

A Call for International Accountability on the Genocide War in Tigray: Reinvigorating Desta Asgedom's Book

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I. INTRODUCTION

Various writers and international analysts have glossed over the war crimes and crimes against humanity in Tigray. By contrast, Desta Asgedom's book *The Tigray Genocide: A Call for International Accountability* brings to the attention of the international community that the war committed on the people of Tigray by a quartet of genocidal forces – the Ethiopian Federal Armed Forces, the Amhara Special Forces, the Fano militias, and the Eritrean War Forces – was not simply war crimes and crimes against humanity, but genocidal war as interpreted by the United Nations (See United Nations General Assembly resolution on Genocide, 260 A, 9 December 1948 and January 1951).

To present the level of sadistic and gratuitous crimes that were committed and to accurately ascertain the cause of the genocidal war in Tigray, Asgedom (hereafter referred to as “the author”) used secondary sources of information (i.e., the reports of human rights organizations, the international community, and governments). His goal is to bring to the attention of the global community the need to make an objective and in-depth investigation into the anguish and grief felt by the author, his family, and the Tigrayan diaspora regarding the millions of Tigrayans who perished, the hundreds of thousands of women and young girls who were gang-raped, and those who sacrificed their lives or were injured in defending their people from extermination.

Summary and Analysis

The author uses eight chapters to unravel the atrocities committed in Tigray by the Ethiopian Federal Armed Forces, the Amhara Special Forces, the Fano militias, and the Eritrean War Forces. In **Chapter 2**, the author depicts the calamities he and his family suffer in Ethiopia and meticulously deciphers the so-called “Law Enforcement Operations” announcement made by Abiy Ahmed, Ethiopia's Prime Minister, before Ahmed embarks on an attack on the Regional Administrative of Tigray. The author then highlights the steps that the Ethiopian federal government takes to deliberately dehumanize Tigrayans, which include labeling the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) a “junta.” According to the author, the purpose of this government propaganda against the Tigrayans is to fuel and escalate a widespread ethnic cleansing through the degradation, humiliation, and imprisonment of the Tigrayans as well as their removal from Ethiopia's landscape.

In **Chapter 3**, the author accounts for various genocidal acts. The bibliography includes pictures of the barbarously slaughtered Tigrayans in Tigray by the Ethiopian Federal Armed Forces, the Amhara Special Forces, the Fano militias, and the Eritrean War Forces. Though the photos in the bibliography are very agonizing, they lack enlightening explanations and detailed documentation.

I agree with the author that those who planned, designed, and executed the Tigray genocidal war (i.e., the Ethiopian armed forces, the Eritreans, and the Amhara leaders) need to be brought to justice (p.9). Nonetheless, it would have been fruitful if the author had ascertained complete documentation of the evidence. For example, the author should have fully documented the following:

1) The author says the census estimate of the total population of Tigray in 2019 was approximately 5.44 million. But, before accepting this as a given, he should explain how the “Tigrayan intellectuals” recalculated the population of Tigray to be approximately seven million in 2020.

2) If it is accepted that Tigray's population is seven million, then, using binary assumption, it would be reasonable to assume that 50 percent of the Tigray population, or 3.5 million, are females. Considering this, the author needs to explain why he thinks that only 2.1 million Tigrayan females, or 60 percent of 3.5 million, were subjected to cruel sexual violence when the Associated Press (August 24, 2023) states that the youngest girl who was raped was eight years old. The author needs to explain why he believes the merciless Ethiopian Federal

troops and their compatriots, who were instructed to rape and exterminate all, were randomly 'kind' to 40 percent of the female population.

3) Since he claims the data he obtained from the Tigray Defense Force (TDF) is supposed to be an estimate and not definitive, he needs to explain how he was able to state the ratio of troops to the Tigrayan women's population in the first round in Tigray was 1:4. Given that commanders ordered the invading forces to commit as many crimes as possible, it is possible that some women and under-aged girls might have faced multiple gang rapes. Thus, the author's second-round ratio of 1:3 troops to women is most likely to be affected by double counting.

Finally, the author's calculation indicates that 156,225 women and girls in Tigray faced sexual violence. If the author thinks, with a margin of 5 percent error, his calculation was correct, how come he ignores his finding and uses the Ghent University number that only 127,000 women and girls in Tigray were subjected to violence and gang rape?

In **Chapter 3**, the author attempts to draw his readers' attention to some conspicuous areas where significant atrocities were committed in Tigray. During the book's revision, to avoid disrupting the flow of the text, the author very creatively and systematically places the 68 micro-fractions of photos in the bibliography section.

