become socially normalized as a marker of adulthood, courage, and success. Young men who remain unemployed in rural villages are often socially marginalized, while migrants and returnees who construct houses or support relatives gain symbolic recognition and prestige. Thus, migration functions as a cultural performance of social mobility and masculine achievement (Gebresenbet, 2022). This insight extends existing migration theories by demonstrating that migration decisions are culturally produced through local narratives of dignity, social recognition, and post-war survival. Migration is therefore not simply an economic response but also a socially negotiated identity project shaped by collective meanings and community expectations (Appadurai, 1996).

The theory of push and pull factors makes a synthesis of conditions that exist in the two 'worlds", the poor and rich countries. The push and pull factors are the faces of the same coin, showing how living conditions, human rights, society, and many other parts of the mosaic can influence common lives. Knowing these factors and their influences on the process of trafficking in human beings is a very big importance for further policy and other institutional measures (Angelina, 2012). Therefore, the community of Hashenge migrated because of the pull and push factors. So, using this theory in the study helps to investigate the pull and push factors in line with the socio-economic impacts of irregular migration.

2.1.2.2 Social Network Theory

Social Network Theory is highly relevant in explaining the persistence of irregular migration among the Hashenge community. Migration networks involving relatives, brokers, smugglers, returnees, and former migrants reduce migration risks and facilitate mobility across dangerous routes toward Sudan, Djibouti, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa (Massey et al., 1993; Mixed Migration Centre, 2024). Recent evidence from post-war Tigray indicates that migration

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

Routes increasingly pass through Afar, Somaliland, Djibouti, and Yemen despite escalating maritime deaths, trafficking, and border violence (IOM, 2024; UNHCR, 2024).

In the Hashenge context, where war-related economic collapse, insecurity, and institutional breakdown persist, migration networks have become essential survival mechanisms for many rural youths. Yet existing migration literature often romanticizes migration networks as supportive systems while insufficiently addressing their exploitative and coercive dimensions (Achilli, 2021). Brokers and informal facilitators frequently manipulate vulnerable young people by promising employment opportunities abroad while exposing migrants to trafficking, extortion, kidnapping, detention, and death along transit corridors (Mixed Migration Centre, 2024). Ethnographic observations from Southern Tigray suggest that many families in Hashenge rely on trusted social connections to organize migration journeys despite awareness of the dangers involved. Thus, migration networks must be understood within broader systems of unequal power relations, informal economies of mobility, and post-war survival strategies (Gebresenbet, 2022). The role of remittances constitutes another important dimension requiring critical reinterpretation.

Existing Ethiopian migration literature often portrays remittances positively as mechanisms for poverty reduction, household consumption, food security, and rural development (Weldemariam et al., 2022). Indeed, among the Hashenge community, remittances contribute to the construction of modern houses, educational support, household food security, debt repayment, agricultural recovery, and investment in small businesses.

2.3.3. New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM) Theory

From the perspective of the New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM), migration functions as a household strategy for risk diversification and income stabilization (Stark & Bloom, 1985). In Hashenge, where war has weakened agricultural productivity, disrupted markets, and increased household vulnerability, families collectively finance migration with the expectation that remittances will stabilize livelihoods and support post-war recovery (Gebrihet & Gebresilassie, 2025). However, this study argues that migration literature in Ethiopia has insufficiently examined the social costs of remittance economies. While remittances may improve material conditions, they also generate profound social and emotional consequences in the community (De Haas, 2021).

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

This research investigates that remittances should not be analyzed solely through economic indicators but also through emotional, relational, and cultural dimensions. Migration generates what may be conceptualized as transnational precarity, where households simultaneously depend on and suffer from migration (Kleist & Thorsen, 2017).

2.2 Empirical Frameworks

2.2.1 Types of Migration

In anthropology, migration is viewed not merely as a demographic statistic but as a complex social, cultural, and personal process that involves the movement of individuals or groups, impacting identity, community structure, and cultural change. It focuses on the lived experience, the social networks that facilitate movement, and the transformation of cultures in both sending and receiving locations. Various authors have classified human migration into different categories. According to Cohen (1996) and King (2012), such migration binaries or dichotomies as internal vs international, temporary vs. permanent, regular vs irregular, voluntary vs forced, economic migrants vs refugees should not be viewed as hard and fast classifications. With regard to administrative boundaries, there are two types of migration. i.e., international (external) migration and internal migration.

The process of external migration is called emigration and immigration, while internal migration is known as interstate or intra-state migration. Intra-state migration has two dimensions, i.e., inter-district and intra-district migration. Migration from one village to another village is occurring in intra-district migration. Both external and internal migrations have two flows of the migration process, in-migration and out-migration. In-migration is the process of positive change of population, while out-migration is the process of negative change of population at any place of residence (De Haas, 2024).

