

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
INSTITUTE FOR PEACE AND SECURITY STUDIES



**TIGRIGNA MEMES: SUBALTERN SATIRES AS EVERYDAY
RESISTANCE TO POWER**

By

GELETA TESHAYE BERISSO

JUNE 2023

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
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ADVISOR: FANA GEBRESENBET (PH.D.)

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APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF EXAMINERS

Name	Signature	Date
Academic Coordinator:		
Yonas Tariku (Ph.D.)	_____	_____
Advisor:		
Fana Gebresenbet (Ph.D.)	_____	_____
Internal Examiner:		
Mercy Fekadu (Ph.D.)	_____	_____
External Examiner:		
Alemayehu Gurm (Ph.D.)	_____	_____

Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby attest to the authenticity of this thesis, acknowledging it as an exclusively original work and has not been presented for a Degree (Master's Degree) in any other University and that all sources of material used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

Signature

Geleta Tesfaye

June 2023

This thesis is submitted for examination with my approval as an advisor of the candidate.

Dr. Fana Gebresenbet
June 2023

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

- AFP:** Agence France-Presse
- AU:** African Union
- BBC:** British Broadcasting Corporation
- BLM:** Black Lives Matter
- BT:** Bottom Text
- CoHA:** Cessation of Hostilities Agreement
- CPHC:** Collective Pulsating Human Consciousness
- DDR:** Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
- EBC:** Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation
- EOTC:** The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church
- EDF:** Eritrean Defense Force
- EHRC:** The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission
- ENDF:** Ethiopian National Defense Force
- FBC:** Fana Broadcasting Corporate
- FISA:** Facebook Image Search Algorithm
- MT:** Middle Text
- MDA:** Multimodal Discourse Analysis
- TDF:** Tigray Defense Force
- TPLF:** Tigray People's Liberation Front
- TT:** Top Text
- UN:** United Nations
- USA:** United States of America

Abstract

This study investigates how Tigrayan youth within the Facebook group, Tigrigna Meme, have employed internet memes as a form of everyday resistance against dominant narratives and powers after the Pretoria Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA), in the context of the 2020-2022 war in northern Ethiopia. Drawing on the works of Gayatri C. Spivak and Antonio Gramsci, the concept of subalternity is applied to these Tigrayan youth in the group. Specifically, the research examines the role of memes in subaltern peacebuilding efforts and how they reflect cultural evolution. The researcher uses qualitative content analysis in conjunction with a Facebook image-searching algorithm to identify relevant memes. Through analysis of these memes, the study reveals that Tigrayan subaltern groups perceive the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) as manipulative and incompetent while viewing the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), the Eritrean government, and Amhara forces as groups who have blatantly violated the Ethiopian federal government's narrative of territorial integrity and countering extremism. The voices of these subalterns provide unique insights into their experiences of the war and valuable insights into peace and security studies for guiding post-war reconstruction policy. The study endeavors to make a significant contribution toward promoting diversity in the efforts for peace, security, social cohesion, and stability in contemporary Ethiopia, particularly its Tigray region.

Keywords: Tigrigna Meme, Subalternity, Satire, Everyday Resistance, and Subversion and Transgression.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This thesis entitled *Tigrigna Memes: Subaltern Satires as Everyday Resistance to Power* examines the deployment of internet memes, as an everyday resistance to power by the subaltern groups in Tigray.¹ The study is conducted on a public Facebook group called ትግርኛ Meme—*Tigrigna Meme*,² and its activity in the post-CoHA³ (African Union, 2022) months following the war in northern Ethiopia (hereafter referred to as the war). The group had approximately 130,000 and 162,000 active members as of January and June 2023 correspondingly.⁴ I borrowed the title of the study, *Tigrigna Memes*, directly from the group's name on Facebook, and pluralized the word 'meme' for syntactic purposes. In this introductory chapter, I present the background of the study, the research problem, along with the rationale to undertake the study.

1.1. Background of the Study

1.1.1. The Subalternity of the Tigrayan Youth during the War

Subalternity refers to the idea that certain social groups cannot fully take part in society and have their voices and experiences heard. The concept has been explored in depth by postcolonial thinkers such as Gayatri C. Spivak, who, in her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" argued subaltern groups, such as women and colonized people, are excluded from dominant discourse and therefore cannot fully express themselves (Spivak, 2003). In this thesis, the concept of subalternity applies to youth groups in Tigray during the war, arguing that they are subalterns because of the different experiences they faced during the war and the TPLF's monogenous representation of Tigrayan society (Tigrai TV, 2020; Mihret, 2023).

During the war, given their age, youth groups in Tigray were heavily affected by conscription and militarization, leaving their families behind and potentially facing permanent injury or loss of life. These experiences underscore the subaltern status of Tigrayan youth from the fact that they were often not represented in discussions about the war. The TPLF's presentation of Tigrayan society during the war is the main reason as it shows a homogenization

¹ Tigray is a region in northern Ethiopia with a population of around six million people and is mostly populated by Tigrayans, and has a youthful population, with a median age of 19 years old. (See: [20210223 acaps secondary data review ethiopia pre-crisis situation in tigray.pdf.](#))

² See ትግርኛ Meme ([facebook.com](#)).

³ CoHA is the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) between the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in Pretoria on November 2, 2022, ending the two years of conflict in northern Ethiopia and began a process of peace and recovery that continues.

⁴ The page dramatically grew from 90,000 members in early December 2022, to 130,000 as of January 2023, 150,000 as of March 2023, and 165,000 as of June.

of subaltern groups: rather than recognizing the diversity of experiences and perspectives within Tigrayan society, the TPLF portrayed all Tigrayans as keenly united to support it, which can be seen from its virtual winning of all seats in the September 2020 regional election (Tigrai TV, 2020). This erasure of differences within the subaltern groups further underlines their exclusion from dominant discourse and reinforces their subaltern status. As Spivak argues, “the subaltern is always in some sense subaltern to something” (Spivak, 1988, p. 307), and in Tigray, this subalternity was reinforced by the TPLF’s homogenization of the Tigrayan society.

1.1.2. Framing Everyday Resistance

Resistance is a key concept in social sciences that has been widely researched to understand the struggles of individuals against power dynamics. One type of resistance is the notion of everyday resistance, which was developed by James Scott (1985). According to Scott (Ibid.), everyday resistance refers to the actions of individuals who take small steps to undermine the existing power dynamics. These small acts of resistance, though not revolutionary, are significant in creating tension against the dominant order. Everyday resistance can take varied forms such as refusal, evasion, and self-sabotage. This resistance allows individuals to exert their agency and creates a sense of personal empowerment, even in the face of overwhelming power structures.

In the context of subaltern satires, everyday resistance refers to the subtle and passive ways in which the subaltern resists and undermines the dominant discourse (Galița, 2020). Such forms of resistance are often not recognized as resistance because they do not take an organized and mobilized form in the conventional form of mass protests or armed struggle; instead, they are subtle and covert actions and behaviors that take place in mundane forms as parts of everyday life (Schock, 2005).

1.1.3. Memes as a Language of Subaltern Groups

In recent years, subaltern groups have increasingly used internet memes to voice their concerns and oppose the established power structures, making the world of memes an incredibly active field for the digital circulation of ideas and socio-political commentary. Memes are a unique form of satire prevalent on the web that reflects both digital society’s booming cultural units and a novel kind of social capital (Bozkus, 2016). According to Shifman (2013), these popular cultural units prompt online users to engage in sharing, replicating, and altering them- generating common cultural references over time. Memes’ humorous nature often invites an oppositional discourse towards dominant narratives portrayed by mainstream media- hence rendering them crucial for everyday subaltern resistance.

“The Selfish Gene,” a book by British ethologist, evolutionary biologist, and scientific writer Richard Dawkins, is where the term “meme” first became popular (Dawkins, 1979). In the book, Dawkins explored the importance of the Darwinian theory of evolution to explain the reality of humanity’s everyday life and developed a notion that a meme is a form of intercultural imitation. Dawkins argues that in the early stages of life on earth, there was what evolutionary biologists call a gene pool, a free and gross soup of genes where every gene competed to survive, and dominant ones survived (Ibid.). Gene is the accepted term for a unit of biologically spreadable information passed through generations (Rheinberger, 2018), and they desire to multiply and survive through generations: as strong genes replicate and weak genes wane, biological evolution takes place.

Dawkins applies this concept of genes, a gross biological factor for evolution and survival of life on earth to memes (Ibid. p. 190). In this sense, a meme is a unit of cultural information that wants to multiply and survive within a limited resource of the human mind—a collective communal perception of everyday realities. He posits that because of the phenomena of a collective pulsating consciousness of humanity (CPHC), there is a new replicator, participating in a new evolution, not biological, but cultural: memes are cultural evolutionary factors.

As gene was swimming in the biological primeval soup called the gene pool, memes are now swimming in a cultural soup called the meme pool: a free and gross market of ideas, competing to survive within a community, and strong ones replicate through imitation from one mind to another (Dawkins, 1979). Nevertheless, a free and gross market of memes is not in the context of the contemporary capitalist notion of a market that doesn’t allow things to openly compete in quality, and the good ones rise to the top. The frame of a meme as free and gross only shows what wins in the market of ideas. The market does not care if the idea is good, exploitative, politically correct, or not, it just brings gross ideas to the market and the dominant ones survive in an everyday cultural community (Ibid.).

Many thinkers such as Ken Wilber (2000) and William James (2018) have studied the phenomena of a collective pulsating consciousness of humanity (CPCH). According to Wilber, human consciousness is an intricate energy field that has unique features when it comes to individuals, group settings, and universal aspects (Wilber, 2000). In contexts of wars, such as the war in northern Ethiopia, experiences from wars have devastating effects on humanity’s overall wellness at large, causing upheavals mentally, physically, and emotionally for both survivors and participants taking part during wars; their inner selves become unstable through experiencing traumatizing events leaving many struggling even after it is over.

This is due to mental states changing turmoil is a common experience people face when trying to come back into balance due to past traumatic events which put a mind in a state of flux (Wilber, 2000), a concept that mental perceptions are non-static, and instead are continually changing due to various factors such as external or internal pressures making it a dynamic process ongoing. Furthermore, James (2018) argues ‘the experience itself’ significantly impacts continuous changes to human consciousness as post-war environments could contain high levels of trauma. As such, collective progress is essential post-war since the mistakes people make as they progress through their lives, allow them to learn and adapt bringing personal growth in inevitably new directions. Transformations like these play a significant role in helping us progress as individuals through learning from past errors while developing mental resilience and establishing humanity’s continuous mental progressions, creating space for further constructive knowledge acquisition.

The phenomena give us a compelling insight to understand how subaltern members of the *Tigrigna Meme* recollect the war in post-COHA months. Given the pre-eminence of elite political and military actors, what an average youth thinks and argue is imperative to bring these subaltern voices up to better understand the nuances and changing views of these youth towards the different actors and events unfolding recently.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Starting from the commencement of reforms in April 2018, tension has grown between the new federal government and the earlier ruling party’s dominant coalition partner, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). This tension has erupted and led to arguably one of the world’s deadliest civil wars in the 21st century. The two warring parties—the Ethiopian government and the TPLF have been utilizing different strategies to galvanize their people for the war. One of the strongest galvanizing strategies for the war was the media framing of atrocities. Both the TPLF and the Ethiopian government have framed the war as an ‘existential’ war that must be fought to survive (AFP, 2021).

On the one hand, the Ethiopian government claimed that the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) was pursuing secessionist agendas and had attacked the Northern Command of the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) (Fiseha, 2022). These narratives helped to generate support among the general population for the government’s actions. The government further stated that Tigray was committing treason, which in turn justified the use of military force (Office of the Prime Minister, 2020). The tensions came to a head in September 2020 when the TPLF held regional elections, which the federal government deemed illegal. In

response, the federal government cut funding to the Tigray region and sent troops to the area (Al Jazeera, 2020).

However, many have argued that was just a pretext to consolidate the power of the ruling party and to suppress the TPLF (Houreld, 2020). They contended that the Ethiopian government conscripted the war by framing it within the context of national security threats. For these critics, the government framed the TPLF as extremist rebels who were attempting to destabilize Ethiopia and impose an authoritarian regime on the people of Tigray.

The Ethiopian government has further faced accusations that it mobilized a war by using talk of national unity and solidarity - themes that were symbolized by displays of patriotism like flags and anthems (FBC, 2022). Yet many observers question whether these messages were truly genuine given how dissenting voices have been treated during this conflict (AFEX, 2020). Critics claim that those opposing the government's policies or questioning its legitimacy have suffered especially harsh repression at the hands of authorities (Allo, 2020). This includes journalists as well as political opposition members like civil society activists harbored sympathies for TPLF (AFEX, 2020).

On the other hand, the TPLF framed the war arguing Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed was sidelining Tigrayans from key positions in government and was violating the country's constitution, which they claimed gave regional states significant autonomy (Africa Center, 2020). To the TPLF, the steps taken by the federal government indicated a clarion call on their autonomy leading them towards waging war. The crux of their offensive lay in seeing themselves as defenders of their constituents against what they perceived as occupying forces: all but an act against aggression.

Ethiopia, particularly northern Ethiopia, is now a post-conflict community, with a cessation of hostilities agreement (COHA) signed on 02 November 2022 (African Union, 2022). Nevertheless, since both the Ethiopian government and the TPLF utilized mainline media for conscription and mobilization of the war, perspectives outside of these apparatuses are missing. Subaltern perspectives outside of dominant narratives are essential as they reveal the silenced or marginalized voices that often go unheard in mainstream media. They are critical in understanding the diverse, complex, and often oppressive conditions shaped by the Ethiopian government (AFEX, 2020) and TPLF (Mihret, 2023) that create obstacles to free speech, free press, equal rights, and power imbalances. In this way, subaltern insights shed light on the varying ways individuals and communities experience and resist power in these contexts.

Furthermore, both the Ethiopian government (AFEX, 2020) and the TPLF (Mihret G. Kristos, 2023) relied heavily on manipulation and control of information to maintain the truthfulness of their narratives of the war. In this context, subaltern insights, which could provide valuable information from the ground about experiences of marginalization, oppression, and representation are absent.

1.3. Significance of the Study

It is important, therefore, to study how the subaltern mass, the non-elite Tigrayans, who are outside of influence on the media framing recalls the war, and in turn, frame the actors in the war. This is because it is difficult to access accurate data regarding political issues due to the less freedom of expression in state-owned media environments. To access perspectives on the war from the subaltern mass, it is therefore binding to device non-traditional methods of data sampling and analysis.

The study utilizes internet memes in the aftermath of the war as a gross marketplace for perspectives and collective memories of the war and views towards TPLF in post-COHA months by the members of the *Tigrigna Meme*. The study contributes to the literature on peace and security in the following ways. First, memes offer an arguably more accessible form of resistance for those who may not have the resources or inclination to participate in street protests. In his Ph.D., dissertation, Denisova (2016) argued memes provide an alternative outlet for dissent, and enable a broader range of people to engage in resistance and contribute to a more peaceful and equitable society.

Second, the use of internet memes as a form of everyday resistance has significant implications for how we understand power and resistance (Yoon, 2016). While traditional forms of resistance often revolve around confrontation and the use of force, memes represent a subtler, more playful mode of resistance, and they are often used to undermine or question dominant narratives and effortlessly spread through social media, amplifying dissent in ways that can be hard for authorities to control or suppress (Shifman, 2013). By acknowledging the power of memes as a form of resistance, a more nuanced understanding of the potential for ordinary people to push back against injustice and challenge power structures, without resorting to violence or overt confrontation.

Third, studying memes as a form of everyday resistance by subaltern groups in *Tigrigna Meme* can have a significant implication on understanding of social cohesion and conflict resolution. When policymakers and authorities ignore or suppress forms of dissent, it can fuel resentment and division, potentially leading to more significant conflict in the future. By acknowledging and responding constructively to forms of resistance to *Tigrigna Meme*,

Ethiopian authorities can demonstrate a willingness to listen to alternative perspectives and engage constructively with dissenting voices. By promoting greater social cohesion and stability, it can contribute to enhancing both peace and security in the long term.

1.4. Objectives of the Research

1.3.1. General Objective:

The overall aim of this study is to investigate subaltern members' viewpoints within the *Tigrigna Meme*, by studying their utilization of subversion and transgression through satirical memes created in the post-CoHA months as a means of everyday resistance against the dominant actors involved in the war.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives:

The specific objectives of this study are:

- a. To analyze subtle dissents and resistance to the mainstream narrative adopted and advanced by TPLF and the Ethiopian government in the war and war mobilization and the subaltern's counter-narratives;
- b. To explore the different experiences the subaltern groups faced during the war, and to contend the seemingly homogenous presentation Tigray by the TPLF;
- c. To document the representations of the 'insiders' and the 'others' as a form of new identity formation dynamics within the group.

1.5. Research Questions

1.5.1. Main Question

How do *Tigrigna Meme*'s subaltern members use satirical memes as a means of resisting the dominant narratives advanced by dominant actors of war through subversion and transgression during the post-CoHA months?