Though better to put them in a separate chapter, the author systematically reviews the following "weapons of genocide" in **Chapter 3**: a) rape as a means of warfare, b) food as a weapon for genocide, c) destruction of public health facilities, and d) destruction of school facilities that the Federal Ethiopian Government used to devastate the people of Tigray.

a) Rape as a means of warfare: As mentioned before, 127,000 women and girls (estimated by Ghent University) aged 8 to 70 years old were inhumanely subjected to "violent gang rape." Since the quartette-genocidal war forces were brainwashed to blindly follow the adage that "a Tigrayan womb should never give birth," Nunis (2021) claims that "...pieces of metal and iron rods used to clean the guns were inserted into the wombs of women and girls to prevent them from giving birth to future generations." Using rape and sex as a weapon of war, the genocidal soldiers inflicted enduring physical and psychological damage on the women and girls of Tigray.

b) Food as a weapon for genocide: Rightly so, the author argues that the quartette-genocidal forces intentionally carried out the denial and destruction of food as a weapon of starvation and warfare in Tigray in three different ways. As discussed by the author, the perpetrators were engaged in 1) the looting and burning of grain warehouses, slaughtering of livestock, and destruction of farm implements; 2) denying humanitarian food aid from entering Tigray; and 3) laying siege to Tigray for more than two years, resulting in a lack of food imports which caused the death of more than 350,000 people (p.64).

c) Destruction of public health facilities: During the genocidal forces' occupation of Tigray, the author reports that the Tigrinya society was entirely deprived of access to existing health facilities. For example, to effectively paralyze the health system in Tigray, by the end of 2022 about 154,825 healthcare facilities had been dismantled (p. 84). About 208 health centers and 638 health-giving facilities were partially or wholly destroyed. About 200 emergency ambulances were seized and transported to Eritrea and the Amhara Region.

d) Destruction of school facilities: The author persuasively argues that the main aim of the quartette-genocidal war was to destroy existing schools and educational facilities entirely and ensure that the remaining Tigrayans could never aspire to knowledge and modern technology (p.100). Consequently, the author states a Tigray Bureau of Education study reveals that 2221 primary and 271 high schools, serving 1,464,835 students, were vandalized, and the ruined school buildings became residences for internally displaced people.

In **Chapter 4**, "Abdication of Responsibility," the author argues that the United Nations, established to tackle humanitarian crises and to control human rights violations, should have intervened. In addition, if agencies like UNICEF, WFP, UNHCR, and OCHA, which are part of the United Nations, had intervened, the millions of people under dire conditions in Tigray would not have been at risk of famine.

In a roughly sketched table (pp. 110-112), the author shows that Antonio Guterres, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, failed to press the Security Council to take swift action in Tigray to avert massive atrocities and the catastrophic gang-raping of 127,000 girls and women (p. 116).

Despite China's and Russia's voting power, the author argues that Guterres should have used his office to uphold the United Nations' values and moral authority and avert the genocidal war in Tigray (p.109).

If **Chapter 6**, particularly pp. 123-125, was incorporated into **Chapter 3** as part of the literature review, it could have served as part of a conceptual framework for showing the inter-relationships among the variables that were deemed very integral to the dynamics of genocide outlined on p. 123. Moreover, the cardinal evidence outlined

on pp. 123-125 to substantiate the author's argument would have been more vigorous and potent if the author had thoroughly used the accepted documentation process.

In **Chapter 4**, the author seems to be giving his verdict, stating that the United Nations, as the defender of international human rights and humanitarian laws, has miserably failed to carry out its responsibility to prevent the most eminent genocide of the modern era committed by the Ethiopian Defense Force, Eritrea's Defense Force, and the Amhara and Fano militias on the people of Tigray.

Using the agenda outline of the Security Council on Ethiopia's affairs (pp. 110-112), the author further confirms his previous argument that Guterres had drastically failed to uphold the values and moral authority of the United Nations and accepted responsibility for not taking appropriate action regarding the horrendous situation in Tigray.

In **Chapter 5**, the author wholeheartedly argues that the United Nations should have given justice to the victims, the Tigrayan people. Since justice was not served, the author rests his case by stating that "...the state, groups, and individuals responsible for these crimes must be held accountable" (p. 121).

Furthermore, the author challenges the credibility and integrity of the Ethiopia-Tigray peace agreement, Cessation of the Hostilities Agreement (COHA), signed in Pretoria on November 2, 2022. He forcefully argues that "unless the perpetrators are held accountable and justice is served, there is no guarantee that another genocide will not occur in the future." His overall conclusion is that bringing the perpetrators to the International Court of Justice heals the victims' souls but also serves as a deterrent to future genocide (p.122).

As discussed before, the quotation from the United Nations Convention on Prevention and Punishment of Crime of Genocide, given in **Chapter 6**, should have been part of **Chapter 3**. More specifically, the five acts that squarely define genocide, which should be included in **Chapter 3**, are: 1) killing members of the group, 2) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group, 3) inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the group's physical destruction in whole or in part, 4) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group, and 5) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

In **Chapter 7**, the author outlines "The Root Causes of the Genocide War" in Tigray, including 1) the securing of lifelong power and suppression by both the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed, and the President of Eritrea, Isaias Afewerki; 2) the historical hostility between Amhara and the Tigrayans; and 3) the aspiration of the Oromo elites to grab and monopolize power over Ethiopia's landscape.

As discussed, if Chapter 6's pp. 123-127 and Chapter 7's pp. 130-132 had been presented initially in the book, they would have provided a foundational review and served as a theoretical framework, thus enhancing the analytical tools and providing a clear-cut research methodology for systematically documenting the intent and actuality of genocide.