2.2.2 Causes of Irregular Migration

Migration may take place because of a number of push and pull factors and takes two forms: Voluntary and forced. Pull Factors are positive aspects that attract people to move to a place. It refers to the availability of better opportunities elsewhere, mainly related to employment. These

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ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

are: safety, stability, freedom, higher wages, job prospects, food availability, better environment, family reunification, better quality of life, and availability of services (Haas, 2024; Saraswati, 2025). Pull factors are responsible for dictating where the migrants end up.

The positive aspects of some destination countries serve to attract more immigrants than those of others. High standard of living and better wages are the major pull factors for potential migrants. In this regard, people who migrate from developing countries to developed countries often find that the same work they were doing at home is rewarding abroad. Most developed countries also need the labor of migrants to support their growing economy. Apart from these, the political and Religious relative freedoms permitted by some developed countries can be mentioned as pull factors (IOM, 2025).

Push factors that drive people to emigrate from their home countries include joblessness, poverty, civil strife, war, and political and religious persecution. Natural disasters and environmental problems are also a source of dissatisfaction among citizens of developing countries, ultimately leading to displacement.

For many people to lose their homes, properties, and jobs, which in turn forces them to migrate to other places (IOM, 2025; Datta, 2004). Currently, a number of people are migrating from Hashenge to different countries due to various push and Pull factors. These people face various types of physical, psychological, economic, and social problems on their journey as well as in their place of destination, as most of them migrate illegally. Few people are fortunate enough to realize their dream of better employment opportunities and payment. Most of them come back to their place of origin after experiencing various types of problems.

2.2.3 Impacts of Irregular Migration.

Irregular migration among the Hashenge community has significant and complex socio-economic impacts, creating both potential benefits (remittances) and severe negative consequences (health issues, exploitation, and social disruption). The phenomenon is largely driven by a lack of local job opportunities and the desire for a better life abroad. Irregular migration has both positive and negative impacts.

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

2.2.4 Positive Impacts of Irregular Migration: Economic

In 2024 alone, approximately 27,000 people migrated from 49 woredas in Tigray. 61.2% of migrants from surveyed areas in Tigray experienced economic challenges, including unemployment and lack of social services. 48.5% of the variance in irregular migration was linked to severe health issues (Tigray region statistics office, 2024).

One of the most important positive impacts of irregular migration in Hashenge is the contribution of remittances to household survival and post-war recovery. Recent studies from rural Tigray demonstrate that remittances support food security, healthcare, agricultural recovery, debt repayment, educational access, and household consumption (Weldu et al., 2025a; Weldemariam et al., 2022).

Within the Hashenge community, remittances are commonly invested in rebuilding houses destroyed during the war, purchasing livestock, financing children's education, and restarting small businesses. Migration, therefore, functions as a household risk-diversification strategy consistent with the New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM), where families collectively finance migration to stabilize livelihoods during periods of economic crisis (Weldu et al., 2025).

Irregular migration also creates opportunities for social mobility and symbolic social status. In many Raya communities, migration is culturally associated with adulthood, masculinity, courage, and success. Migrants and returnees who financially support relatives or construct modern houses gain prestige and social recognition within the community. Thus, migration has become socially normalized as a livelihood strategy and marker of achievement among rural youth (Fejerskov & Zeleke, 2024).

Migration networks additionally provide transnational social support systems through relatives, brokers, diaspora members, and former migrants who facilitate information-sharing, financial assistance, and mobility opportunities. In the post-war reality of Hashenge, where formal institutions remain weak and recovery is uneven, these networks have become important mechanisms of survival and hope (Weldu et al., 2025).

Despite the risks, migration is often seen as a coping mechanism for food insecurity and a lack of

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livelihood options. Irregular migration is taken as a poverty alleviation strategy in the Hashenge Community.

2.2.5 Negative Impacts of Irregular Migration: Social, Environmental, and Political

Irregular migration has generated profound negative consequences for the Hashenge community. One major impact is the depletion of economically productive youth from rural agriculture. The Tigray war severely damaged agricultural systems through the destruction of farmland, livestock losses, market collapse, and displacement. Continued migration of young adults further weakens agricultural labor availability and undermines long-term rural recovery (Meaza et al., 2024). Irregular migration also contributes to widening social inequality within the community. Families receiving remittances accumulate wealth more rapidly through improved housing, consumption, and investment, while households without migrant members remain economically marginalized. Consequently, migration contributes to emerging forms of class differentiation and social stratification within rural Raya society (Weldu et al., 2026).

Another major negative impact involves trafficking, violence, and migrant deaths along migration routes. Recent reports indicate that increasing numbers of Tigrayan migrants travel through Afar, Djibouti, Somaliland, Yemen, and the Gulf despite escalating risks of kidnapping, extortion, detention, torture, maritime disasters, and death.