1.5.2. Specific Questions

- a. In what way do subaltern members in *Tigrigna Meme* express dissent and resistance towards dominant narratives using satirical memes in the post-CoHA months?
- b. Do the subaltern members' experiences deviate from the dominant narratives specifically from the TPLF?
- c. How do subaltern members represent various actors of the war, including the TPLF, Tigrayan traders, the TDF, the Ethiopian government, the ENDF, and Eritrea, in their new identity formation dynamics?

1.6. Scope of the Study

The study focuses on memes targeting the actors in Northern Ethiopia's War from a Facebook group, *Tigrigna Meme*, and analyzes them to identify ways in which the subaltern groups in post-war Tigray carve out a space from which to successfully confront dominant narratives and actors such as the TDF, TPLF, the Ethiopian federal government, and situations like forced conscriptions by the political and economic elites during the war. The period for the selection of memes covers the post-COHA months, from November 2022, when Tigray was connected back to the internet in May 2023, when the study concludes.

Furthermore, the study entirely depends on the Facebook group for the following reasons. First, the group has the largest number of active members regarding memes in the Tigrigna language, with a minimum most original memes posted in it, each day. In comparison, other group memes in the Tigrigna language on social media such as Telegram⁵, Facebook, and Instagram⁶ have a limited number of members, and they repost a few memes from *Tigrigna Meme*. Second, the number of members has dramatically been increasing since January 2023. The group has showcased commendable progress in terms of its active memberships. Its statistics reveal that the number stood at figure of 130,000 as of January 2023 and experienced a noticeable surge to account for approximately 150,000 members in March. By April, it had shot up to 155,000 individuals, and 165,000 as of June.

1.6. Limitations of the Study

The research has a limitation in several ways due to the researcher's inability to read the language, Tigrigna, and understand the context in which the memes were created, and relying solely on translators whose mother tongue is Tigrigna, there is a likelihood of losing the nuances and fine details that make up the cultural context of the language. Furthermore, the inability to do research through ethnography by reading comments and delving oneself into the group's spirit of conversation makes it difficult to understand the full context of the memes and how they are used to resist power. Ethnography provides researchers with a platform to immerse themselves in the online culture they are studying by participating in the community and gaining firsthand experience (Addeo, 2019); but this was not possible because of the limitation of the language by the researcher.

⁵ Some of the top groups on Telegram include <https://t.me/TigrignaMemeOfficial> and <https://t.me/Tigrignameme1/>. These groups have approximately 3,900 and 2,600 subscribers as of May 2023.

⁶ https://www.instagram.com/tigrigna_meme/. This site only has 48 followers.

1.7. Ethical Considerations

In the process of undertaking this study, several ethical guidelines have been considered. First, given the nature of the study and for the security of the members, no personal details will be mentioned, in both data sampling or analysis. The memes may depict controversial themes, and some individuals may not wish to have their images or personal information shared publicly. Second, all data taken from the group is acknowledged and given appropriate citations. Third, any preconceived assumptions are avoided in data analysis and findings, and the data collection, interpretation, and dissemination are focused on the research objectives.

Fourth, memes often convey political or cultural messages and may contain explicit or implicit biases or stereotypes that could cause harm to specific communities or groups (Fairchild, 2020). In this regard, whether the memes could exacerbate tensions or cause harm to socially marginalized groups are considered. Further, appropriate language and respectful terminology when analyzing and reporting on memes that address sensitive issues are also considered.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, an introduction to the research is forwarded by setting the background of the study along with the research problem, and the significance of the study is also formulated. The question, “How do *Tigrigna Meme*’s subaltern members use satirical memes as a means of resisting power through subversion and transgression during the post-CoHA months?” is formulated to guide the study toward understanding ways the Tigrigna-speaking subaltern group recalls key actors in the war in northern Ethiopia, such as the TPLF, the TDF, Eritrea, the Ethiopian federal government, the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) and para-ENDF forces such as Amhara Fano and Amhara Special Forces.

In this chapter, available pieces of literature on the study of subalternity and the historical strategies they utilized to undermine power through satires are analyzed. The chapter reviews the concept of subalternity and subalterns’ historical struggles for representation, as the role of satire and humour in resisting power structures. Furthermore, works on subaltern satire and its numerous functions are reviewed along with the concept of power and resistance in social media; likewise, works on the emergence of internet memes as a form of everyday resistance are studied. The chapter concludes by locating the conceptual and literary gaps that this study solves.

2.2. Subalternity and their Historical Struggles for Representation

Subalternity refers to the individuals’ or groups’ state of being marginalized and oppressed within society, often due to factors such as race, gender, or social class (Green, 2002; Spivak G. C., 2003), and their struggles for representation have been a subject of study and analysis for many years. In the study of subalternity, one of the most influential works is Gayatri Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” In this essay, Spivak argued that the subaltern is unable to speak for themselves in a way that is recognized and understood by those who hold power in society (Spivak, 2003) as they are always defined by them, and their experiences and struggles are always framed by the dominant discourses of the powerful.

Spivak’s work shone a light on the historical endeavors executed by subalterns in their struggle for representation, and Green (2002) delved deeper into how subjugated populations including peasants, workers, and women were not offered many opportunities for political or cultural inclusion within society at large hence why they often found themselves pushed onto its margins with their voices being drowned out at every turn. However, despite this uphill

fight, Beverly (1999) recognizes that the subaltern groups have never given up in trying to claim what is rightfully theirs.

Effective examples include South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle where leading figures like Nelson Mandela rallied together to seek change (Makombe, 2011), and India's resistance for independence featured key figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar representing a united subaltern anterior (Bagade, 2023). In the contemporary, we continue to see numerous instances where many segments of society are excluded from the political and cultural mainstream by status or class-based hierarchies; nevertheless, these groups' struggles for representation persist.

In this light, examining subalternity and their historic struggles for representation is an essential field to explore as it illuminates both social and political power dynamics, as well as those everyday acts of resistance, performed amidst post-war circumstances. Although Spivak, Beverly, and Green's work provides us with a background to comprehend intricate aspects of subaltern experiences whereas advocating an inclusive culture that values all individuals' voices, it remains important to establish theoretical principles foundational to Subaltern Studies within political scholarship.

2.2.1. Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial Theory and Subaltern Studies are academic disciplines that arose during the second half of the previous century (Mignolo, 2012). They share a common interest in exploring colonialism's impact on societies and cultures worldwide notably those located within regions considered part of the Global South. The postcolonial theory primarily prioritizes analyzing how colonizers interacted with colonized people to impose dominant values upon them (Spivak, 1988). Ashcroft (2001) proposes the idea that such interactions generated an inequitable distribution of resources between these groups.

In addition to these factors, it is important to note that postcolonial theory also highlights how colonization has influenced language usage, identity development as well as cultural production by analyzing cultural representation construction over time (Beverley, 1999). One of the influential theorists in this field, Edward Said believes in showcasing how the West fabricated a negative view toward people emanating from Eastern cultures: a process known as *Orientalism*; thus, causing oppression among these communities throughout history (Said, 1977). In comparison, Homi Bhabha refuses reductionist approaches to studying culture; his interests have centered around hybridity's role in shaping cultural production through the interpretation of cultural identity (Bhabha, 2012). Hybridity serves to integrate multiple

perspectives into social reality promoting coexistence between colonizers and formerly colonized communities (Ibid.).

Subaltern studies, on the other hand, emerged out of an attempt to understand the marginalized and oppressed voices of subaltern people who experienced neglect and exploitation under colonialism (Spivak, 1988). It posits that these suppressed stories can provide new insights into how people from excluded cultures interpreted their world, and what political potential was still available (Dutta, 2010).

Postcolonial theory and subaltern studies offer theoretical foundations and roots to understand the concept of subalternity and their struggle for representation within mainstream political narratives and dominant cultures. Moreover, understanding these theoretical foundations can provide peace and security studies a framework to understand and deconstruct the oppression and marginalization that still face many contemporary cultures and societies and the critical examination of the power dynamics and cultural constructions. To take on this, it is imperative to submerge deeper into how these dominant cultures and mainstream political dominances operate and subaltern groups counteract, and Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony and counter-hegemony provides compelling insights on this.

2.2.2. Gramsci's Theory of Hegemony and Subaltern Counter-Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci, a well-known Italian Marxist philosopher revealed his theoretical verdicts about hegemony: dominant classes sustain power over subordinate classes through cultural means (Gramsci, 1971). As elucidated by Katz, Gramsci hypothesized counter-hegemonic forces by subaltern groups as a solution that could challenge hegemony. These subordinate units possess distinctive cultures or ideologies which could be leveraged against ruling parties (Katz, 2006). Forces in power also maintain authority beyond conventional political or economic systems: media outlets and popular cultures serve as useful mechanisms for manipulating public opinion while perpetuating existing ideologies (Ibid.). Through this means, dominant classes easily represent their interests as habitual or logical.

In comparison, subaltern units hardly possess the ability to influence mainstream media or dominant cultures; therefore, what they constantly encounter is just one perspective or "usable or accepted" ideology (Gramsci, 1971). Drawing from that comprised, primarily of subalterns' culture and principles, counter-hegemonic systems can stem these issues with the use of another cultural revolution. This approach would create alternative frameworks that challenge existing ideologies while providing contextual alternatives (Ibid.).

Another key thinker who built upon Gramsci's theory of hegemony is Spivak (2003), who introduced the concept of the "subaltern" and argued it is only through acts of counter-

hegemonic resistance that subaltern groups can reclaim their subjectivity and agency. Mouffe (2017) similarly wrote regarding “agonistic pluralism” which is an idea that power can never be fully consolidated by any group or individual, but a site of constant struggle for hegemony and a healthy democracy requires an agonistic pluralism, where different groups challenge each other’s ideas and values, which allows new counter-hegemonic movements to emerge (Mouffe, 2017).

Overall, Gramsci’s theory and works by thinkers such as Spivak and Mouffe elaborate on the application of these ideas and their relevance in contemporary power dynamics, which the post-CoHA months’ subaltern groups in *Tigrigna Meme* are viewed this theoretical lens. Nevertheless, to decipher the practical relevance of the theory at a societal level, reviewing works on the politics of representation and cultural resistance is also significant.

2.2.3. The Politics of Representation and cultural resistance

The politics of representation by those in power, and cultural resistance by subalterns are significant to understand Gramsci’s theory at a societal level. On the one hand, those in power often use various means to represent themselves before their constituents and gain their trust and votes (Bianco, 1994). They engage in creating a charismatic personality or an issue that resonates with the concerns of the public, such as symbols, body language, and even their dress.

On the other hand, subalterns, which are hidden, unrepresented, or marginalized people in societies, often resist their suppression through various cultural means (Spivak, 2003). Cultural resistance in this context is subaltern groups’ conscious and intentional act and the creative articulation of opposition and defense against those in power using their traditional, everyday cultural practices such as music, dance, literature, and other artistic expressions (McDonald, 2013; Spivak, 2003). Numerous political thinkers from Africa have also contributed significantly to the discussion on cultural resistance and politics of representation. For instance, Achille Mbembe, a Cameroonian philosopher, argued that African subalterns engage in cultural resistance to fight against the dominant Westernized cultures enforced on them through colonialism (Mbembe, 2001), while Chinua Achebe, a Nigerian novelist, described how colonialism erased some of his people’s cultural practices and how they resisted retaining their cultural identity (Achebe, 2021).

Overall, the politics of representation and cultural resistance by subalterns is essential to understand the power dynamics between power and resistance. Available scholarly works from Africa and abroad show that subaltern groups can resist their suppression through various cultural means, with their artistic expressions aimed at preserving their cultural heritages and identities. In light of the study at hand, the politics of representation and subaltern resistance

underscores the importance of centering perspectives and experiences of the subaltern groups in *Tigrigna Meme* in their struggles for justice and social change. In the next subsection, one of these artistic means of subaltern groups, satire, as an everyday resistance to suppressive power structures is analyzed to understand the subaltern perspectives in *Tigrigna Meme*.

2.3. Satire and Humour in resisting power structures

Satire and humour are compelling tools for subaltern groups resisting power structures (Obadare, 2009). Satire is the use of irony, sarcasm, hyperbole, absurdity, and ridicule to expose and criticize individuals' or institutions' flaws and follies, whereas humour is the ability to see or express the amusing or comic aspects of those situations. Together, satire and humour can challenge the status quo and undermine the dominant discourse that supports oppressive power structures, whether they are social, political, or cultural (Gilbert, 2004). By ridiculing and making fun of power, satire, and humour can create a space for questions, dissent, and ultimately change. They further help to build solidarity among people groups who are marginalized or oppressed and offer a means of coping with the challenges of life under structural inequality (Potter, 2001).

2.3.1. The Subversive and Transgressive Power of Humour

Subversion and transgression are two interrelated concepts the subaltern groups utilize to challenge the established dominant norms and values of society. Subversion refers to the subaltern groups' intentional undermining of power structures or societal institutions, while transgression is the violation of established social norms and boundaries. Whereas subversion is a form of resistance against structures of oppression, transgression is a way of challenging the limits of social norms and, elements that the dominant culture considers taboos. In a postmodern context, these concepts have become particularly relevant as they shed light on the limitations of conventional categories and meaning systems. As Foucault noted, "...transgression opens the way to the indefinite expanses of pleasure, to a world beyond the norms and the law" (Foucault, 1984, p. 58).

Bell Hooks, a black African-American thinker argued that subversion and transgression in humour enable oppressed people to resist and survive in oppressive environments and reclaim their agency and identity, as they use it to express their experiences and confront the powers that oppress them (Hooks, 1989). In her article, "Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood," Hooks recalls using humour as a way to cope with the racism she faced from white peers in her school (Hooks, 1997). Similarly, Chela Sandoval in her book "Methodology of the Oppressed," argues that humour can be a transgressive and subversive tool for the subaltern as it acts as a

form of resistance, as the laughter it creates can be disruptive to dominant power structures, and can challenge the privileged perspectives of those in power (Sandoval, 2013).

Furthermore, Sara Ahmed, in her book “The Promise of Happiness,” also examines the subversive potential of humour for subaltern groups (Sara, 2020). Sara argues humour can be used to “undo” stereotypes and create new meanings, as it enables the subaltern to express complicated and nuanced experiences of their lived realities. She asserts that humour may serve as a tool for fostering a sense of harmony within these communities. This occurs when individuals are brought together through their mutual encounters with resistance, critique, and individual expression.

Popular culture has also brought forth prominent comedians like Dave Chappelle (2004) and Trevor Noah (2023), who choose to analyze issues affecting people based on their race or status with insightful perspectives from below mainstream society. Ignoring conventional norms, tactics such as subversion and transgressions were used by them during performances, to challenge the existing powerful normative structures within the West, and provided alternate opinions. While Noah humorously highlights topics like identity politics, and discrimination among different races and genders, picking on the absurdity of prejudices, Chappelle emphasized hidden complexities about how people perceive racial relations, with explicit subversion and transgression approaches, drawing attention to marginalized groups’ struggles.

One of the compelling aspects of humour is when those in power are exposed to the ridicule of the subaltern, revealing the fragility and insecurity of their position. In his book, “Can the Subaltern Laugh?” Cipriani asserts the act of laughing in the face of power can be both a form of resistance and a way of relieving the tension and anxiety of the oppressed (Cipriani, 2019). From this perspective, humour is transgressive as it breaks down barriers and creates a sense of solidarity among subaltern groups. When these groups use humour to ridicule their dominant narratives and power, they can create a shared sense of humour that can act as a unifying force (Zekavat, 2017).

Besides, humour critiques power structures in a way that is accessible and engaging for subaltern groups. It achieves this by breaking down complex and abstract social issues into simpler and more digestible forms, making it easier for them to understand and connect on an emotional level (Cipriani, 2019). Obadare further argues humour is a strong coping mechanism with and processing the trauma and pain of oppression (Obadare, 2009), and laughing in the face of power helps to relieve stress and anxiety, providing a sense of release and catharsis for subaltern groups. Vinthagen et al (2013) further posited that through humour, subaltern groups

can resist, critique and even dismantle power structures that marginalize them. Humour allows the subaltern to reclaim their identities, agency, and group solidarity. It can be subversive, transformative, and empowering.

The works of Freire (1996), Chela Sandoval (2013), Bell Hooks (1997), and Sara Ahmed (2020), among others, offer a nuanced exploration of the power of humour as a tool for resistance and transformation. Humour is also a way of coping with and processing trauma, providing a sense of release and catharsis for oppressed groups. This can be an important step in the process of healing and recovery for individuals and communities that have experienced war and numerous violence such as the subaltern groups in post-CoHA Tigray.

2.3.2. Illustrations on Subaltern Satire from Popular Works

In recent decades, a surge of interest in studying subaltern satires' dynamics within popular culture and social media has emerged. Particularly among marginalized communities who use humour as their tool for cultural critique or resistance against oppression or discrimination encountered daily on various levels. This method exists across multiple mediums such as film or television that showcase society's structural flaws explicitly through its artistically compelling style choices embodying various campaigns.