Chapter 8 of the book deals with some policy implication conclusions that the author draws. Briefly, he states that the devastating and genocidal War in Tigray, which started on November 4, 2020, and formally ended on November 2, 2022, has profoundly impacted the author's perspective. The author states that about every 40 years, from the reign of Emperor Yohannes IV (1872-1889) up until 2022, Tigray has faced a recurring pattern of existential threats through massacres and economic devastation. The author thinks that establishing Tigray as "...an independent state would benefit both Tigrayans and Ethiopians" (p. 134) and would break Tigray out of this 40-year recurring cycle of severe calamity.

Reinvigorating Asgedom's Book

Desta Asgedom's *The Tigray Genocide: A Call for International Accountability* is a worthwhile read. Recalling my experience as a high school director at the Agazi High School in Adigrate, Tigray, Ethiopia, the author was an intelligent eighth-grade student. Now, as the author of *Tigray Genocide...*, Asgedom has shown that he has since developed his intellectual curiosity even further, deepened his analytical inquisitiveness, and expanded his passion for his community.

Though using secondary data is controversial and challenging, Asgedom's book attempts to effectively utilize secondary data to provide a compelling narrative and trajectory. He presents a balanced interpretation of the available information regarding the genocidal war in Tigray. By emphasizing the context of the Genocide Convention, the author argues that international organizations, such as the United Nations, should be held accountable for the genocidal war committed by the combined forces of the Ethiopian Federal Force, Eritrean troops, Amhara militia, and Fano forces against the people of Tigray.

The author has systematically developed the study's purpose and articulated its significance to make his case compelling. However, to fully convince the International Court of Justice (ICJ) that "acts constituting the crime of genocide," such as dehumanization, starvation, mass killings, the destruction of critical infrastructure, acts of sexual violence, and the entire destruction of Tigray, were committed by the Ethiopian Forces and its allies from November 2020 to November 2024 and have persisted, the author needs to review more documents (such as the document by Azeem Ibrahim OBE, Senior Director, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy) and reorganize the limited literature that he reviews in his book.

Consecutively, after partly using **Chapter 6** (p. 123) to develop the conceptual framework to analyze the ten types of genocidal atrocities committed in Tigray, the author needs to operationalize the ten critical indicators or the ten stages model, that he presents on pp. 125-126.

Reliable and valid data are needed to make possible assumptions and calculations. Given this, the Tigray population data obtained from the “Tigrayan intellectuals” needs to be verified to establish reliability and validity. Furthermore, the data secured from the “Tigray Defense Force” database to estimate the ratio of perpetrators to the number of women and girls who faced horrific crimes of sexual assault seems to be non-authentic and based on guess estimation or, at the very least, is roughly calculated.

Since the University of Ghent's (2024) qualitative and quantitative estimations were based on telephone interviews, the author needs to ascertain that this particular data is fully reliable. For example, the interviewees may have biased the data by providing information they think the interviewer expects or wants to hear (Sekaran, 2003).

To further ascertain that the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), the Eritrean Defense Forces, and the assorted regional militias possessed the “intent” to destroy the Tigrigna ethnic groups, it would be better if Asgedom had used a robust, authentic, and intensive case studies approach that could allow an in-depth, multi-faceted exploration of the genocidal war in Tigray.

That is, in addition to using existing assertions from secondary sources, the conclusions from genuine case studies would likely result in the author strongly calling for Ethiopia (which strenuously denies responsibility) and Eritrea (which calls accusations against it defamatory) to be brought before the International Court of Justice and for international agencies to be held accountable for the genocide war committed against the people of Tigray (See for example, Aljazeera, 4 June 2024).

Though insignificant, I advise the writer to remove the first-person perspective throughout the book by replacing “I” with “author” or “writer.” Also, in addition to listing names and essential topics, adding an index would help readers quickly and easily identify the critical issues discussed in the book and enhance the book's marketability.

Finally, though it is left up to the author's prerogative, it would impact on the readers and add substantial value to the book if the significant authorities who gave feedback to the author as the book was being developed appeared in the acknowledgments section. I believe for this to have the most impact, the acknowledgments should be moved from pp. 137- 139 to the beginning of the book, right before the table of contents using the Roman numbered pages.

As mentioned before, the book is gallant and readable. It systematically reviews and coherently arranges some of the conspicuous information reported in the mass media, international organizations, and government reports on the genocide war committed by the joint forces of the Ethiopian Federal Government, Eritrean War Forces, Amhara Special Forces, and Fano militias forces on the people of Tigray.

Though challenging to use secondary data exclusively, the author somehow ascertained that the Ethiopia National Defense, the Eritrean and Amhara militias, and the Fano forces had committed far-reaching genocidal war in Tigray from November 2020 to November 2024.

It would be an ambitious and daunting task to fully convey the entire story of the genocidal war and its consequences on the people of Tigray to the International Court of Justice. Suppose the author wishes to go down this road, I suggest that the author further undertakes an in-depth, multi-faceted case study approach to reinvigorate his case to establish the truth that “never again” would any Tigrayan, especially the surviving victims, face the horror of genocide (Asgedom, 2024).

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