What is more, the emotional and psychological consequences of migration are also severe. Families in Hashenge often experience chronic anxiety, grief, uncertainty, and emotional fragmentation due to disappearances, trafficking, imprisonment, or deaths of relatives abroad. (Fejerskov & Zeleke, 2024). Irregular migration also strengthens exploitative informal migration economies. Brokers and smugglers frequently manipulate vulnerable youth by promising employment opportunities abroad while exposing them to trafficking and abuse. In the Hashenge context, migration networks therefore operate both as systems of solidarity and systems of coercion embedded within unequal power relations and informal economies of mobility (Achilli, 2021).

The post-war political situation in Tigray further complicates return migration and reintegration. Returnees often face unemployment, trauma, social alienation, and weak institutional support.

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

Continuing insecurity, unresolved territorial tensions, displacement crises, and fears of renewed conflict undermine sustainable reintegration processes in communities such as Hashenge (Le Monde, 2026)

Generally, Irregular migration has a positive impact on the community of Hashenge. As a result, it creates access to better nutrition, health care services, and quality of life. On the contrary side, irregular migration has negative consequences in the community and has led to labor shortages for agricultural activities, and has deepened the remittance. Social impact is one of the indicators of irregular migration. There is a large variation between the former and the latter migrants. Those who have a well-established social relationship with the former migrants are more secure than those who have no social relationship with the abroad once.

Irregular migration has profoundly transformed social relations, family structures, and community life in Hashenge. On the positive side, migration strengthens transnational family networks and enables households to access remittances that support education, healthcare, food security, and reconstruction of war-damaged homes (Weldu et al., 2026). In many Raya communities, migrants who support their relatives financially gain social prestige and symbolic recognition, making migration culturally associated with adulthood, masculinity, courage, and social mobility (Fejerskov & Zeleke, 2024).

However, irregular migration also generates serious social disruptions. Many households experience prolonged family separation, emotional fragmentation, and weakening of community cohesion. Families frequently suffer anxiety, grief, and uncertainty due to disappearances, detention, trafficking, or deaths of migrants along routes through Djibouti, Yemen, and the Gulf States. Besides, Post-war trauma further intensifies these emotional burdens, particularly among women, children, and elderly family members left behind (Desta et al., 2025).

Irregular migration also contributes to changing social hierarchies within the Hashenge community. Households receiving remittances often improve their housing conditions and consumption patterns, while non-migrant families remain economically marginalized. This contributes to new forms of social stratification and inequality within the rural Hashenge community (Weldu et al., 2026)

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

Generally, irregular migration provides significant, sometimes life-saving financial benefits to households through remittances, but it also creates high-risk scenarios. For destination communities, it provides cheap labor and stimulates demand irregularly, but can strain public infrastructure and put downward pressure on low-skill wages.

Environmentally wise, Ofla is ecologically unique due to Lake Hashenge. Migration impacts the environment in nuanced ways. Irregular migration also has important environmental implications for the Hashenge community and post-war Tigray more broadly. The war caused widespread environmental destruction through deforestation, soil erosion, destruction of conservation systems, and collapse of local environmental institutions (Gebremedhin et al., 2025). Migration affects environmental systems in contradictory ways. On one hand, out-migration reduces pressure on local agricultural land and natural resources because fewer young people remain dependent on farming and fuelwood collection. On the other hand, labor shortages undermine

Community-based conservation activities, such as terracing, watershed management, and soil conservation practices, are traditionally maintained by rural youth. Climate variability, drought, land degradation, and food insecurity further interact with migration dynamics. Environmental stress, therefore, operates together with war-related destruction and economic crisis to intensify migration pressures among rural households of Hashenge Southern Tigray (Cassells et al., 2024).

Finally, Irregular migration in post-war Hashenge is also deeply connected to political instability and governance challenges in Tigray. The war weakened public institutions, disrupted local administration, and reduced trust in state structures. Many young people perceive migration as an escape from political uncertainty, insecurity, militarization, and fears of renewed conflict (Le Monde, 2026).

Irregular migration also strengthens informal and illicit political economies. Smuggling networks, brokers, and trafficking systems increasingly operate in contexts where state regulation and border governance remain weak. In some cases, migration routes intersect with armed actors, informal taxation systems, and conflict economies in border areas linking Tigray, Afar, Djibouti, and Yemen (Achilli, 2021).

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

Irregular migration primarily targets young, able-bodied adults. Their departure weakens the *Ofera* system, which serves as a form of grassroots governance. As the labor force migrates to Saudi Arabia or Yemen, the community's ability to remain self-sufficient and politically autonomous from state aid decreases, making them more dependent on federal or regional relief.

programs. This also has the youth of the community to be hopeless and motivated to search for new job opportunities even in an informal way (Tesfaye M, 2025/2026). In the Hashenge community, irregular migration is a political act of survival in a landscape where the state has failed to provide a viable future. While it offers a shortcut to wealth, its long-term political impact is the atomization of the community. It breaks down the traditional collective labor systems (*Ofera*), shifts local power to those with external ties, and leaves the community demographically weakened in its struggle for regional identity and political recognition (Tesfaye M, 2025/2026).