One classic instance is Marvel's "Black Panther" (Coogler, 2018), that sets amidst Wakanda's fictional African land by using satirical elements seeking to expose colonialism's legacy while simultaneously commenting on global politics (Razak, 2019). By introducing Killmonger, raised by poverty-stricken origins within America yet entirely Wakandan, the movie highlighted how Western exploitation and oppression contributed significantly to Africa's current state. It subtly critiques the United States of America's current political landscape concerning problematic racial and nationalist issues.

A Nigerian novelist, Chimamanda N. Adichie, in her 2013 U.S. National Book Critics Circle Award-winning novel "Americanah", also speaks from the perspective of subaltern groups through humour to expose the tensions between African and African-American identities, as well as how both groups are marked by dominant cultural narratives about race and gender (Adichie, 2013). Another notable example stems from her "The Danger of a Single Story" TED talk that uses anecdotes with a touch of humour to challenge common perceptions regarding Africa's homogeneity and impoverishment (Adichie, 2009).

2.4. Power and Resistance in social media

The relationship between power and resistance in the context of social media is multifaceted; while amplifying marginalized voices at an unprecedented scale enables societal shifts to take place, powerful actors may use such platforms as tools for reinforcing existing structures that

handle dissenting voices through exclusion or silence. Obadare declares that such technological advancement paves the way for global solidarity among those working towards transformative change (2009), while Shirky highlights how creating online communities around shared beliefs challenges mainstream discourses (2011).

The far-reaching strength of social media is an undeniable force that even the powerful figures holding traditional forms of authority like governments or corporations cannot ignore. Consequently, they seek ways through which they might regulate it enough so that they can hold on tightly to their established positions of power all while avoiding dissenting voices from gaining ground (Hunsinger, 2013). The outcome has been an escalated trend towards greater surveillance capabilities coupled with censorship programs embraced more openly than before—all carefully devised with manipulation experiments also thrown into the mix (Ibid.). However, amongst the turmoil activists and other concerned voices have made a name for themselves by recognizing social media as an avenue through which they can arrange rallies or call-to-arms tasks - this thus challenges existing power structures, (Shirky, 2011). As a result, corporations suffering from malpractice, and crimes of unlawful violence by police can be brought to light through their efforts.

2.4.1. Resistance Strategies of the Subaltern Internet Users

Yan et al (2019) observed that power dynamics exist in social media, where users with more followers and engagement have more influence and control than others. In such a context, some social media users adopt resistance strategies against power, which include various actions and behaviors aimed at challenging and subverting dominant power structures. In his article, “Hashtag Activism, politics and Resistance in Africa”, Sebeelo also observed one of the most common resistance strategies against power in social media is the use of hashtags (Sebeelo, 2021).

He elaborates that hashtags are a form of metadata that group content based on a common topic and are widely used on social media platforms, mainly Twitter and Instagram (Ibid.). Social media hashtags also serve as a digital archive that documents and amplifies marginalized voices and experiences, and further allow subaltern users to bypass the gatekeeper function of traditional media and spread information and opinions on a global scale, creating a sort of virtual public sphere (Ibid.).

Another resistance strategy used by subaltern social media users against power is the creation of alternative media platforms. Dare posits that social media has disrupted the media landscape by challenging the dominance of mainstream media and allowing grassroots journalism and citizen journalism to emerge mainly through blogs, podcasts, and YouTube

channels to express their viewpoints and provide a counter-narrative to mainstream media's dominant discourse (Dare, 2011). He further points out that alternative media platforms also provide an opportunity for users to interact with content creators, establish communities, and share knowledge and experiences.

Subaltern social media users also adopted resistance strategies that challenge the dominant narrative by creating and sharing memes, and through the use of memes to criticize and subvert oppressive structures, such as political leaders, corporate entities, or traditional media (Shifman, 2013). In this sense, memes offer users a way to express humour and irony in a situation, and they can serve as a way to make sense of complicated situations. Furthermore, engaging in counter-surveillance is another strategy that subaltern social media users utilize to resist power (Clavell, 2014). Clavell elaborated that social media platforms are known for their intrusive data collection, which raises privacy concerns, and some users react to this by adopting counter-surveillance tactics, including encryption, anonymization, and deleting their digital footprint. This tactic allows subaltern users to reclaim their agency and avoid being subjected to monitoring by governments or corporations.

Overall, social media has empowered subaltern groups to challenge and subvert dominant power structures through various resistance strategies. Hashtags, alternative media platforms, memes, and counter-surveillance tactics all serve as ways for users to interact and communicate with each other and challenge oppression. The promising development of social media provides subaltern groups with an empowering platform to resist dominant forces, voice their diverse perspectives and actively engage in shaping ongoing discussions on social justice.

2.5. The emergence of internet memes as a form of everyday resistance

Memes, as described by Shifman (2013) are images, videos, or text messages created with the intent of conveying a political or social message that elicits humour or satire. These memes get distributed across various online platforms where they often become part of the conversation around politics and criticism. A fascinating aspect of memes is how accessible and effective they have become as tools used for expressing opinions while cultivating resistance against dominant ideologies. This access applies regardless of one's socio-economic background with experts rating creation easy alongside dissemination; this ease makes it possible for such information sources to target vast audiences through widespread sharing on different social media platforms.

As a form of everyday resistance, memes are an innovative way of challenging dominant ideologies, stereotypes, and power structures as they offer an alternative narrative or interpretation of events and issues that may have been distorted or silenced in the mainstream

media (Ibid.). They often have subversive and transgressive messages or hidden meanings that can be decoded by a community of like-minded individuals who share similar values and beliefs (Yus, 2019). Their emergence has provided a creative and accessible way for subaltern groups to express resistance against dominant ideologies, and have become a vital tool for challenging power structures and injustices and further demonstrating ways to take everyday actions in a more accessible, engaging, and interactive way (Shifman, 2013).

2.5.1. The History and Evolution of internet memes

Memes are cultural entities that achieve relevance through transmission amongst people but with added context along their journeys such as emotions or humour. Originating from Richard Dawkins' book "The Selfish Gene" (1976), the term meme looks at this phenomenon closely. Later on, during internet space's arrival on the scene, internet memes got introduced and took things a step further.

Easy-to-understand images accompanied by funny captions soon became popular in online circles during the early 2000s when humorous macros went viral. These memes started out being political, with Ryan M. Milner (2018) contextualizing events around challenging dominant establishments through his research centering around "The World Made Meme." For Milner, these early memes had a distinct political edge, with many aiming at the institutions and individuals that wielded power in society and they enabled activists to spread images and messages aiming to subvert dominant power structures, in line with the radical roots of participatory culture. At the turn of the century, critical memes often tackled topics like corporate greed, media control, and the military-industrial complex.

While many early internet memes took a decidedly political bent, the form quickly expanded to encompass a wide range of subject matter, from fan culture to humour to commentary on current events. According to Whitney Phillips, this expansion was driven by the increasing ease with which memes could be shared and remixed as they are so compelling because they can be created and distributed so quickly and easily (Phillips, 2017).

The technical affordances that enable this utility, which is the ability to copy, paste, and post make it simple to recycle parts of a previously successful meme, thereby infusing the new iteration with a sense of continuity and legitimacy. The utilization of internet memes has transformed into a significant resource for crafting our social perception of the world. Through employing an approach that is lively and captivating memes have the potential to modify our thought processes and convictions in meaningful ways by connecting with our collective consciousness.

Internet Memes have now evolved into sophisticated tools with highly complex elements from their simple image macro beginnings in recent years. Culture has played a critical role in shaping our understanding of how technology transformation is being used to foster adaptation and growth via disruptive innovation served through various communities. Henry Jenkins highlights memes' importance as building blocks in cultural convergence which define new expression domains expanding beyond stereotypes into new dimensions shaping communications that transcend stereotypical boundaries in his book "Convergence Culture" (Jenkins, 2007). The rise of social media at its height during the early 2000s facilitated memes' rapid spread as well as significant political-oriented tones emerged during mid-2000s campaigning periods like those seen in Obama's past presidential campaign encouraged them (Milner, 2018).

Today's evolved internet memes have completely transformed communication processes by becoming indispensable tools for humour commentary while creating an entirely different dynamic form around social interactions that exist online forever altering communication and interaction processes. For example, Pepe the Frog represents one community with its unique cultural support endlessly expressing themselves outside mainstream cultures valuing engagement beyond traditional Internet memes (Memes Dictionary, 2023).

2.5.2. Internet Memes as Subaltern Satires

There's hardly anyone now who hasn't seen or heard of an internet meme. While some laugh at these digital forms of entertainment, others recognize them as significant ways for marginalized groups to resist power imbalances within society (Clavell, 2014). Media expert Henry Jenkins sees memes as outlets for "vernacular creativity," whereby subordinated communities claim their narratives and reject dominant cultures (Jenkins, 2007). Creating memes empowers these otherwise silenced folks with a new way to voice their insights on current events or social issues - thus challenging conventional perspectives.

A Brazilian educator or scholar Paulo Freire once argued that "traditional" education works towards maintaining oppressive power structures; rather than adopt this approach, he proposed liberating pedagogy designed to empower disempowered voices so they could critically rethink reality derived from personal experience only (Freire, 1996). Memes present one valuable avenue for achieving such empowerment by encouraging subaltern communities to comment critically on the society around them.

According to Shifman's book "Memes in Digital Culture," memes have political and social implications that are worth exploring. Shifman argues that memes are part of a growing

digital culture that serve as a platform for expressing democracy-enhancing commentaries on political issues while promoting solidarity among marginalized communities. Stuart Hall (1997), a cultural theorist, echoes similar sentiments about the significant role played by popular culture in shaping our societal beliefs while Michel Foucault (1984) highlights how it reflects dominant power structures in society.

Mememes being part of this culture provides subaltern satires crucial for offering marginalized groups an opportunity to share their voices with their critiques on established social norms while questioning dominant narratives through humorous content creation aiming at invalidating power struggles previously entrenched within society's fabric comprehensively. By providing humorous imagery for analyzing societal dilemmas critically through satire, internet mememes act as powerful tools fostering a better understanding of cultural taboos perpetuated within contemporary society.

2.5.3. Key characteristics of Internet mememes as a form of cultural production

Understanding mememes better requires examining some common characteristics that set them apart from other forms of cultural production as per Shifman (2013). First is their participatory nature; unlike filmmaking or writing music where creation is the work of one person working alone; collaboration plays a critical role in mememe culture across the world wide web. As such, there's always room for variation as different internet users add their twist to already existing ones during their sharing process continually.

Second, on our list is the visual element that pervades most memorable jokes and trends online — many times heavily reliant on imagery sourced from films or TV shows or creative graphic designs created explicitly for them. These visuals serve the purpose of quick comprehension amongst audiences which leads us to the third characteristic: humour or satire messaging. Third, mememes tackle complex issues but accomplish them lightly by poking fun at everything from celebrities to political figures, popular culture phenomena, and anything else people find amusing. This makes it a form of social commentary that is both engaging and fun.

Fourth, mememes carry unique features that make them quite different from other forms of communication as identified by Shifman (2013), because they depend on context; thus, you need adequate knowledge about specific phenomena or cultural moments for you truly comprehend a particular mememe fully. As an example, someone without full awareness of the political climate during the CoHA between the Ethiopian government would interpret viral mememes referencing such events out of context.

Furthermore, memes' ease of replicability coupled with their shareability makes them highly popular pieces in today's society (Shifman 2013). The ability for anyone to copy-edit-share online contributes significantly towards making internet memes critical components of popular culture as well as its common language globally. In this sense, memes are not just humorous or simple visuals, but they also portray social and political events or discussions often meant for starting conversations on vital issues.

2.5.3.1. The humour and irony of memes as a form of resistance

As the world continues to grapple with socio-political unrest, people often turn to humour and satire as a means of expressing their dissent (Silvestri, 2018). Humour plays a critical role in the effectiveness of memes as a form of resistance (Cipriani, 2019). In many cases, humour can be more effective than anger or aggression in conveying a message or critique. By using humour to ridicule certain beliefs or individuals, memes can help to undermine their power and authority, revealing their contradictions and hypocrisies. For example, political figures or institutions can be satirized through cleverly crafted memes that humorously highlight their flaws or failings, making them seem less formidable.

Another powerful element of satire, irony, takes center stage in how memes operate as forms of effective resistance (Obadare, 2009). Irony occurs when one uses language or action that contradicts or confounds the expectations one has for it. Memes make good use of irony since subaltern groups can use them effectively to subvert dominant narratives or expectations by challenging societal norms accordingly (Ross, 2017). For example: using pop culture references or combinations between images and text in ironic ways within a meme format underscores precisely how absurd certain beliefs or practices evident in society are via satire.

Memes also provide a platform for subaltern individuals expressly interested in sharing opinions or experiences with others who hold similar views based on humour alone- which contributes towards building communities rooted around common political or social critiques while establishing empowerment within these collectives as they seek change against systemic issues (Zekavat, 2017). Memes, therefore, work as a powerful way to critique political systems and social norms through humour's use and irony's role in exposing their limitations.

2.5.4. Subversion and Transgression in Internet Memes

The use of internet memes has paved the way for subaltern groups to challenge the established narratives with satire. These memes can be altered in ways that express dissent towards issues related to power and privilege (Shifman, 2013). Altering these memes involves repurposing their original meanings to convey different messages or perspectives. One may add text, modify images or even create new memes altogether.

For example, the “Distracted Boyfriend” meme shows a man ogling another woman while his partner disapproves (Shander, 2019). Although it became popular across cultures and contexts, its intrinsic value did not change much over time until some users began repurposing it differently as per Shander’s assertions wherein, they show the girlfriend leaving her boyfriend for someone more desirable. Such innovative usage challenges conventional notions about the objectification of women and instead gives them agency in making choices.



Figure 1: The distracted boyfriend meme.⁷

To push what is deemed appropriate or acceptable requires transgressing internet memes similar to how satire does it in general terms. To bypass these limitations, subalterns’ resort to using taboo or polemic content like politics, sexuality, or violence. One classic example of an intentionally-transgressive meme is *Pepe the Frog* meme which depicts Matt Furie’s simple cartoon frog initially; however, alt-right groups co-opted it for spreading messages of hate speech along with extremist viewpoints (Miller-Idriss, 2019).

Consequently, some meme-users countered by creating their versions that either show Pepe in a positive light or manipulate him into undermining the alt-right’s ideologies altogether resulting in challenging their power and influence on social media platforms (Miller-Idriss, 2019). Miller argued every user knows one day this act will affect them too since freedom always demands safety for virtuous citizens while challenging tyrants. In both subverting and transgressing internet memes, subaltern groups can challenge established power structures and privileges. Furthermore, these memes can be used to spread awareness and education about serious issues regarding social inequalities and injustices while boosting marginalized communities’ self-image which translates into an empowering experience for all. Overall,

⁷ <https://www.wired.com/story/distracted-boyfriend-meme-photographer-interview/>. Created 28 August 2017. Accessed on 21 February 2023.

internet memes are transformed into powerful tools of social change when subjected to skilled transgression.

2.5.5. Case studies on internet memes as forms of resistance to power

Numerous studies show internet memes can be harnessed to challenge powerful structures effectively. In particular, the 2016 US Presidential election saw prominent employment of this tool by Ross (2017). Both major camps' supporters utilized it widely while independent groups used it to push alternative viewpoints while criticizing mainstream media coverage too. Pro-Bernie Sanders advocates created humorous images highlighting their candidate's progressive policies while scrutinizing his opponents' corporate connections and ties with political establishments; meanwhile, anti-Trump enthusiasts used captivating memes calling out his errant statements and probable interests-conflict.

Another instance is found in the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement analyzed by Clark (2016), who argues how these digital artifacts played an organizing role in bringing together people opposed to police violence and systemic racism. The iconic symbol here is the raised fist, which became a sign of resistance and solidarity. Memes are typically shared and created by people in subservient positions or with restricted access to traditional media channels hence providing opportunities for creativity, humor, and spontaneity concerning political activism. It should be noted that memes cannot substitute authorized methods or institutionalized forms of resistance but only serve as subalterns' accessible expressiveness platform against authority and promoting change ideals.

2.5.6. Internet Memes as a form of cultural and political critique

Albeit memes are typically associated with being humorous or entertaining, subaltern groups have found another use for them – they've become an influential tool for commenting on politics and cultural issues across society. In Africa – where political problems are sensitive issues that can mean life or death – citizens have seized on memes as a means of expressing their dissatisfaction, anger, and frustration with the current state of things.

One outstanding example of this phenomenon is the #ZumaMustFall movement that began in South Africa in 2015 (Bosch, 2019). The president at the time Jacob Zuma's decision about reshuffling his cabinet stirred controversy which many perceived as trying to strengthen his grip on power. This hashtag fast became famous on social media platforms where informed individuals created such captions as a symbolical way of criticizing President Zuma's presidential leadership abilities using amusing or serious language through well-thought-out memes.