3. Study Area and Methodology

3.1. Study Area

Ofla (Tigrinya: ኦፍላ, also Wofla (ወፍላ) in Amharic) is one of the weredas (districts) in the southern Zone of Tigray Region of Ethiopia. Ofla is bordered by Alamata in the south, by the Amhara Region in the west, by Enda-Mekoni in the north, and by Raya Azebo in the east. Ofla has different small towns, including Fala, Zata, Zikuya, Sesela, Menkere, Hashenge, Endedo, and Higumbirda. The Administrative office of Ofla woreda is found in Korem town.

The woreda is found in the highlands and has many natural resources like Higumbrada Forest, Hola Menchaechaeta (water fall), Mifisas Bahri, Lake Hashenge, and Baatimashilatat (Cave). Within the boundaries of this woreda is found Lake Hashenge (Philip, 2002).

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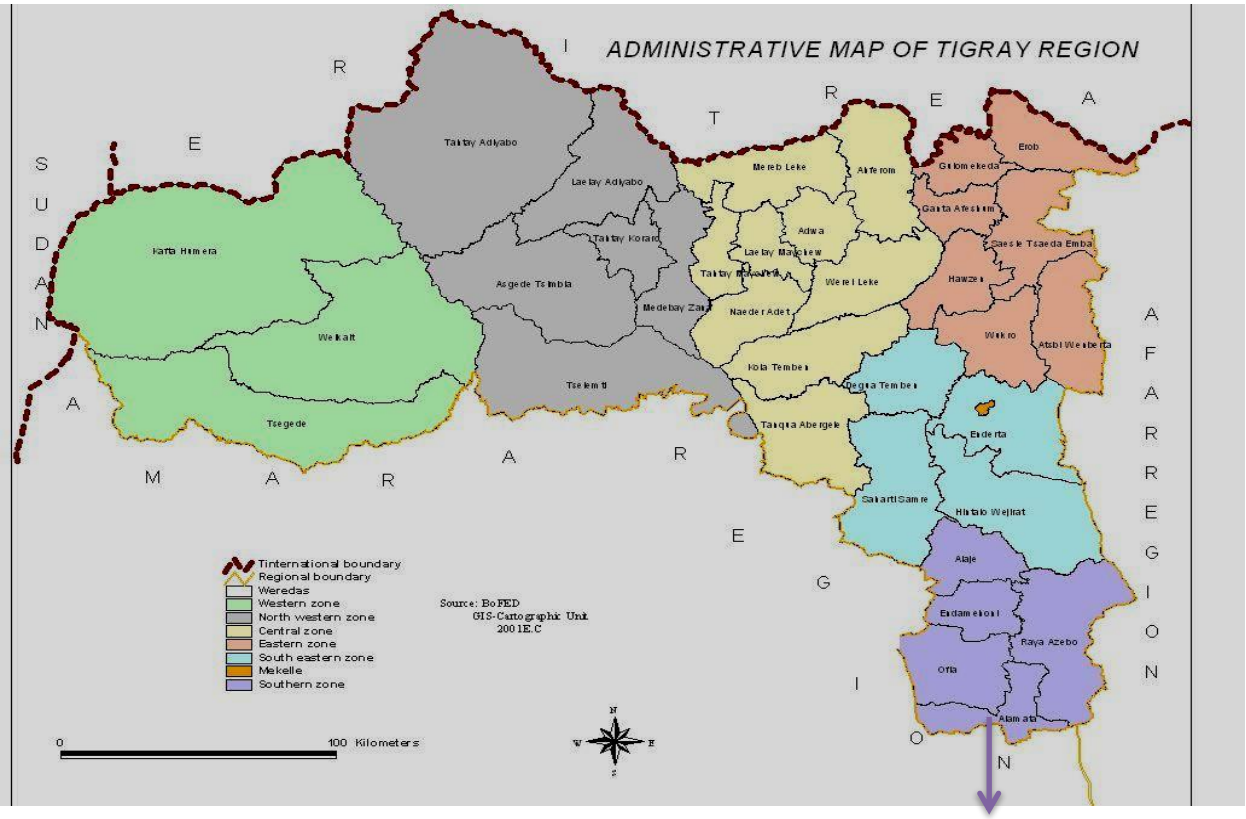

Picture 1: Administrative Map of Tigray taken from the Bureau of Finance and Economic Development of Tigray Region (GIS. Cartographic Unit: 2017 E.C).

Hashenge is a *Tabia* found in Ofla wereda, known for its natural lake and evergreen scenery in the Tigray region. Currently, the total population of the *Tabia* is 13,342, of which 6988 is male, and 6354 is female. It also has a total of 2964 households: 1938 Male household heads and 1026 female household heads. The *Tabia* consists of four *Kushets*: *Debri, Mewura, Deteri,* and *Adibomossa.* The total population of the *Debri* is 2539: males 1340 and females 1468; *Mewura,* 2063: males 1090 and females 973; Deteri, 2958: males 1490 and females 1468; *Adibomossa,* 5782: males 3068 and females 2714. The total population of *Adibomossa* is twice the population of the other *Kushets,* perhaps due to the impact of urbanization following the location of the Tibia's administrative office. Irregular migration has become a major socio-economic issue in all the above-mentioned *Kushets* of Hashenge. Infrastructure-wise- wise, Hashenge has one high school, three elementary schools, one health center, one agricultural office, one water supply office, and one police station,

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

all of which functionally operate as governmental institutions (OWSA, 2024).

3.2. Methodology

3.2.1. Study Design

The study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of irregular migration and its socio-economic impacts. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires, while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with key informants and focus group discussions. The mixed-methods approach allowed for triangulation of data sources, thereby improving the reliability and validity of the findings.

3.2.2 Instruments

The study used both primary and secondary data collection tools. Primary data was collected through questionnaires, interviews, and focused group discussions from returned Migrants. Secondary data was collected from different published and unpublished documents, like journals, books, magazines, articles, websites, research findings, policy documents, manuals, and other relevant materials. Besides, the researcher gained data from the Ofla wereda agricultural office, social affairs office, and the Hashenge *Tabia* local administration office. In this study, sample participants from the four *Kushets* of Hashenge *Tabia*, namely *Debri, Mewura, Deteri*, and *Adibomossa,* were selected using purposive sampling techniques. These *Kushets* have a significant number of migrants recorded by the Ofla wereda office. In terms of age, 56.5% were within the 26–35 age group, 32.7% and 10.8% were between 36 and 49 years old, whereas 59% were male, while 50 respondents, 41% were female. The same technique was also applied to identify 15 key informants for interviews. The key informants were selected from four *Kushets* of the Hashenge *Tabia* (i.e., from *Debri* 4 key informants, from *Mewura* 3 key informants, from *Deteri* 4 key informants, and from *Adibomossa* 4 key informants). They were selected based on their knowledge and their strong concern about the issue of irregular migration and its consequences.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 15 selected participants to gain a comprehensive understanding of their perspectives and experiences towards irregular migration.

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

Abogerb's religious leaders and *Debartes* are actively involved in communal decision-making. The role of *Abogerb* and religious leaders is primarily to solve the social problems of the community. The semi-structured approach allowed the researcher to make a thorough exploration of specific areas of interest and to ensure the inclusion of critical topics. The

In this study, the researcher used a closed-ended and open -ended questionnaire to gain target-oriented data about the socio-economic impacts of irregular migration. An open-ended questionnaire was used to gain depth, context, nuance, and thick description from the return migrants. A closed-ended questionnaire was used to produce structured, quantifiable data that can be analyzed statistically. To do so, the researcher selected 340 samples from the total of 13,342, using Yamane's (1967) formula systematically. From the selected total 340 samples, 122 were migrants, and 228 were non-migrants, from 2015 E.C up to 2017 E.C. The selected respondents were from each *Kushets*. (i.e., *Debri* 15.6%, *Deteri* 24.5%, *Adibomossa* 30.34%, and *Mewura* 29.5%. Finally, 122 questionnaires were distributed, and all were filled out properly. All of them were valid for the study. The respondents have had real experiences and knowledge about the impacts of irregular migration.

The researcher also used focus group discussions as a tool of data collection to triangulate the data that were collected through interviews and questionnaires. Focus group discussions were conducted with a variety of demographic groups, a total of 20 individual representatives. To do so, five migrants were purposely selected from each *Kushet.* The selection was made from adults and young adult migrants based on their knowledge about and exposure to the impacts of irregular migration. The selected groups were given an equal chance during the discussion. Their reflections, views, and suggestions were recorded and interpreted contextually.