Ncube (2019) also reported extensive usage of memes in Zimbabwean politics during the 2018 election cycle. Due in part to limited access by many citizens to conventional news sources, memes emerged as an effective way for people across the nation to stay informed about current political affairs without being heavily politicized. Memes were created primarily with the aims of lampooning public figures over their political flaws like policies shortcomings or campaign promises made and critique on other government matters which included democratic rights abuse like suppressing opposition rights among others while also expressing general disapproval for ruling party politics. This often-dispelled narratives traditionally enforced through conventional media like newspaper print outs or broadcasted news reports.

Moreover, these same memes serve as more than just a means of popular expression; they also work towards celebrating and affirming diverse African identities around the world by countering harmful stereotypes directed towards Africans at large. This is often undertaken on digital platforms like Twitter where Black Africans particularly use humorous images accompanied with texts against racist narratives that portray Africa as backward by exaggerating cultural practices some deemed archaic while devaluing the contributions of Africans to global culture.

In all, internet memes have grown into a significant tool for political and cultural advocacy in Africa. They have become a crucial part of many African activists' online campaigns by providing humorously cutting commentary that is easily accessible to many. Memes provide a platform where users can express political discontent, as well as celebrate African culture in an empowering way. From condemnations of corruption and the stifling of democratic rights to championing diverse cultures, memes are reshaping African discourses globally.

2.5.6.1. Internet memes as a form of counter-hegemony

Internet memes possess a great deal of cultural significance and underlying ideologies that often go unnoticed. One critical aspect whereby they can function as exceptional counter-hegemonic tools is by dismantling dominant cultural narratives. According to theoretical foundations based on subaltern studies; hegemony refers to the dominance one social group exercises over another; imposing its values or beliefs upon them - thereby reinforcing its control over weaker groups (Gramsci, 1971). This results in inequalities - be it socially or economically or politically (Femia, 1975).

On the other hand; counter-hegemonic movements aim toward divergent thinking by opposing existing norms with fresher views or perspectives (Ibid.). By being easy to create and spreading rapidly online- humorous or satirical memes offer an incredibly effective medium

for challenging conventional forms of power and control while avoiding confrontation with authorities (Ross, 2017). Furthermore, due to their participatory nature, subaltern groups can efficiently contribute to cultural conversations that challenge traditional ways of power.

Internet memes have emerged as a popular medium for communication in present-day Ethiopia among its youth population. With an acute sense of frustration towards structural oppression prevalent in their country lately engendered into them these communities view memes serve as important agents capable enough of challenging dominant narratives that pervade society's public lifetime with counter-hegemonic messages combating oppressive forces at large.

2.6. Conclusion

Within this chapter lies an extensive analysis of literature focusing on various aspects relating directly or indirectly to subalternity and opposition forces' power dynamics at play; including theoretical frameworks engaging expressions like everyday resistance alongside practical illustrations exploiting cultural or political memes as tools against oppression prove effective. They demonstrate that deviation from the traditional discourse can challenge dominant structures' legitimacy and power in society.

Moreover, during times when conventional media is hampered by significant censorship, social media memes are embraced platforms for dissidents to safely voice their opinions. However, a notable literary gap emerges regarding the subaltern use of memes when framing and rejecting power within contexts after the war. This gap demands further scrutiny as it influences our comprehension of the relationship between dominant powers and subaltern groups following the war. Especially concerning post-war circumstances, one particular concept is highly relevant – collective pulsating human consciousness.

This powerful notion denotes the shared sentiments, experiences, and feelings within a community that comes together with an ardent desire for catharsis after experiencing trauma such as war. To interpret subaltern groups' contribution to peace and security accurately requires investigation into this critical topic; neglecting it creates gaps in our comprehension despite its importance. Therefore, analyzing Tigrigna memes used by subaltern groups in post-CoHA is necessary through this study that sheds light on new insights regarding subaltern contributions during the aftermath of war through their social media activities.

These research results provide significant knowledge indicating ways in which subaltern communities participate actively in constructing narratives regarding peace building expressing their emotions via various means involving memes creation most importantly framing actors' crucial aspect when examining the construction narrative regarding peace

building, the study further informs scholars on Subalternite's mechanisms turning them into useful channels toward conflict resolution instead next engagers contributing more insightful approaches towards restoration surrounding areas after extended wars.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, a review of works of literature regarding subalternity, hegemony, and counter-hegemony, the emergence of memes as forms of subaltern satires, is undertaken. The review exhibited that by creating a parallel discourse that runs counter to the dominant one, subaltern groups can challenge the legitimacy of the ruling regime and undermine its power through satires. Moreover, in a context where the mainstream media is heavily manipulated and civil society organizations are often suppressed, internet memes offer a relatively safe and accessible way to express dissent and mobilize for change (Obadare, 2016). Nonetheless, the review established that there has been little attention paid to the use of memes by subaltern groups as a form of everyday resistance by framing actors in the context of the aftermath of war.

This chapter now sketches a research methodology for this study, which aims to fill the gap. The chapter is formulated to guide the research question towards providing valuable insights into how the subaltern groups in *Tigrigna Meme* in the post-COHA months, frame actors of the war in northern Ethiopia (hereafter, the war) by creating counter-narratives. It further aims to understand ways the members use memes to express their emotions and participate in the narrative construction of peace and security in Tigray.

3.2. Research Design

This study is undertaken within the paradigm of interpretivism, as it emphasizes the importance of understanding individual interpretation and meaning-making in social contexts (Ansell, 2015; Scauso, 2020; Potrac, 2014). Interpretivism allows the researcher to explore how individuals create and interpret memes as a form of everyday resistance to power, because memes are a collective expression of popular culture and social commentary, often using humor and irony to challenge dominant cultural and political narratives (Milner, 2018).

Through interpretivism, this study further analyzes how memes are created and shared within *Tigrigna Meme* and understands their significance as a means of challenging dominant power structures in post-COHA months. The approach also highlights the subjective nature of meaning-making, reminding researchers that one meme can have different meanings for different individuals and that these interpretations are shaped by their cultural, social, and historical contexts. Ultimately, the interpretive approach offers a nuanced and contextualized understanding of the significance of *Tigrigna Meme* as a form of everyday resistance to power.

3.3. Research Framework

3.3.1. Study Population

The selection of Tigrayan subaltern groups as the primary focus for this research is founded on a variety of compelling justifications. First, the war has had a more devastating impact on Tigray than any other region in Ethiopia, leading to widespread displacement, violence, and economic upheaval (Africa Close, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2023). A closer examination of the Tigrayan subalterns' use of satires and internet memes as a form of everyday resistance against dominant narratives and power structures is an essential component of understanding the lived experiences of those affected by war.

Second, as discussed in Chapter One, TPLF's homogenous representation of the Tigrayan society has played a pivotal role in shaping the experiences and perspectives of the Tigrayan subalterns (See section 1.1.1. under Chapter One); as such, these groups exist in a unique power dynamic that underscores the importance of a nuanced exploration of their tactics of resistance. Thus, understanding how these groups leverage satirical forms of communication can provide valuable insights into how political tensions can be navigated and diffused through language and culture. Ultimately, the selection of Tigrayan youth as subaltern groups have significant implications for peace and security studies as it enables an examination of the perspectives of those who have experienced marginalization and oppression, this research can contribute significantly to a better understanding of the drivers of conflict and the pathways to conflict resolution.

3.3.2. Social Media, a Space Where Subalterns Speak

Facebook and similar social networking sites have transformed how subaltern groups engage in communication amongst themselves, and counteract dominant powers that traditionally silenced them. Focused examples are found in a study by Myria Georgiou, who studied Georgiou, subaltern voices in social media by investigating migrant voices in digital Europe (Georgiou, 2018); a study by Shepherd Mpofu, who argued subalterns speak through social media by studying citizen journalism and genocide 'victims voices online (Mpofu, 2015); a study by Kunjat and Christopher Norman on a netnography of India's subaltern voices entering the public via social media, which argued subaltern groups can tweet (Kujat, 2016) and; thus, can speak through social media.

3.3.3. The *Tigrigna Meme* Facebook Group

The selection of the *Tigrigna Meme* Facebook page as the primary focus of this research can be justified through a rigorous analysis of its comparative advantages over other social media

platforms. In particular, the page’s vast following among Tigrayan youth (see the below graph on the age distribution of *Tigrigna Meme*) lends itself as an ideal case study for investigating how subaltern groups utilize satire and internet memes as a form of everyday resistance.

3.3.3.1. *Distribution of Tigrigna Meme Members by Age and Gender*

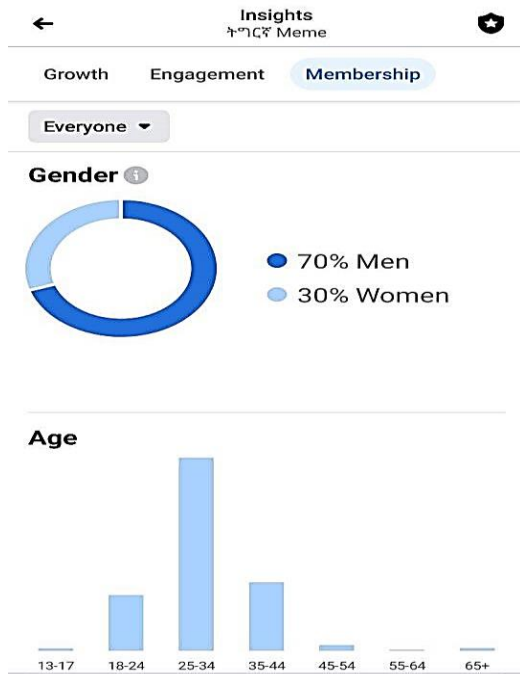


Chart 3.1. *Distribution of Tigrigna Meme members by gender.*

The pie chart displays the gender distribution of the members of the page. The chart indicates that 70% of the members are male, while the remaining 30% are female, highlighting the significant gender gap in the group.

Graph 3.1. *Distribution of Tigrigna Meme members by age.*

The graph showcases a clear dominance of the 25-34 age range group; whereas, the 34-44 age range is slightly greater than the 18-24 group. This graph points towards the tendency of the young population likely to be affected by conscription and militarization during the war.

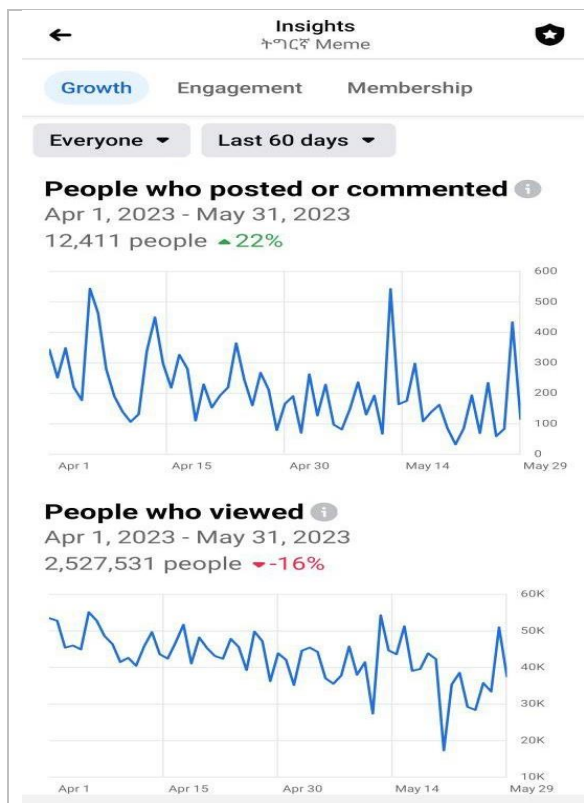
3.3.3.2. *Distribution of Tigrigna Meme members by location*



Table 3.1. *Distribution of Tigrigna Meme members by location*

The table displays the geographical distribution of members in the *Tigrigna Meme*, providing insight into their location patterns. As the data reveals, it is evident that the majority of the group’s members reside in Ethiopia, with a significant percentage living in Addis Ababa, and the city of Mekelle. These two locations alone constitute 60% of the total population, indicating a high concentration of members in these areas. Furthermore, the table displays other cities in Tigray, such as Adigrat, Aksum, and Wukro, which also have a notable *Tigrigna Meme* presence, accounting for the remaining 27% of the population.

3.3.3.3. Active and passive engagements of members with the contents of the page



Graph 3.2.

Active and passive engagements of members with the contents of the page for 60 days.

The graph depicts the engagement and viewership of the *Tigrigna Meme* from April 1 to May 31. The graph reveals that on average, around 550 people engage with the page daily. This includes individuals who post or comment on the page, compared to approximately 50,000 people, who view the page on a daily basis. This specifies that while there are a significant number of people interacting with the content on the page, there is a much larger audience passively engaging with the content. Moreover, the graph shows a 16% decrease in viewership compared to the previous 60 days (February and March), and the administrators have attributed it to the government's disabling of social media, making it only accessible through a VPN.

3.4. The Research Method

The study is undertaken with a qualitative research method. The qualitative approach to research is obliging in understanding the complexities of how memes in *Tigrigna Meme* serve as everyday resistance to power. The qualitative research that is used in this study is content analysis (Iloh, 2021; Branthwaite, 2011). Through this method, the researcher examines the themes, messages, and symbols that emerge from the memes as the method enables him to examine user-generated content, which includes comments and shares (Marwick, 2014), to understand the meaning and interpretation of memes from the perspectives of the members of the *Tigrigna Meme*. Qualitative analysis of such content can reveal patterns and themes in how different groups perceive and use internet memes as a means of resistance to power.

3.4.1. Data Sampling Method

3.4.1.1. Sampling Strategy

Given the number of memes that have been posted in the *Tigrigna Meme* group, which is about 131,000 as of April 2023, a manual search for memes targeting the research question could bring inaccurate results. Hence, the researcher utilized a Facebook image-searching algorithm to identify relevant memes targeting the frame of the study (Cohen, 2020). The Facebook image search algorithm is a complex system that relies on computer vision and machine learning. One

of Facebook’s features that have contributed significantly to its image search algorithm by making it easier for users to locate images within specific terms, in any language (Facebook, 2023). When a user enters specific terms in the search bar within the group, Facebook’s algorithm scans through all the images available within that group. The algorithm identifies images that share similar characteristics as the image being searched for, by applying filters ranging from shape, size, and color.

The algorithm then ranks these images based on the relevance and time frame of the search terms entered (Meta, 2022). The images that share more similarities with the search terms and those that match the search terms more specifically are given a higher ranking. Furthermore, there are also some advanced features within the algorithm. For instance, users can refine their search results by choosing parameters such as date range, file type, and image subjects.

3.4.2. Data Analysis Framework

To acquire relevant information concerning how the subaltern members of *Tigrigna Meme* frame actors and dominant narratives in the war in the post-COHA months, the researcher developed the following frame of analysis. The frame developed based on messages from memes targeting these actors and the narratives around them.

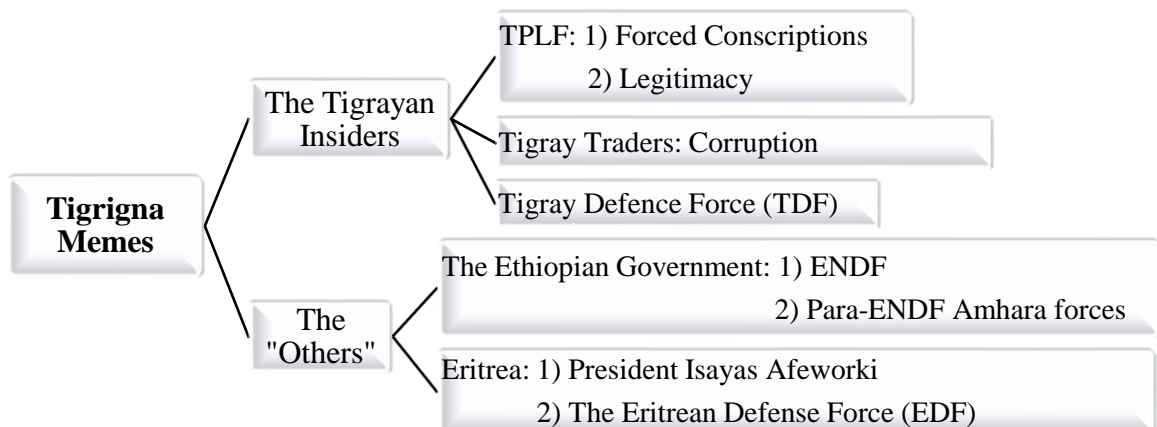


Figure 3.1: A framework for data collection and analysis

3.4.2.1. Data source

Drawing on Dawkin’s notion of memes, as units of cultural information that compete and want to multiply and survive within a limited resource of the human mind, the researcher used the above Facebook image search algorithm to identify memes that have been created, most liked,

and most shared by subaltern groups in *the Tigrigna Meme*. The query terms used in the search bar within the group are in both Tigrigna and English languages. These included dominant actors and narratives during the war.