3.2.3 Sampling and Sample Size Determination

The target population of this study was composed of economically active age group__ 15 to 49 years old individuals who experienced irregular migration at least once in their lives. According to Belayneh and Sagar (2021), this age group represents the most economically active and migratory age group. Similarly, the migrant returns of Hashenge are also within this age group. So, all four *Kushets* of Hashenge *Tabia,* which have high out-migration rates, were included in

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

this study. These *Kushets* are *Adibomossa, Debri, Mewura*, and *Deteri*. To determine a representative sample size from the target population, different strategies can be used according to the necessity of the research work. For this study, the researcher employed the following sample size determination formula of Yamane (1967).

$$n = \frac{N}{(1+N(e^2)}$$

Where n is the sample size, N is the population size, and e is the level of precision. Let this formula be used to determine the sample size, in which N =13,342 with 9% precision. Assuming 91% confidence level and e =0.09, we get the sample size as

$$n = \frac{13,342}{1+13,3342(0.09^2)} = 122$$

The study employed 122 migrants based on the above formula. These migrants were selected using a systematic sampling technique. The researcher distributed a questionnaire consisting of both closed-ended and open –ended questions. All copies of the questionnaire were filled out and found useful for the study.

3.2.4 Method of Data Analysis

The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis. The study employed a qualitative ethnographic approach to analyze the socio-economic impacts of irregular migration among the Hashenge community of Southern Tigray. The analysis primarily relied on thematic analysis, which is widely used in qualitative migration research to identify, analyze, and interpret recurring themes, meanings, and patterns within qualitative data. The process of theme development was iterative and inductive, allowing meanings to emerge directly from participants' lived experiences within the post-war context of the Hashenge community.

First, all qualitative data were transcribed verbatim and translated into English. Second, open coding was applied to segment the data into meaningful units. Third, these initial codes were systematically compared and grouped into categories that reflected broader social and economic

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

processes. To enhance the credibility and depth of findings, data triangulation was applied. This involved comparing and cross-checking information from multiple qualitative sources, from In-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and key informant interviews.

3.2.5 Ethical Issues

The researcher considered the legal and moral aspects of the community before starting data collection activities. The overall components, objectives, results, significance, and dissemination of the study were communicated legally both in written and verbal formats to the concerned body. Finally, the researcher properly acknowledged the informants and the community who cooperated during the study.

4. Results and Discussions

This chapter presents and discusses the findings related to the socio-economic impacts of irregular migration in the study area. The data were collected using the methods described in the preceding section. The findings are analyzed and interpreted thematically in accordance with the objectives of the study.

4.1. Socio-Demographic Background of the Respondents

4.1.1 Age of the Respondents

Age as a demographic factor is often a cross-cutting element determining the economic, political, and cultural life in society. Age is a very important variable that determines the section of the community that is prone to irregular migration. Table 1 below shows the distribution of migrants across age categories.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Age.

Age of the respondents	Frequency	Percent

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

15-25	69	56.5
26-35	40	32.7
36-49	13	10.6
Total	122	100.0

As the above table shows, the age group of 15-25 years constituted 56.5% of the migrant population; the figure for the age category of 26–35 is 32.7%, and that of 36-49 years 10.8%. The findings indicate that the majority of migrants were very young, although the occurrence of migration can be observed at all age levels. The proportion of migrants decreased with an increase in age. Previous studies have also come up with similar results. According to the National Youth Policy of Ethiopia (2024), the youth categorized between the age group of 15-29 are the productive force and are the most vulnerable group. The data that were collected from the key informant interview and focused group discussions also support the above result.

4.1.2 Gender of the Respondents

Gender is one of the socio-demographic data in the study. It is a very important variable that determines a section of the community, determining who might be inclined to irregular migration, because adult men and women hold different motivations for migration. (See table 2 below).

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Sex of Migrants	Frequency	Percent
Male	72	59
Female	50	41
Total	122	100.0

In terms of gender distribution, 59% of the respondents were males, while 41% respondents were

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

females. The findings of this study indicate that migration is more prevalent among males than females. Specifically, males constitute the majority of migrants, i.e., 59%, compared to females who constituted 41%. Which is still significant. Male dominance in migration is influenced by a combination of socio-cultural expectations and economic factors. Based on the data gathered from the key informant interview and focused group discussion, one possible explanation is that adult men often bear greater cultural, social, and economic responsibilities. According to age-old traditional gender roles, men are considered the breadwinners, and hence they are expected to cater to the basic needs of their family. Neglect and incompetence to fulfil these demands are often met with social disapproval.

4.1.3 Marital Status of the Respondents

Marital status is one of the demographic data in this study. Family life brings additional responsibilities and decisions to migrate should often be weighed against those shared responsibilities. (See table 3 below)

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percent
Married	40	32.7
Single	60	49
Divorced	14	11.5
Widowed	8	6.8
Total	122	100.0

In terms of marital status of the respondents, singles constitute 49% of the respondents, far more in proportion than the married, divorced, and widowed respondents. The reason why the majority

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

of the migrants are single is that they do not have land or other resources. This reality easily forced them to be victims of irregular migration. The data that were collected through interviews and focused group discussions support this idea.

4.1.4 Educational Level of the Individual Respondents

Education level is one of the most important demographic variables in this study, as it often affects the decision-making process, the amount of post-migration earnings, and the choice of economic activities after relocation. (See table 4 below).