Sample search terms for dominant actors and narratives:

ህዝባዊ ወያኔ ሓርነት ትግራይ (ህወሓት)—a Tigrigna equivalent for the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF); *ሓይልታት ምክልክል ትግራይ (ሓምት)*—Tigray Defense Forces (TDF); *ኪጋይ ትግራይ*—Tigray traders; *ሓይልታት ምክልክል ኤርትራ (ሓምኔ)*—Eritrea Defense Forces (EDF); and *የኢ.ፌ.ዲ.ሪ መከላከያ ሠራዊት (or መከላከያ)* — the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF); *ገፈፋ* (Forced conscriptions); *ትግራይ ትዕስር* (Tigray shall prevail); and etcetera.

Search terms for major political figures:

አብይ አህመድ አሊ (or አብይ፣ አብቺ) — Abiy Ahmed Ali (Abiy, Abichu); *ገሬዝደንት ኢሳይያስ አፈወርቂ (or ኢሳይያስ)*—Isayas Afeworki, *ጌታቸው ረዳ (or ጌች)*—Getachew (Gech); *ገሬዝደንት ደብረጽዖን (ደብረጽዖን)*—Debretsion, and etcetera.

3.4.3. Data Analysis Method

As a form of content analysis, a Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) is used to analyze sampled memes for the following reasons (Mohamed, 2020). First, MDA has the power to reveal how memes serve as a form of collective resistance, as subaltern groups engage with and remix existing memes to create new meanings and contest dominant narratives (Kress, 2013; Yus, 2019 and Mohamed, 2020). Second, MDA provides a useful framework for understanding how internet memes function as a form of everyday resistance, contributing to broader struggles for social justice and cultural change (Mohamed, 2020; Kress, 2013). Third, through MDA, a researcher can identify themes and patterns in the communication of subaltern satires and everyday resistance to power (Gupta, 2022) among the members of the *Tigrigna Meme*.

The researcher’s main objective for using MDA is to capture the different semiotic modalities of the memes (text, images, symbols, and gestures) to answer the research question. MDA focuses on how meaning is created through different semiotic modes, including textual (top text and bottom text in memes), and images (context-based images of a meme), (Yus, 2019). As internet memes make use of a range of semiotic modes, MDA is an effective framework for analyzing how they function as a form of everyday resistance to power dynamics. By examining how memes use humor, irony, and other rhetorical devices to subvert and transgress narratives as related to power dynamics in society, an MDA approach can reveal

how subaltern groups in *Tigrigna Meme* usage of memes can subvert and transgress dominant narratives and actors and challenge narratives in the war in post-CoHA months.

3.4.3.1. *Text-picture combinations in Memes*

One type of MDA is Francisco Yus' cyber-pragmatic approach to memes analysis (Yus, 2016, 2019). As grasping the widespread impact that memes have on online communication requires a multifaceted approach, Yus' method involves studying their pragmatic functions alongside an analysis of how they're used in various contexts while also considering the sociocultural factors that help define them. By adopting a cyber-pragmatic perspective, the researcher can gain insights into the complex dynamics of memes by the subaltern members of the *Tigrigna Meme* and the role that memes play in dominant public discourses and narratives. The following image is a typical example of a meme with three elements: the top text (TT), the middle image giving the context (MI), and the bottom text (BT).

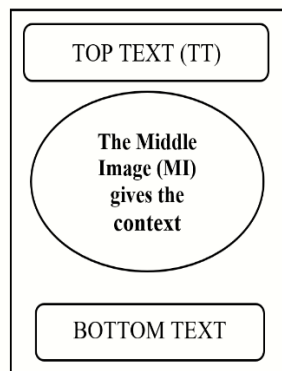


Figure 3.2: *A typical example of a meme with its three elements.*

Yus' cyber pragmatic approach is that memes are similar to how scholars interpret spoken language with explicit or implicit meanings; thus, memes have both visual *explicatures* and *implicatures* as well (Yus, 2019, pp. 2-3). Accordingly, researchers need to make inferential hypotheses about how images in memes contribute to our overall comprehension of them, specifically, they must determine whether the image solely represents something factual (visual *explicature*) or if it implies more than what is immediately visible (visual *implicature*) based on the surrounding context.

While identifying a visual *explicature* generally involves straightforward identification and connection of labels with their referents in images, decoding an underlying message through the mental referent of the context could require much more complex analysis. Consequently, comprehending memes requires coordination between textual processing, and interpretations drawn from visuals, alongside potential implications arising from any textual-visual pairs.

Upon sighting a meme on Facebook in *Tigrigna Meme*, the researcher follows the following inferential processes (Ibid.); nevertheless, they may not necessarily follow each other consecutively but rather depend on the researcher's expectations towards and relevance searching within memes:

Stage 1: Decode and inferentially enrich the verbal content of the meme (top and bottom texts of the meme) to obtain the explicit interpretation of the text or *explicature*.

Stage 2: Derive *implicatures* from verbal content, if these are necessary to reach a relevant interpretation of the verbal content of the meme.

Stage 3: Decode and inferentially enrich the picture to yield a visual *explicature*.

Stage 4: Derive *implicatures* from the picture in the meme, if these are necessary to reach an adequate interpretation of the meme as a whole.

Stage 5: Infer possible combinations of text and picture to yield interpretations (typically, implicated ones or verbal-visual implicatures) that are only possible from the combination of these sources of information (text and picture) and not from either of them taken separately.

Therefore, based on the above MDA's cyber-pragmatic approach, the researcher, (1) establishes the referents of a meme both on the level of the subversion and transgression within the meme and of the dominant narratives of political contexts they are targeting, (2) combines a narrative on the meme picture to get an appropriate context, and (3) draw on the intertextual-visual meaning of the meme to understand the subaltern perspective.

3.5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter formulated a research methodology aimed at exploring how satirical memes are utilized by members of the *Tigrigna Meme* as a form of everyday resistance against power through internet memes in the post-COHA months. The interpretive framework and qualitative methodology were chosen to provide a thorough examination of the complex interactions within this community. One of the qualitative approaches, content analysis, was used to identify, collect, and analyze data through Facebook's image search algorithm.

In the next chapter, a type of MDA, Yus' cyber-pragmatic approach to memes analysis will be applied in examining the data collected. The researcher analyzes collected memes to identify how subaltern memes in *Tigrigna Meme* play a significant role in expressing resistance to power. Further, by drawing upon the concept of collective pulsating consciousness in the aftermath of war, it aims at identifying the uses of memes as a means of coping with social and political changes affecting their lives and their usage of memes as a form of resistance by challenging the dominant ideologies that normalize oppressive structures.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE TIGRAY INSIDERS

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, the methodology through which the thesis is undertaken is formulated. This methodology helps the research fulfill the objective of the study in understanding the subaltern groups in *Tigrigna Meme*. It is also noted that the objective of the study is to identify the subaltern use of internet memes to express their dissent, and emotions, frame actors in the war, and participate in the counter-narrative construction of peace and security in post-CoHA months. The methodology further enables the researcher to analyze memes in a way that brings out the intended message, situating the audience and their political context.

This chapter now provides an in-depth analysis of the collected data, regarding the inside actors in the war by highlighting the significance of internet memes as a tool for political expression by subaltern groups in *Tigrigna Meme*. The researcher applies a Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) as a data analysis method (Mohamed Ben Moussa, 2020). In Chapter Two, a review of works of literature on subaltern satires exhibited that the use of humor, sarcasm, hyperbole, and absurdity enables subaltern groups to question the dominant narratives in circumstances where there is limited to no freedom of speech and expression.

Furthermore, an important point to consider is that subaltern communities are resorting to social media activism and the internet infrastructure itself to circumvent traditional forms of censorship and influence. This discovery carries significance because it suggests that these communities are taking new avenues for engaging with politics while resisting dominant powers. In this context, this chapter examines how subaltern groups within *Tigrigna Meme* have harnessed mockery, satire, sarcasm, and other tactics within their meme production practices for challenging established structures. Through such strategies, a nuanced picture emerges of how these actors frame different characters involved in the war in northern Ethiopia (hereafter, the war).

By utilizing MDA, particularly based on the cyber-pragmatic approach to meme analysis (Yus, 2019), the researcher first establishes the referents of the meme both on the level of subversion and transgression within the meme. This is directed to understand the subaltern subversion of the dominant narratives of political contexts they are targeting from the top text (TT) and the bottom (BT), and occasionally the middle text (MT) of memes. Then, combines a narrative on the meme picture to get an appropriate context, and finally, draws on the intertextual-visual meaning of the meme to understand the subaltern's perspective. This

approach allows the researcher to deconstruct the meaning behind the memes, their intended audience, and the message being conveyed.

The chapter is divided into three subsections. The first subsection introduces the chapter by highlighting key arguments and findings. In the second subsection, the researcher analyses memes framed thematically and discusses findings from the analysis. The third subsection concludes the chapter by highlighting key themes and findings discussed in the chapter.

4.1. Frames of Analysis, Findings, and Discussions

Under this subsection, dominant actors of the war based in Tigray with their narratives, and subaltern groups' counter-narratives regarding them are framed thematically. These frames include the Tigray People's Liberation Front (two themes: legitimacy, and forced conscriptions), the Tigray Traders (one theme: exorbitant prices and profits), and the Tigray Defense Force. To acquire accurate data, the researcher followed Facebook's Image Search Algorithm (FISA), using the search terms mentioned in Chapter Three, and analyzed through Yus' cyber-pragmatic approach to memes analysis (Yus, 2019).

The filters applied in the search algorithm are the date of the memes (post-CoHA months) and their magnitude of engagements. The magnitude of engagement these memes possess is significant for the study as it verifies Dawkins' concept of a meme as a cultural replicator: the higher the engagement within the *Tigrigna Meme*, the higher the chance of the memes' survival within the group. Further, due to the concept of collective pulsating consciousness (CPC), these memes have the potential to expose the war's shared experience of the subaltern community in the group.

4.1.1. The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)

In this subsection, the researcher analyzes nine memes in detail. The analysis is undertaken on two levels: TPLF's Legitimacy and TPLF's aggressive conscription during the war. To achieve this, one hundred memes related to the TPLF were selected through FISA, and out of the analyzed memes regarding the TPLF,⁸ nine memes are selected based on the number of engagements (likes, comments, and shares) they possess, and examined in detail.

The analysis of these memes exhibits that the subaltern groups in *Tigrigna Meme* subvert dominant narratives by the TPLF and transgress them towards narratives they desire. These subalterns often use irony, hyperbole, humor, and satire to ridicule narratives and top leaders of the TPLF. The memes further reveal that the TPLF is perceived as incompetent and caused multiple problems in their society, such as corruption, undesired war and forced

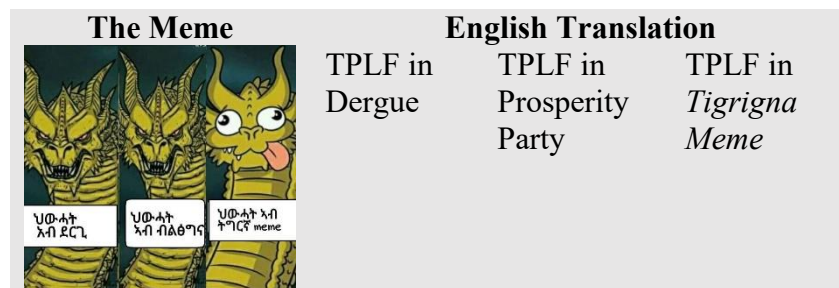
⁸ Access the thematically collected memes here:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/10kcICLeqpyTyTGK5aITJO3jf6K7CERl3/view?usp=sharing/>.

conscription, and poverty. The TPLF is also portrayed as being authoritarian and manipulative, seeking to control all aspects of society for its gain.

One common theme found in the memes is the use of symbols and imagery to depict the TPLF. For example, one meme portrayed the TPLF leader as a fake dragon, demonstrating negative connotations such as deceit and weak-playing-strong. Furthermore, the findings of the analysis of TPLF-related memes demonstrate that the subaltern groups are challenging the dominant narrative of the TPLF utilizing satire, humor, and irony to undermine the actor. This has vital implications for the larger political landscape as the subaltern groups are using social media in compelling ways to engage in political discourse and push for change.

4.1.1.1. *Subversions and Transgressions against TPLF’s Legitimacy*

Figure 4.1.⁹ TPLF during the Dergue, its relationship with the Prosperity Party, and its presentation within the *Tigrigna Meme*.



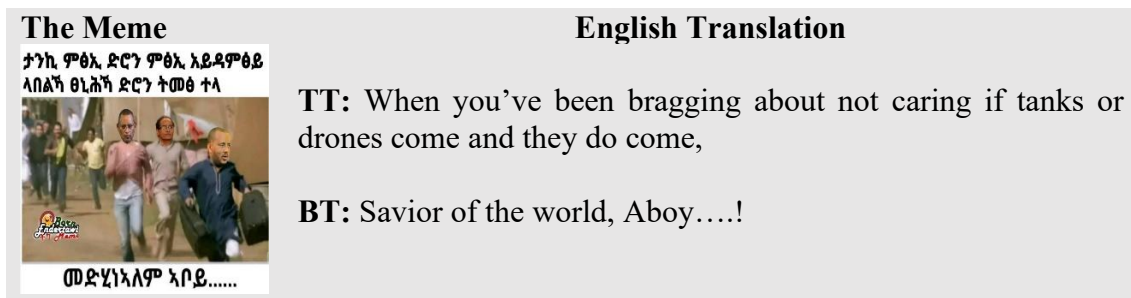
This meme was posted on the verge of the war and has a subversion and transgression as it undermines the power and credibility of the TPLF within the internet community of the *Tigrigna Meme*. The meme shows a portrait of three dragons, which represent the TPLF. The first two dragons are depicted as real, powerful, and frightening creatures, which represent the image of the TPLF as it portrayed itself within the past and present Ethiopian governments, with the captions demonstrating that the TPLF portrays itself as a powerful dragon. The third dragon, however, is a fake, dragon-like doll, as represented by the subaltern group in the *Tigrigna Meme*. This image challenges the TPLF’s claim of prowess and suggests that it is not.

The employment of the dragon imagery carries with it significant meaning since dragons have long been associated with might and resilience, yet they are also legendary creatures. The use of the dragon in the meme is a subversion of the TPLF’s image: by depicting the TPLF as a dragon, the meme challenges the TPLF’s attempt to craft an image of itself as a

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1484298495087150&set=gm.724249688156842/>. Posted on 16 September 2020. Accessed on March 12, 2023. Albeit this meme was posted prior to the war that began on 4 November 2020, it is important to notice that the *Tigrigna Meme* group has had a coherent representation of the TPLF (compare subsequent memes which are posted in post-CoHA months).

powerful force fighting against the Ethiopian past and present oppressive government. The use of the fake dragon-like doll by the subaltern further undermines the TPLF's image by suggesting that it is not a serious threat to the Ethiopian government, and it does not have the same respect it has within the members of *Tigrigna Meme*, as it has with Ethiopian governments. The meme also serves as a reminder that dominant narratives and misinformation can be challenged and that the subaltern voices of marginalized groups can be delivered through memes.

Figure 4.2.¹⁰ TPLF's top leaders fleeing from ENDF's drone attack.



This meme subverts the TPLF's narrative during the war and transgresses against their perceived invincibility. The subaltern memer is saying that the TPLF, which was in power in the region of Tigray in Ethiopia for decades, on one hand, had been portraying itself as the savior of the people of Tigray against the oppressive Ethiopian government. They had been bragging about their military capabilities, and how they could defeat the Ethiopian government's army despite being smaller in number and resources. On the other hand, the Ethiopian government's decision to launch a drone attack on the TPLF leadership, who were thought to be hiding within Tigray, caught the TPLF off guard. This attack was a transgression of the TPLF's perceived invincibility. The TPLF had believed that Tigray was impregnable and that the Ethiopian army would not be able to attack them using tanks or drones.

The subaltern memer likewise transgresses against the TPLF's glorification of its leaders by showing them running away from the drone attack. The meme creator satirizes the TPLF leadership by adding the punchline, "...savior of the world, Aboy!" This line mocks the TPLF's idolization of its leaders as infallible and god-like figures. The fact that the TPLF leaders are portrayed in the meme as having to run and seek refuge shows that they are not as powerful as they had made themselves out to be. Further, the use of humor in this meme is a subversion of the TPLF's narrative. By making fun of the TPLF's bravado and by displaying its leadership fleeing for their lives, the meme creator diminishes their image and makes them

¹⁰<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=2106064033115618&set=gm.1285537835361355&idorvanity=404125963502551/>. Posted on 22 February 2022. Accessed on 12 March 2023.

the TPLF leadership represents the community and are asserting their agency and their right to speak out against their leaders.

Figure 4.4.¹² A former spokesperson and present President of the Tigray region, Getachew Reda talks with Commissioner Derartu Tulu on her visit to Tigray in early January 2023

<p>The Meme</p>	<p>English Translation</p> <p>TT: When Derartu asks Gech how they escaped from the encirclement,</p> <p>BT: First I was walking on the streets of Kola Tembien and I heard gunshots. When I turned around, they were heading towards me saying “PP” so I took a right at the crossroads and I skedaddled out of there as Letesenbet would.</p>
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This meme is particularly striking in its use of humor to both critique and satirize the actions of Getachew Reda, the TPLF spokesperson during the war. The meme suggests that Getachew escaped the encirclement by the Ethiopian army while many of his comrades lost their lives. The memer is referring to the encirclement of Kola Tembien on December 6, 2020, by the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), in which they described “...last stronghold of TPLF under siege” (MVN, 2020).

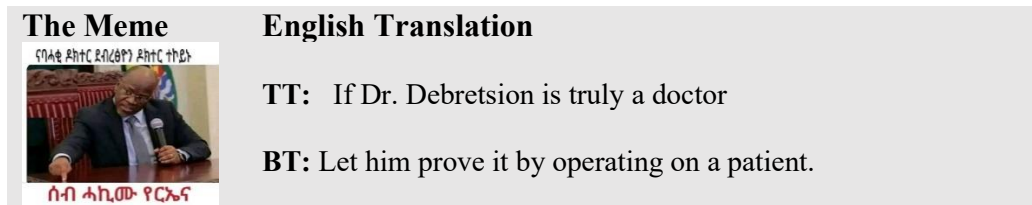
In framing Getachew’s story as a comical tale of cowardice and flight, the subaltern subverts the heroic narrative that the TPLF has been promoting throughout the conflict: they are fearless warriors who will not back down in the face of adversity. The meme’s punchline, “I fled from the Ethiopian army as Letesenbet would,” is particularly biting, as Letesenbet Gidey is one of Ethiopia’s greatest long-distance runners and a national icon. By equating Getachew’s flight with Letesenbet’s powerful strides on the track, the meme both mocks Getachew’s cowardice and challenges the TPLF’s claim to be heroic fighters.

The transgressive nature of the meme is further underscored by its use of humor to critique a serious and deeply divisive political situation. Given the traumas associated with the war in Tigray and Getachew now serving as president of that region, numerous Tigrayans may perceive this meme to be insensitive or impolite. However, deploying humor and satire can represent an effective channel for social critique since it empowers marginalized communities to explore taboo subjects in ways that are both entertaining and intellectually stimulating. This particular meme serves as a bold illustration of defiance following periods characterized by bloodshed.

¹²<https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=618718206687395&set=gm.1257011888213950&idorvanity=404125963502551/>. Posted on January 10, 2023. Accessed on February 20, 2023.

Through its use of wry wit and lampoons aimed at disproving TPLF’s claims regarding valorousness and heroism, it debunks deeply ingrained assumptions about the dispute while also encouraging individuals to reflect on where their allegiances lie or if they’re biased towards certain narratives. Consequently, this meme underscores how humor can unmask societal flaws even amidst fractious contexts.

Figure 4.5.¹³ A subaltern questioning the legitimacy of the TPLF to lead Tigray

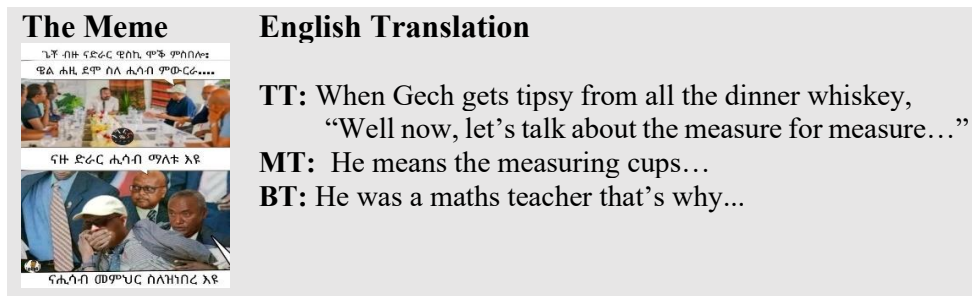


The subversion in this meme is quite evident: the subaltern memer is questioning the legitimacy of the TPLF during the war and after the war. The meme seems to convey the prevailing sentiment amongst the Tigrayan people, which is that the TPLF inadequately handled the situation. The meme’s subversive nature is because it openly questions the abilities of the leader of the TPLF during the war, Dr. Debrezion Gebremichael. The meme puts the TPLF’s leadership in question by stressing the lack of practical experience of Dr. Debrezion in the realm of medicine, questioning whether he can be considered a qualified doctor. Thus, the meme subtly questions the legitimacy of the TPLF’s rule over Tigray.

Moreover, the meme transgresses by presenting the viewer with an entirely untenable scenario. Dr. Debrezion has a Ph.D. in Information Technology (Wolde, 2011) and has nothing to do with medicine. The meme transgresses by placing an absurd request on Dr. Debrezion to treat a patient, possibly a symbol for the Tigrayan people in the post-CoHA months. Though memes are typically associated with humor, they can also be implemented subversively and transgressively, functioning as vehicles for power challenges and expressing alternative viewpoints from norms. This particular example stands out for how it questions TPLF’s current state - an example of resistance.

¹³<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=112643408380580&set=gm.1254872985094507&idrvanity=404125963502551/>. Posted on 7 January 2023. Accessed on March 13, 2023.

Figure 4.6.¹⁴ TPLF leaders’ style was exposed at a dinner table with the federal leaders



This meme is another example of the subaltern youth’s subversion and transgression against the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) narrative that they are the people’s party by highlighting the cultured extravagant lifestyle of TPLF leaders while the people of Tigray struggle with starvation. The meme is not only a humorous take on the political situation in Tigray but a compelling critique of the TPLF’s leadership and their priorities.

The visuals of the meme show top officials and military leaders of both the Ethiopian federal government and the Tigray region sitting around a table. The top image is taken from Prime Minister Abiy’s first face-to-face meeting with Tigray leaders after the war (AlJazeera, 2023). The use of this imagery gives the impression that they are engaging in a formal discussion on the reconstruction of war-affected areas in Tigray. However, the focus of attention in the meme is Getachew Reda, the current head of the TPLF.

The choice to portray Getachew Reda getting tipsy with whisky in the meme is a clever one as it is one of how the creator of the meme indicates that TPLF leaders are not taking their responsibilities seriously. The whisky’s relationship to the TPLF head in the meme symbolizes wealth and luxury and is a stark contrast to the reality for many people in Tigray who were facing starvation. The creator of the meme is also making a statement about how TPLF leaders were enjoying an extravagant lifestyle while ordinary people in Tigray did not have enough food to eat.




The caption at the top of the meme adds to the subversion and transgression of the meme suggesting that when Getachew Reda gets tipsy, he talks about “measure for measure”. This can be interpreted in a few different ways, but one possible meaning is that TPLF leaders are enjoying their privileged lifestyle at the expense of the people of Tigray. This is reinforced by one of Getachew’s team members, who covers Getachew’s mouth when he begins talking about ‘measure for measure’ and corrects him by saying that he meant ‘measuring cups.’

¹⁴<https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=3410894672521694&set=gm.1273730483208757&id=orvanity=404125963502551/>. Posted on 4 February 2023. Accessed on March 12, 2023.

The use of irony in the meme is also significant. The subaltern is saying that Getachew is supposed to be a leader of the TPLF, but his drinking and behavior suggest that he is unfit for his position. The irony is further accentuated by the fact that when he mentions measuring cups, his team member corrects him, implying that TPLF leaders are trying to keep their lavish lifestyle hidden.

4.1.1.2. Subversions and Transgressions against TPLF’s Forced Conscription

Figure 4.7.¹⁵ The head of the TPLF, a conscription-man.

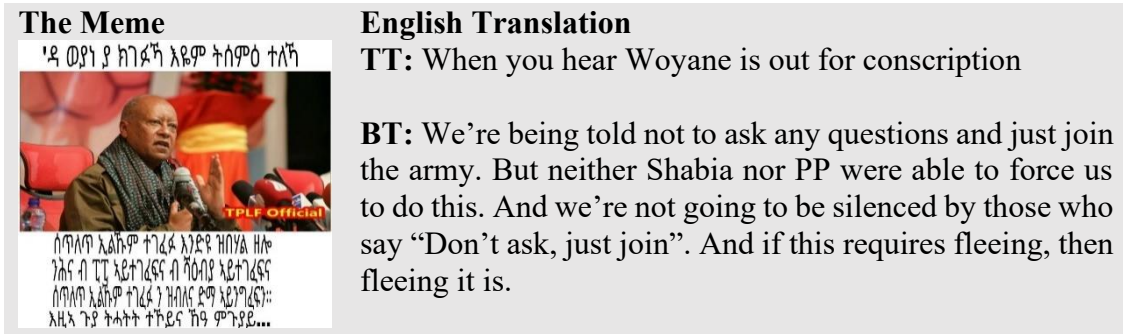
The Meme	English Translation
 spider ማን	TT: Spiderman
 super ማን	MT: Superman
 ግፍ ማን	BT: Conscription-man

The meme depicts the former head of TPLF, president Debretsion, as a conscription man, a symbol of the TPLF’s oppressive tactics of forcing young Tigrayan men and women into the military during the war. The use of popular and fictional characters, Spiderman and Superman in the upper image of the meme is an ironic reference that subtly mocks the idea of a superhero. The juxtaposition of these superheroes with Debretsion, the head of TPLF reinforces the idea that the subaltern Tigrayan people are being forced into a war they do not want.

One of the most significant aspects of this meme is its use of transgression by portraying Debretsion as a conscription-man, which is a provocative statement that subverts the traditional roles of authority and power. The idea of a leader being forced to conscript their people into a war is a radical inversion of the traditional order of power, and it challenges the legitimacy of the TPLF’s actions. The meme also highlights the TPLF’s disregard for his people’s rights and their willingness to engage in unethical and oppressive practices. The use of conscription as a tool of control and domination is a clear indication of the TPLF’s disregard for the safety and well-being of the Tigrayan people. By using irony, the meme draws attention to this issue and exposes the hypocrisy of the TPLF’s leadership.

¹⁵<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=2035048223373162&set=gm.1256638824917923&idorvanity=404125963502551/>. Posted on 10 January 2023. Accessed on February 23, 2023.

Figure 4.8.¹⁶ A TPLF official on conscription duty.



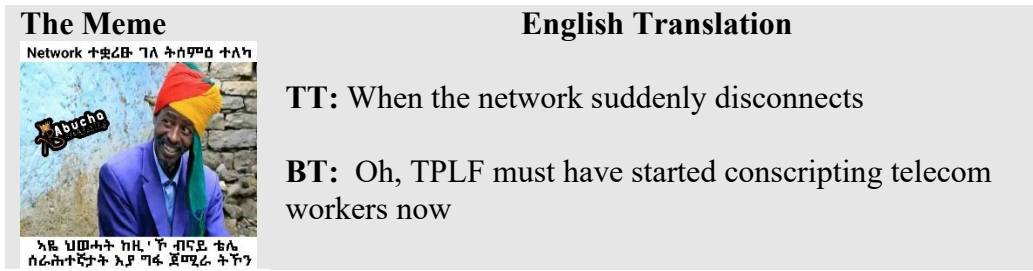
This meme is also a representation of subversion and transgression by the subaltern groups in response to the forced conscriptions that occurred during the war. The subaltern is speaking that TPLF forcefully conscripted Tigrayan youths into their army to fight against Ethiopia. It achieves this by providing a glimpse into the response of the Tigrayan youth to the conscription. The Tigrayan youth is depicted as being aware of the TPLF's intention to conscript them, which highlights the severity and inevitability of the problem.

The meme portrays a TPLF official, wearing a Tigray patriotic symbol, a sarong, telling the youth not to ask any questions and just join the army. This indicates that the TPLF is using patriotism as a means of manipulating the youth into joining the military without seeking an explanation. However, the youth's reaction to this is one of defiance, indicating that they will not be silenced by the TPLF.

The meme subverts the power dynamic by suggesting that fleeing may be a better option than fighting by emphasizing the fact that the youth refuse to participate in the war, regardless of the consequences. It is a clear indication of the youth's defiance and their unwillingness to be coerced into doing something they deem unjust. The meme also underscores the subaltern youth's continued resistance to forced conscriptions, although both Eritrea (Shabia) and the Ethiopian government were unable to enforce their agenda on them. The tone of the meme is subversive, depicting the Tigrayan youth as being unwilling to submit to the tactics used by the TPLF. Furthermore, the text in the meme emphasizes that the youth will not be cowed into compliance with the TPLF's warnings not to ask questions.

¹⁶<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=704690681359634&set=gm.1270748860173586&id=orvanity=404125963502551/>. Posted on 31 January 2023. Accessed on March 3, 2023.

Figure 4.9.¹⁷ A subaltern mocks TPLF’s aggressive conscriptions during the war.



This meme is a compelling subversion and transgression against the TPLF’s aggressive conscription of everyone, including extremely important workers of modern society. A subaltern who posted this meme is seemingly mocking the TPLF’s attempts to conscript everyone. The image of the man in the meme is one of confusion and curiosity, suggesting that even people living in Tigray are unaware of the TPLF’s actions. The punchline, however, reveals that the man’s confusion is not due to his incompetence or negligence but, rather, due to the TPLF’s aggressive conscription policies.

This meme is an example of subversion because it not only exposes the TPLF’s actions but also sheds light on the plight of the people living in Tigray. The fact that people in Tigray are aware of the TPLF’s aggressive conscription policies is a testament to the TPLF’s control over the region. Nevertheless, this meme illustrates that even subaltern Tigrayans are aware of the TPLF’s actions and are willing to call them out.

Furthermore, the meme is a transgression against the TPLF’s narrative about the war. The TPLF claimed that it is fighting for the rights of the Tigrayan people and that the Ethiopian government is the enemy (Melesse, 2020). However, this meme suggests that the TPLF’s actions are harming the Tigrayan people, and the fact that the TPLF is conscripting everyone, a vital service in the modern world, suggests that the TPLF is more interested in consolidating power for itself than protecting the welfare of the Tigrayan people.

Overall, this meme is a captivating subversion and transgression against the TPLF’s aggressive conscription policies during the war as it exposes the TPLF’s actions and sheds light on the plight of the people living in Tigray. It likewise challenges the TPLF’s narrative about the conflict and suggests that the TPLF is more interested in consolidating its power than protecting the welfare of the Tigrayan people. As such, this meme is a powerful tool for subaltern Tigrayans to resist the TPLF’s dominance and reclaim their agency in the conflict.

¹⁷<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=900990537738274&set=gm.1256656994916106&idorvanity=404125963502551/>. Posted on 10 January 2023. Accessed on February 15, 2023.

4.2.2. Tigrayan Traders

Due to the volume of memes framing Tigrayan traders in the *Tigrigna Meme*, it is important to treat them as one of the dominant actors of the war. Memes regarding these traders are largely subversion and transgression of the TPLF's dominant narrative that the Tigrayan traders and business owners are heroes who have been supporting them and the people of Tigray during the war. This narrative has been perpetuated in the media, especially the Tigrayan media, and by the TPLF. For instance, a government-owned Tigray TV program praised Tigrayan traders who donated millions of ETB, to support the TPLF during the conflict in northern Ethiopia (Tigray TV, 2022). The Tigray government called them "heroes" and "patriots" of the people (Tigray Today, 2020).

Nevertheless, the subaltern Tigrayans in *Tigrigna Meme* have a different view of the situation. For them, Tigrayan traders exploited the vulnerable situation of the Tigrayan people and profited during the war. The view of these subalterns' is supported by various news articles and reports. In March 2021, The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) released a report detailing how the war economy perpetuated escalating costs for essential factors such as goods or transportation across Tigray (EHRC, 2021). Regrettably, some traders capitalized on the unfavorable circumstances: adding excessive premiums; manipulating prices unethically; taking an opportunistic stance towards profiteering possibly causing additional financial stress on civilians living there currently. Recently similar allegations came up surrounding black market dealings. A BBC article shed light on local smugglers allegedly receiving help from corrupt officials that facilitated marketplace manipulation illegally resulting in significant personal profit (BBC, 2020).

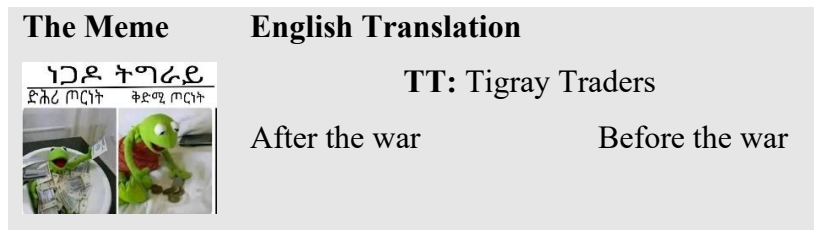
In this subsection, memes targeting the Tigrayan traders in the *Tigrigna Meme* are collected, and their messages are decoded by seeing into subversions and transgressions within them.¹⁸ Nine of the most engaged memes are selected and analyzed in detail. The analysis of these memes exhibits that the subaltern in the group challenges the dominant narrative that the Tigrayan traders are heroes who have been supporting the TPLF and the Tigrayan people during the war, and exposes the greediness and unethical practices of these traders in alliance with the TPLF.