Table 4: Educational Level of Individual Respondents

Educational Level	Frequency	Percent
Illiterate	68	55.73
Elementary	34	27.86
High school	20	16.39
Total	122	100.0

In terms of the educational level of the respondents, illiterates constitutes 55.73%, elementary school graduates (1-8) constitutes 27.86%, and high school graduates (9-12) constitutes 16.39 %. Therefore,

The data from the interview and focused group discussion also indicated that the majority of migrants were illiterate. Late alone the illiterate members of the community, the educated persons are not economically satisfied. The main reason for this reality is the war that happened between the federal government and the Tigray region in 2020. During that time, most of the civil servants suffered economically and became dependent on their families. This situation aggravated irregular migration and undermined the importance of education. In fact, before the war, the Hashenge community was motivated to send their children to school. However, the war negatively affected the motivation of the community to send their children to school, and even those who were in

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

school ended up dropping out. This forced them to choose irregular migration as a solution to their future.

4.1.5 Occupational Status of the Individual Respondents

Occupational level is one of the demographic data in the study. It determines the community of Hashenge predisposed to irregular migration (See table 5 below).

Table 5: Occupational Status of the Individual Respondents

Occupational Status	Frequency	Percent
Farmers	60	49
Carpenters	25	21
Clergymen	22	18
Muslim Leaders	15	12
Total	122	100

In terms of the current occupational status of the respondents, 49% were farmers, 21% were carpenters, 18% were clergymen, and 12 % were Muslim leaders. This data shows that the majority of the migrants were farmers. The data that was collected through interviews and focus group discussions also support this idea.

4.1.6 Religion Of Individual Respondents

Religion is one of the demographic factors considered in the study, as migrants came from Various religious backgrounds with differential impacts on experiences of irregular migration in the Hashenge community (*See* Table 6 below)

Table 6: Religion of Individual Respondents

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

Religion of migrants	Frequency	Percent
Orthodox	54	44
Muslim	68	56
Total	122	100

In terms of religion, 56% were Muslims and 44% were Orthodox Christians. So, most of the migrants were Muslims. Based on the data from the interview and the focus group discussions, the researcher found that the common reasons for irregular migration for both Muslim and Orthodox migrants were economic and social factors. But for the Muslim migrants, there is also a religious reason that forced them to migrate to Saudi Arabia and Yemen. This is related to their religious practices and prestige. The Muslims annually visit Mecca, the holy city found in Saudi Arabia, to earn the socially prestigious title among the followers of the religion. So, the Muslim migrants considered this a blessed part of their lives. In anthropology, Muslim religious practices are studied not just as theology but as embodied rituals that shape their identity.

4.1.7 Year Of Migration Of Individual Respondents.

Year of migration is one of the demographic data in this study. It determines the community of Hashenge inclined to irregular migration (See table 7 below).

Table 7: Year of Individual Respondents

Year of migration	Frequency	Cumulative frequency	Percent
2015 E.C	60	60	49
2016 E.C	34	94	77
2017 E.C	28	122	100
Total	122		

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

In terms of migration year, there were 49% migrants in the year 2015 E.C, 77% migrants in the year 2016 E.C, and 100% in 2017 E.C. The results indicate that the number of migrants increased within that given year. The data that was collected from the interviews and focus group discussions also supported this idea.

The main causes for the increase in migrants from 2015 E.C to 2017 E.C are related to the impact of the war between Tigray and the Federal government in 2020. Hashenge was part of the critical war zone. During the war, there were atrocities against human beings in the community; the Tabia also faced serious economic, social, political, and environmental damages. Migrants of the Hashenge community have different pull factors that attract them to migrate from their homeland. Those factors are positive causes of irregular migration, which motivate youngsters to find a better way of life.

4.2 Positive Impacts Of Irregular Migration Among Individual Respondents.

Pull factor is one of the important demographic variables in the study. It initiates the Hashenge community to take irregular migration as a way out of their socio-economic problems (See table 8 below).

Table 8: Positive Impacts of Irregular Migration

Positive factors of irregular migration	Frequency	Percent
Economic opportunity	51	41.8
Social network	32	26.2
Safety	16	13
Education	14	11.5
Digital connectivity	8	6.55
Total	122	100.0

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

As one can see from the above table, the Hashenge migrants are attracted to irregular migration because of the following positive factors: economic interest 41.8 %, social network 26.2 %, safety 13%, education 11.5%, and digital connectivity 6.55%, respectively. Therefore, the majority of the migrants were motivated by a better economic opportunity and migrated from their homeland. The Hashenge area is characterized by high population density, land scarcity,

And reliance on rain-fed agriculture. Following this, some community members were forced to migrate irregularly in order to maximize the income of their families. The decision was made by the households.