Regardless of the Tigray region being in post-CoHA months, the subalterns in *Tigrigna Meme* believe that TPLF has been allied with Tigrayan traders to exploit the people of Tigray. This alliance represents an alliance between the state apparatus and the unrestricted predatory

¹⁸ Access the thematically collected memes here:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/10kc1CLEqpyTyTGK5aITJO3jf6K7CERl3/view?usp=sharing/>.

capitalism of the traders and works to the detriment of the subalterns who are already been suffering from the war.

Figure 4.10.¹⁹ Tigrayan Traders got filthy rich after the war



This meme features two images of Kermit the Frog (Britannica, 1976), a popular puppet character, to subvert and transgress Tigrayan traders’ reputation among the people of Tigray. The first image shows a happy Kermit swimming in cash, with the caption “Tigrayan traders after the war”. The second image shows a sad Kermit with a few coins, with the caption, “Tigrayan traders before the war”.

The subaltern youth who created and shared this meme is expressing their grievances over the greediness and exploitative practices of certain Tigrayan traders and their collusion with the TPLF government. Tigray-based UMD Media and ሓቂ (Haqi) Media, among other media outlets, have reported that Tigrayan traders have allied with the TPLF and are blocking goods from entering Tigray (Haqi Media, 2022), (UMD Media, 2023). This has resulted in skyrocketing prices of essential goods which has had a devastating effect on the Tigrayan population. The subaltern in *Tigrigna Meme* has used meme culture to express their critique of these practices through humor and satire.

Spivak (1988) raises the question of whether subaltern voices can be heard or understood within dominant narratives. She argues that the subaltern, who are marginalized and oppressed, are often silenced, and their voices are not taken seriously. However, Spivak also recognizes the possibility of finding ways for the subaltern to speak and be heard despite their lack of power within the dominant structures.


The subaltern Tigrayan youth’s use of memes as a means of expression highlights the fact that subaltern voices do exist even if they fall outside of the mainstream narrative. Memes, although often dismissed as trivial and unserious, have the potential to be a powerful tool for resistance, as evidenced by the youth’s use of humor and satire to critique the government and certain Tigrayan traders. Additionally, this approach makes the critique accessible and relatable

¹⁹<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=2002360856811472&set=gm.1273606823221123&idorvanity=404125963502551/>. Posted on 4 February 2023. Accessed on March 11, 2023.

to younger generations in Tigray, creating opportunities for solidarity and networking outside traditional power structures.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the subalterns in *Tigrigna Meme* are not a homogenous group, and their experiences and perspectives can be diverse. The existence of this subaltern Tigrayan youth who is speaking out against certain Tigrayan traders and the TPLF government does not mean that all subaltern Tigrayans share the same views or experiences. However, this youth’s use of memes to express their critique of exploitative government and business practices highlights the essential truth that subaltern voices do exist, and they should be listened to and amplified.

Figure 4.11.²⁰ Tigrayans asking Tigrayan traders to ‘disarm’.

The Meme	English Translation
	<p>TT: When peace comes, but a trader tells you a 100KG Teff costs 10,000 ETB</p> <p>BT: You traders, when are you going to disarm?</p>

This meme portrays a subaltern perspective on the injustices inflicted upon the people of Tigray through the economic exploitation of Tigrayan traders. In the meme has a message that though the CoHA provided a sense of relief and the disarmament of the TDF signified a step towards peace in Tigray, Tigrayan traders continued to exploit Tigrayans by overpricing necessities (Teff).


To decode the subversion in this meme, it is important to explore a historical and cultural reference to of concept of ‘disarmament’. In post-war societies like northern Ethiopia, Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) is a process, that is applied in conflict resolution and post-conflict scenarios. In the subaltern’s perspective, the term serves as a juxtaposition of the TDF, an armed combatant group, and the Tigrayan traders’ ‘armament’ in greediness and exploitation.

The meme indicates a shift from conflict to peace by referencing the CoHA’s disarmament (DDR) process, as the TDFs handed over their weapons in the interest of peace. It then seems to suggest that all actors in society must disarm for peace, not just combatants. In the subaltern’s eyes, the traders’ exploitation of the people of Tigray is similarly a form of war, and as such the meme’s message is that they should also disarm their selfishness, greed, and exploitation, rather than using economic gain as an argument.

²⁰<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=903854660785195&set=gm.1259654117949727&idortvanity=404125963502551/>. Poster on 14 January 2023. Accessed on March 12, 2023.

Further, combining the CoHA’s disarmament under DDR with peaceful economic assimilation in Tigray, the memer is calling for healing, progress, and hope for economic justice in Tigray. Nevertheless, the meme also reveals an underlying frustration with the Tigray government (TPLF) which apparently turned a blind eye to the plight of Tigrayans and left them vulnerable to the traders’ exploitation (see subsequent memes in this subsection). At a deeper level, the meme’s message is therefore a call for a more inclusive and equitable society for all Tigrayan people. The meme in general serves as an important reminder for constructive dialogue, reform, and advocacy in the region.

Figure 4.12.²¹ “Armed” Tigrayan traders smash the people of Tigray and the TPLF enjoy the scene

The Meme	English Translation
	<p>TT: Tigray Traders</p> <p>MT: The people of Tigray</p> <p>BT: The government (TPLF)</p>

This meme is an example of subversion and transgression through its use of imagery and symbolism that challenge dominant narratives and power structures. The image depicts a fully armored soldier crushing an unarmed young girl trying to escape, while a man, Calvin Candie from the movie *Django Unchained* (Cobb, 2013), enjoys the spectacle with a glass of expensive whisky in his hand. The face of the president of Tigray during the war, Debretsion, is photoshopped onto the image of Candie, suggesting that he is enjoying the suffering of the people of Tigray in the same way that Candie enjoyed the spectacle of slaves fighting.

In the subaltern’s imagery, the fully armored soldier represents Tigrayan traders, the young girl, on the other hand, is a symbol of the people of Tigray who are being crushed by these forces. By depicting the soldier as fully armored and the girl as unarmed, the meme is highlighting the power imbalance between Tigrayan traders and the people of Tigray.


Nevertheless, the transgression in the meme lies in its use of Calvin Candie as a symbol for the TPLF, the ruling elite in Tigray that was fighting against the Ethiopian government. In the movie, Candie is a Mississippi-based slave owner in Confederate America who enjoys watching slaves fight each other to death for his amusement, and by associating the TPLF with him, the meme is suggesting that the TPLF is not fighting for the welfare of the people of Tigray, but rather for its gain.

²¹<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=2074323996289622&set=gm.1259413274640478&id=vanity=404125963502551/>. Posted on 14 January 2023. Accessed on March 12, 2023.

Moreover, the use of a popular movie’s reference adds another layer of subversion to the meme. Django Unchained is a movie that satirizes the Western genre, which historically glorified violence, conquest, and colonialism. The utilization of imagery appropriated from popular movies is one way in which the existing dominant “histories” surrounding power dynamics can be destabilized. These themes are particularly relevant when looking at how individuals from Tigray have been marginalized or otherwise oppressed on account of these hierarchical structures. Henceforth why memes like these represent such crucial acts when trying to shift current paradigms.

Through their use of symbols transcending cultural borders alongside layered meanings embedded within such memes’ visual language structure: they become significant works of subversion. Power imbalances between Tigray Traders and Tigrayan people are made more visible through these memes. This all culminates in highlighting how members of the TPLF are likened to slave owners who gather pleasure through watching people suffer.

Figure 4.13.²² Tigrayan traders and the people of Tigray in a boxing ring and TPLF as their referee

The Meme	English Translation		
	Tigray	TPLF	The people of Tigray
	Traders		

This meme is a visually striking representation of the economic situation and power imbalance in Tigray during the war and in the post-CoHA months. The imagery from a comedy by Charlie Chaplin (United Artists, 1931) in a boxing ring attacking a professional boxer by hiding behind an oblivious referee highlights the absurdity of the economic injustice inflicted upon the people of Tigray. Drawing on this scene from the comedy, the subaltern highlights three actors involved in the economic situation in Tigray: the people of Tigray, the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), and the Tigray traders.

From the subaltern’s perspective, the people of Tigray, as represented by the professional boxer, have the power to win but are in a vulnerable position, because of the TPLF’s deliberate neglect of the traders’ attack. The TPLF, represented by the referee, is ostensibly meant to be a neutral mediator, but is instead seemingly complicit in allowing

²²<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=638995228000175&set=gm.1260164737898665&id=404125963502551/>. Posted on 15 January 2023. Accessed on March 21, 2023.

injustice to occur, by hiding the Tigray traders as represented by Chaplin, to take advantage of the situation and exploiting the people of Tigray.

The use of the image of Chaplin further highlights the humor and absurdity of the situation. The Tigray traders, for the subaltern, are essentially irrelevant figures, yet they hold significant power over the economic situation in Tigray because of the referee, the TPLF. The role of the referee in this meme highlights the TPLF’s complicity in allowing this injustice to occur. The referee is meant to be in a position of authority and neutrality, yet they are allowing the Tigray traders to exploit the people of Tigray without consequence. The refusal of the referee to leave the center when requested by the professional boxer highlights the imbalance of power in the situation.

Subaltern members within Tigrayan society utilize meme sharing as a method for prominently highlighting the economic obstacles they encounter while also bringing attention to possibilities for subsequent injustices. Crafting popular visual imagery helps rapidly transmit messages concisely facilitating widespread dissemination among diverse audiences. Furthermore, the meme underscores disparities between local inhabitants in Tigray, including those affiliated with the TPLF, and local traders; underscoring how the lack of crucial interventions from the regime exacerbates profoundly unjust conditions.

Figure 4.14.²³ The president of Tigray’s Interim Government giving media briefing.

The Meme	English Translation
	<p>TT: Gech, what do you say about the current issues?</p> <p>BT: Some greedy traders did not bring whiskey from abroad</p>

The subaltern’s act of subversion involves rejecting the TPLF’s narrative that champions Tigrayan traders as heroic figures. Instead, they are calling attention to how these traders have nefariously benefited from their alliance with the corrupt regime - preying on vulnerable war-stricken individuals in Tigray. Despite utilizing humor in their striking meme, their intent remains serious in its critique of those who have perpetuated such exploitation and abuse.


Multiple news sources have also reported on accusations of corruption made against this group of individuals (Haqi Media, 2022; UMD Media, 2023). The subaltern is saying that

²³<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=903883304115664&set=gm.1259685767946562&idortvantity=404125963502551/>. Posted on 14 January 2023. Accessed on March 12, 2023.

these individuals have used their close ties with the TPLF to exploit the suffering of the people of Tigray, and taken advantage of the war to amass wealth and power, leaving the people of Tigray with nothing. The meme is predominantly compelling as it focuses on Getachew Reda, the former TPLF spokesperson and the current President of the Tigray’s Interim Government to link him to the greedy traders. The meme suggests that Getachew is complicit in Tigran traders’ corruption and that he has betrayed the trust of the people of Tigray. By doing so, the meme transgresses against the authority of the TPLF and also exposes their corrupt practices.

The meme is also notable for how it engages with the post-war issues in Tigray. By highlighting the issue of traders who did not bring whiskey from abroad, the meme satirizes the priorities of the TPLF, which seems to be more concerned with profiting from the war than with actually addressing the needs of the people of Tigray. By attacking Getachew for his drinking on a personal level, the meme further serves as a testament to the power of memes to challenge authority and expose corruption wherever it may be found.

Figure 4.15.²⁴ The Tigrayan traders as “TPLF’s sources of income”.

The Meme	English Translation
	<p>TT: Why the government [TPLF] do not take action against the traders?</p> <p>BT: The government [TPLF]: “They are the very source of our income.”</p>


This meme is another compelling way used by the subaltern Tigrayan to subvert and transgress against the greediness of Tigrayan traders who were exploiting their people during the war. The meme depicts a Tigrayan man questioning the government of Tigray (TPLF) regarding their neglect to not taking any action against the traders who are exploiting their people. The memer subverts the government’s response through irony that the traders are the source of the government’s income, and therefore it cannot take action against them. The message conveyed through the meme is that the greediness of Tigrayan traders has reached an unprecedented level and that they are operating with impunity under the guise of supporting the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) in its war for the benefit of the people of Tigray.

The significance of the meme is rooted in the fact that Tigrayan traders have played a significant role in both fueling the Tigray conflict and profiting from it. Tigrayan traders have reportedly been supporting the TPLF in smuggling weapons and supplies into their region stated a report by the APA news (APA, 2021). Unfortunately, these traders have also exploited

²⁴<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1628753654251371&set=gm.1259457404636065&idorvanity=404125963502551/>. Posted on 14 January 2023. Accessed on March 12, 2023.

The meme's purpose is to critique the ruling party's governance competence by emphasizing the subaltern's view, which represents a series of practices and relations that organize the subalterns in Tigray. From this perspective, the meme illustrates how the subalterns in Tigray are positioned in such organized practices, to be exploited and subjugated. The meme, therefore, subverts the narrative that the ruling party is working in the interest of all Tigrayans; and instead shows how the ruling elites are benefiting at the expense of the subalterns. This subversion and transgression reflect the subaltern's struggle against exclusion and marginalization in Tigray.

Figure 4.17.²⁶ Tigrayan traders as prototypes of 'thieves' meme

The Meme	English Translation
	<p>TT: When someone asks you whether you are a trader. BT: Could you please stop insulting me? Do I look like a thief to you?</p>

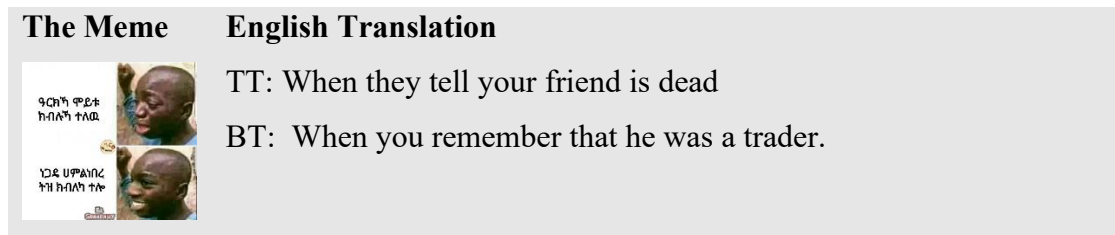
This meme is another example of subaltern Tigrayans' subversion and transgression of TPLF's narrative that portrayed traders as heroes of the people of Tigray. The meme shows an image of two Tigrayans in conversation, with one of them asking the other whether he is a Tigrayan trader. The response of the second person, who gets furious and asks rhetorically if he looks like a thief, reveals the subversion and transgression in the conversation.

The subaltern's motive in creating this meme is to challenge the status quo and break the power structures that exist within the Tigrayan community. The subaltern memer assumes that the Tigrayan traders have got filthy rich after the war, at the expense of the suffering Tigrayan population. This perspective is supported by news that explores the cycle of exploitation among Tigrayan traders, who inflate prices and hoard essential commodities, such as food and medicine, to make exorbitant profits during the crisis (UMD Media, 2023).

By portraying Tigrayan traders as thieves, the subaltern is further transgressing the norms and values held by the Tigray leadership towards traders that represented traders are respected members of society for their role in providing goods and services. Ultimately, the subaltern's perspective in this meme is intended to be subversive, challenging the dominant narrative about Tigrayan traders and the role they play in the war.

²⁶https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=131498416457992&set=gm.1260847577830381&id_or_vanity=404125963502551/. Posted on 16 January 2023. Accessed on March 21, 2023.

Figure 4.18.²⁷ Tigrayan traders as a friend whose death is a desirable



This meme is a further illustration of subalterns' creativity in subverting and transgressing Tigrayan traders' reputations. The meme depicts a Tigrayan man who is crying after learning that his friend has died. However, the man suddenly stops crying and bursts out laughing when he remembers that his friend was a Tigrayan trader. By using mockery, the subaltern memer is challenging the power that the traders hold in Tigray society through the TPLF's narrative. The meme criticizes the traders' greed and their participation in the war, which has caused widespread harm.

The subaltern youth, who created the meme is moreover transgressing against traditional norms in Tigray society and culture. In the Tigrayan culture, it is not considered polite or appropriate to criticize others in public or to openly mock them (Zhalay, 2003). However, the subaltern Tigrayan is using this meme to clearly and loudly criticize the traders and their actions, thus transgressing against these norms. This is significant because it shows that subaltern people in Tigray are in a cultural evolution, and they're willing to challenge traditional norms to express their frustration and opposition to the traders.

Overall, the subversion and transgression in the meme created by a subaltern Tigrayan after the war is a powerful expression of popular opposition to the greediness of Tigrayan traders. The meme is a clear example of how subaltern Tigrayans' humor can be used to undermine established power structures among TPLF and Tigray traders. Furthermore, media reports on the traders have lent support to the perspectives that the subaltern Tigrayan expresses in the meme (Haqi Media, 2022).