4.3 Negative Impacts Of Irregular Migration Among Individual Respondents.

The Hashenge migrants are forced to migrate from their homeland due to different push factors. Those factors are often associated with what is often termed the push factors of migration. Some of the salient push factors that surfaced in this study include poverty, insecure livelihoods, social cleavages, political instability, and environmental catastrophes (see Table 9 below).

Table 6: Negative Impacts of Irregular Migration

Negative Factors of Irregular Migration	Frequency	Percent
Economic reason	59	48
Social reason	19	27.86 15.57
Political reason	34	8
Environmental reason	10	100
Total	122	

As the above table shows, the Hashenge migrants were forced to opt for irregular migration for different reasons: economic reasons 48%, social reasons 27.86%, political reasons 15.57%, and

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

environmental reasons 8%. Therefore, the majority of the migrants migrated because of economic reasons. Economic reasons include unemployment, poverty, and lack of access to social services, etc. So, the migrants of the study area migrated to seek job opportunities, to improve their quality of life, and to ensure food security for their families. Social reasons are the second most important contributors to irregular migration among the Hashenge community. Social reasons of migration are understood as the intricate web of relationships, norms, cultural values, and power structures that influence individuals' decisions to move, their experiences during migration, and their integration into new communities (Wimmer, 2013).

From the data that was collected through interviews and focused group discussions, it was found that the migrants of Hashenge often follow their migrant relatives who have already established strong social Networks. The former considers these networks as social capital that provides significant social support for the latter. These networks help later migrants to get access to information, strengthen mutual aid, and build trust, which are critical for successful migration. Besides, irregular migration is not an individual decision but a collective family strategy aimed at diversifying income, securing a future for children, and responding to family needs. Because of these reasons, the decision on who is chosen to migrate was made within a household based on family responsibilities.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that irregular migration and its consequences are a topical issue in the Hashenge community. Accordingly, it finds out that irregular migration has significant social and economic impacts on the Hashenge community. The majority migrated because of economic reasons. These include unemployment, poverty, and lack of access to social services. Therefore, migrants exercised international mobility to secure job opportunities, thereby improving their quality of life and ultimately ensuring food security for their families. The bulk of migrants belonged to the youth population who were economically active members of the society.

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

Most tend to be men because they often bear greater cultural, social, and economic responsibilities. Society puts higher demands on men, forcing them to take riskier livelihood options in order to fulfil normative expectations. Access to land and other economic resources in the place of origin also determines who decides to migrate. Those without land who also happen to be unmarried tend to be more vulnerable to human trafficking and are likely to migrate haphazardly to other countries. Low-profile irregular migrants with low levels of training and education are often left without many options to decide on the course of their own mobility, nor choose between a wide range of migration destinations.

Generally, returned migrants face significant physical, social, economic, and psychological problems. Many suffer from health problems, difficulties in social reintegration, and limited economic opportunities. They also experience psychological distress, including anxiety, trauma, and depression.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and the interpretation of the data, the following recommendations are proposed to address the socio-economic problems caused by irregular migration in the Hashenge community. Hence, the local government and relevant stakeholders should perform the following important tasks to solve the problems.

1. Enhance economic opportunities: Developing the Hashenge agricultural potential (irrigation) to provide local alternatives. To raise living conditions and generate employment possibilities, fund local and regional economic development initiatives. Besides, encourage small companies and entrepreneurship, especially in rural and economically underprivileged areas. Creating local job opportunities is the fundamental solution to control irregular migration.

2. Enhance psychosocial support: To support returnees and help them recover from trauma, it is necessary to establish psychosocial support centers in nearby towns such as Korem. Many migrants experience various psychological challenges as a result of the hardships they face during irregular migration.

ISSN: 2706-6460(print)
ISSN: 2706-6479(online)

3. Awareness campaigns: Raise awareness regarding the dangers of irregular migration, enhance border security, and take legal action against traffickers and brokers are significant solutions. One of the core assignments that should be aggressively worked on by the local government is awareness creation for the community about the consequences of irregular migration, with tangible examples from the Hashenge community.

4. Peace consolidation: Ensuring lasting stability in the region to allow for long-term investment rather than emergency is one solution for controlling irregular migration.

5. Improve social services and infrastructure: To increase access to necessary services, infrastructure investments should be made in healthcare and education. To lessen financial problems, create social safety nets and support structures for disadvantaged groups.

6. Environmental and agricultural initiatives: Encourage environmentally friendly land use methods and raise agricultural output. Put in place initiatives to assist communities in becoming more resilient to climate change.

7. Targeted programs: Implement reintegration strategies for returnees, such as vocational training, land access for farming/trade, and psychosocial support. These initiatives can help returnees rebuild their livelihoods and reduce the likelihood of re-migration.

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