4.2.3. The Tigray Defense Force (TDF)


Subaltern groups in *Tigray Meme* have also been establishing an act of subversion and transgression against the narratives put forward by the Ethiopian Federal government concerning the Tigrayan Defense Force (TDF) after the CoHA. In this subsection, an analysis of memes regarding the TDF is undertaken by looking into subversion and transgression in

²⁷<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=691217919202176&set=gm.1253038215277984&id=orvanity=404125963502551/>.

memes collected from *Tigrigna Meme*.²⁸ Out of these memes, only four of them are analyzed in detail given the nature of the memes as they all glorify the TDF in a virtually equal magnitude.

Despite the group’s open dissent towards the TPLF (see subsection for TPLF), examination of the memes regarding the TDF shows that subaltern members of the *Tigrigna Meme* revere and accept the cause of the TDF. For them, the TDF are heroes worthy of reverence and respect from the people of Tigray, not terrorists or villains as portrayed by the Ethiopian government and its mainline media. Nevertheless, this unbridled reverence for the TDF potentially distorts the subaltern perspective as it might impede any peace process requiring objectivity and rationality, irrespective of ethnic solidarity.

Figure 4.19.²⁹ TDF Militarization and Farming in Tigray

The Meme	English Translation
	<p>TT: When TDF is heading to the bride’s house from the groom’s house:</p> <p>BT: Crops of June oh crops of June Yeah ... bombs they’ve become Yeah ... rockets they’ve become Yeahhhhhhhh!</p>

The image in this meme portrays a group of TDF, carrying guns in the air, accompanying a groom to his bride’s house while singing a traditional Tigrayan song. The text on the top of the meme reads, “When TDF heads to the bride’s house from the groom’s house,” with the punchline reading: “Oh crops of June, crops of June, yeah... bombs they’ve become; yeah... rockets they’ve become; oh yeah....” This meme is subversive as it appropriates a cultural ritual, the wedding ceremony, to signify the militarization of Tigrayan youth by the TDF. Furthermore, the meme is transgressive as it underscores how war has disrupted a critical component of Tigrayan life - farming.

The Tigrayan wedding ceremony is a ritual rooted deep within Tigrayan culture and society. The ceremony marks an essential event in the life of a young person, serving as an initiation rite into adulthood, and weddings, in Tigrayan culture, are grand events celebrated with much joy, feasting, and traditional dance. However, this meme subverts the wedding ritual, turning it into a metaphor for the militarization of Tigrayan youth by the TDF. In the


²⁸ Access the thematically collected memes here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/10kclCLEqpyTyTGK5aITJO3jf6K7CERl3/view?usp=sharing/>.
²⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/404125963502551/permalink/1262293274352478/?mibextid=KwgM2GW EWh1I2rGu/>. Posted on 2 January 2023. Accessed on 12 March 2023.

context of subversion, the guns carried by the young people in the image replace the traditional elements of the ceremony, such as livestock and jewellery (Tefferera, 2005).

The punchline of the meme, “Oh crops of June, crops of June, yeah... bombs they’ve become; yeah... rockets they’ve become; oh yeah...”, offers a scathing critique of the war’s effects on Tigrayan life. The lyrics are an adaptation of a popular Tigrayan wedding song that celebrates the initiation of farming in June, which lasts up to August. The memer juxtaposed the wedding with the crops of June, the former being an initiation into a new life, and the latter as crops being ready to be sown. However, the translation of the lyrics in the context of the war urges viewers to consider how the war has disrupted Tigrayan farming and, consequently, their livelihoods (Omna Tigray, 2022). The crop fields that were once bountiful and provided sustenance have been replaced by bombs and rockets; forces of destruction that have decimated Tigrayan farmlands.

Overall, the subaltern memer employs a universal cultural practice, the wedding ceremony, to symbolize the militarization of Tigrayan youth, disrupting norms that underlie traditional wedding customs in Tigray. Moreover, the meme underscores how young people have been forced into a war that takes away their ability to farm, one of the vital components of Tigrayan life. In essence, the meme shows how war has disrupted multiple facets of Tigrayan society, affecting everything from traditional rituals to daily life.

Figure 4.20.³⁰ A TDF soldier as a Heroine of Tigray

The Meme	English Translation
	<p>TT: career, marriage, and family were what you had in mind; ruthless invaders wouldn't let you unwind</p> <p>BT: So...you left all that behind; you fought for the helpless, sister, you're hard to find!</p>

This meme is a subversion and transgression of gender, societal norms, and cultural expectations in Ethiopia, particularly in post-CoHA Tigray. It is a lament by a Tigrayan youth, who is grappling with the after-effects of the war. The meme captures the struggle of young Tigrayan women, who are trying to find meaning in their lives amidst the chaos and turmoil of the war. The poem, which accompanies the image of the young TDF female soldier, is a poignant reminder of the impact of the war on the lives of the youth of Tigray.

³⁰https://www.facebook.com/groups/404125963502551/permalink/1262327247682414/?mibextid=KwgM2GW_EWh1I2rGu/. Posted on 18 January 2023. Accessed on 22 April 2023.

The words “...career, marriage, and family were what you had in mind; but ruthless invaders wouldn’t let you unwind” speak to the aspirations of young Tigrayan women. Just like other young people worldwide, Tigrayans also dream of pursuing an education, building successful careers, getting married, and starting families. Unfortunately for them, however, these plans are now uncertain due to the war which has thrown them off course. Nevertheless, the war has disrupted their plans and thrown them into uncertainty and chaos. It highlights the subversion of societal norms and expectations as war changes not only the area’s fabric but also the lives of individuals.

The meme’s transgressive nature lies in its celebration of the young Tigrayan female soldier. In a patriarchal society like Ethiopia, where women’s roles are primarily relegated to domestic work and nurturing children, women’s participation in the war effort is a significant departure from the norm. By depicting a young, beautiful, and educated Tigrayan woman as a soldier, the meme challenges traditional gender roles, defying common cultural expectations. It is a compelling statement that women can be soldiers and can fulfill their duty toward their society.

The meme’s poetry condemns the “invading force” who has ruthlessly disrupted the lives of these young girls, making no exceptions for their dreams and aspirations. It laments the costs of the war, as young people are forced to abandon their lives and join the fight, with no clue of the outcome. The poem dutifully conveys its gratitude towards a brave young Tigrayan female soldier without whom countless people would have remained helpless. It accentuates her remarkable strength to overcome adversity at times of crisis while lauding the pivotal role women play during wars.

This moving meme unmistakably emphasizes how Tigrayan women actively participate in their country’s struggle for sovereignty rather than merely being passive victims of war’s catastrophic consequences. To sum up, this deeply resonating piece serves as a reminder that global wars can unwittingly destroy a society’s economic, social, and cultural fabric to unspeakable depths apart from material loss such as infrastructures and possessions. It impels us all toward awareness by acknowledging these issues’ crucial aspects.

themselves. The phrase, “The angel of death hovering over their whole life, became nothing,” echoes a religious language within the Christian belief that Jesus’ substitutionary death and resurrection defeated death, sin, and evil itself. This allusion serves as a transgressive act in and of itself, as it defies the official Ethiopian narrative that attempts to discredit the TDF as terrorists who were a threat to the Ethiopian state.

The second part of the caption, “with their death, they killed death,” is even more appealing for someone in Christian belief. These words express the Tigrayan subaltern’s belief that the TDF soldiers’ deaths were not in vain; their sacrifice was a transformative act that destroyed the oppressive forces that had been dominating Tigray. The phrase implies that the TDF’s sacrifice had a redemptive quality analogous to that of Jesus’ substitutionary death. It is a subversive message that directly challenges the Ethiopian government’s narrative that the TDF was a threat to the state’s stability.

The last part of the meme’s caption, “they that paid the price so that we (the people of Tigray) lived,” is yet another subversive message. It suggests that the TDF’s actions were heroic and defended the Tigrayan people’s broader interests and well-being. This further contradicts the Ethiopian government’s narrative of the TDF’s actions as being terrorist acts with no purpose other than to destabilize the country. Overall, the meme’s poetic language and allusions to religious symbols and events render it a powerful message of hope and deliverance for the Tigrayan people. The message of the meme implicitly contradicts the perception that was being spread about the TDF soldiers being terrorists and enemies of the state and elevates the TDF to hero status.

4.3. Conclusion

This chapter provided an in-depth analysis of the subaltern Tigrayan use of internet memes as subaltern satires for everyday resistance to power in post-CoHA months in three subsections. The first subsection of this chapter introduced and highlighted key arguments and findings. In the second subsection, the researcher analyzed memes targeting actors inside Tigray and discussed the findings from the analysis. This subsection now concludes the chapter by highlighting key themes and findings discussed in the chapter.

The chapter provided an analysis of the use of internet memes as compelling subaltern satires for everyday resistance to power in *Tigrigna Meme*. The findings aimed to contribute to the discourse on internet memes, their importance as a tool for political expression, and the empowerment of subaltern groups emphasizing the important role they play in subverting and transgressing dominant narratives and giving voice to subaltern groups.

The study demonstrated how humor, sarcasm, hyperbole, and absurdity are utilized to challenge dominant narratives and frame actors and narratives in the war in circumstances where freedom of speech and expression is limited or non-existent. This was undertaken through the cyber-pragmatic approach to meme analysis, in which the referents of the meme were established to understand the subaltern subversion of the dominant narratives and the intended message. This approach further enabled the researcher to deconstruct the meaning behind the memes, their intended audience, and the conveyed message. The next chapter concludes the study by verifying how the analysis and discussions met the objective of the research, along with recommendations for both policy developers and succeeding researchers in the area.

CHAPTER FIVE: “THE OTHERS” FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, an in-depth analysis of collected data, regarding the insider actors in the war in northern Ethiopia (hereafter, the war) is provided by underscoring the significance of internet memes as a tool for political expression by subaltern groups in *Tigrigna Meme*. This chapter follows a similar procedure in collecting and analyzing data regarding “other”, non-insider actors, which are outside of the Tigrayan society. The phrase “the others” in the title of the chapter designates actors that were fighting against the TPLF and the TDF, namely the Ethiopian federal government with its Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) and para-ENDF Amhara armed forces, and the Eritrean government.

The chapter is divided into three subsections. The first subsection introduces the chapter by highlighting key arguments and findings. In the second subsection, a thematically framed analysis of memes targeting “the others” is undertaken with a discussion of the findings. The third subsection concludes the chapter by accentuating key themes and findings discussed in the chapter.

Through the MDA’s cyber-pragmatic approach to memes analysis (Yus, 2019), the researcher observed the subversion and transgression in memes to identify humor, sarcasm, hyperbole, and similar tactics the subaltern groups in *Tigrigna Meme* utilized to frame these actors and narratives they propagated in the war. This uncovers the subaltern groups’ dominant narratives of political contexts they are targeting from the top text (TT) and the subversion and transgression of the narratives in the bottom (BT), and occasionally the middle text (MT) of memes. The researcher then combines the dominant narrative with a picture in the meme to get an appropriate context, and lastly, draws on the intertextual-visual meaning of the meme to deconstruct the meaning behind the memes, their intended audience, and the message being conveyed.

5.2. Frames of Analysis, Findings, and Discussions

Under this subsection, dominant actors of the war which fought against the TPLF and TDF along with their dominant narratives, and subaltern groups’ counter-narratives regarding them are framed thematically. These frames include the Ethiopian Federal Government (two actors: the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) and the para-ENDF Amhara armed forces (Fano and Amhara Special Forces)), and Eritrea (two themes: President Isayas Afeworki and the Eritrean National Defense Force (EDF)).

In acquiring accurate data on memes, the researcher followed Facebook's Image Search Algorithm (FISA), using the search terms mentioned in Chapter Three. The filters applied in the search algorithm are the date of the memes (post-CoHA months) and their magnitude of engagements. The magnitude of engagement these memes possess is significant for the study as it verifies Dawkins' concept of a meme as a cultural replicator: the higher the engagement within the *Tigrigna Meme*, the higher the chance of the memes' survival within the group and its potential in representing their perspective on the war.

5.2.1. The Ethiopian Federal Government, The Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), and the Amhara Armed Forces

The 2020-2022 war in northern Ethiopia has been a cause for grave concerns about human rights violations, and even for some, an attempt at genocide. As a major actor in the war, the Ethiopian federal government has proliferated dominant narratives within a frame of national security. The government claimed that the TPLF was an extremist organization that aimed to destabilize the country and framed the war as being compulsory to safeguard Ethiopia's sovereignty and maintain peace and security in the region (Abiy Ahmed, 2020).

One example of disputable the government's framing of the war is a speech by Daniel Kibret, who is an advisor to the Prime Minister (NMN, 2021). In a speech that has come under heavy criticism, Daniel delivered an abstruse speech as he referred to the "Tigrayans or the TPLF" as "weeds" and called for their elimination (NMN, 2021). Daniel alluded "their" elimination to that of Satan, referring to him as the last of his kind, and "they" must also remain the last of their kind (NMN, 2021) while the audience applauded in laughter. Nevertheless, Daniel's solitary usage of the pronoun "they", has made the speech ambiguous.

The speech has sparked a debate on whether Daniel's comments about Tigrayans were discriminatory or misunderstood. The government clarifies that Daniel did not intend to generalize all Tigrayans as weeds; rather he expressed displeasure towards a specific group of individuals who caused unrest in their region. However, there are still those who accuse him of using hate speech against Tigrayans. They believe that such statements worsen an already escalating situation in an area where many people have suffered great losses (Benesch, 2021). Nonetheless, the dominant narratives propagated by the Ethiopian government, as presented by the Prime Minister himself included the safeguarding of the country's territorial integrity, the restoration of law and order in Tigray, and countering terrorism (Abiy Ahmed, 2020).


Despite the government's claims, some reports indicate that the actions of the armed forces of the federal government, i.e., the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) and Amhara forces commonly known as Fano and the Amhara Special Forces have blatantly

violated the narrative. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission has identified several cases concerning serious human rights violations executed by these groups, for instance, rape, torture, and mass killings. Additionally, media outlets claim individual state officials influenced perceptions regarding military action so they appeared morally sound; an assertion supported by the shutting down of critical media houses coupled with arresting of journalists reporting on atrocities while simultaneously spreading only supportive perspectives about their campaigns (Zelalem 2022).

In this subsection, the most engaged memes regarding the Ethiopian federal government, ENDF, and Amhara armed forces (Fano and Amhara Special Forces) are collected from the *Tigrigna Meme*.³³ Among these hundred memes, nine memes most engaged memes are selected and observed by looking into subversion and transgressions within them to decipher the subaltern Tigrayan perspectives on the Ethiopian government’s dominant narrative of the war. Analysis of these memes indicates that the media framing of the Ethiopian government has been problematic, with reports of them downplaying the conflict’s severity.

The subsection’s analysis is only intended to decipher the subjective perspectives of the subaltern Tigrayans on the Ethiopian government’s actions in the war. As such, it is crucial to note that the narratives and viewpoints that manifest from the analysis of memes solely belong to the creators and do not necessarily represent the researcher’s stance. To ensure precision and accuracy, the research attempted to remain true to the implied narratives and counter-narratives within the memes.

Figure 5.1.³⁴ Prosperity Party in Tigray meme

The Meme	English Translation
	<p>TT: During Prosperity Party (PP), when you go home late and hear someone say “Come here!”</p> <p>BT: Alas! I am to be shot dead at a young age.</p>

This meme is a subversion and transgression against the narrative of the Ethiopian government by criticizing the military ethics of the ENDF and their treatment of civilians during their control of the Tigray region starting from late November 2020. The meme creator asserts that it was not safe to move around Tigray after dark due to the threat of being shot dead by the ENDF during the time. This contention subverts and transgresses the official narrative of the


³³ Access the thematically collected memes here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/10kclCLEqpyTyTGK5aITJO3jf6K7CERl3/view?usp=sharing/>.
³⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/404125963502551/permalink/1325106804737791/?mibextid=KwgM2GWEWh1I2rGu/>. Posted on 3 May 2023. Accessed on 10 May 2023.

Ethiopian government, which claims that the ENDF’s deployment was to restore law and order in Tigray.

The creator of the meme emphasizes the lack of freedom of movement in Tigray by using the example of a young Tigrayan man walking home late in a state of constant fear due to the perceived threat of being shot by the ENDF. This message is a representation of how military control imposed on civilian populations can lead to a lack of security and freedom and serves to expose the repressive tactics used by the military to maintain control and instill fear in the local population.

The meme implied that the Ethiopian government should have exercised caution in its military operations, particularly concerning the protection of civilians in Tigray and further condemns the ENDF for acting irresponsibly and not in the interests of the Tigrayan people. The message of the meme is that the actions of the ENDF have led to a situation where people are left feeling vulnerable and afraid, unable to move freely and live their lives as usual, i.e., when ENDF didn’t control the region.

Figure 5.2.³⁵ “Exaggerated” rape reports by the Ethiopian government

The Meme	English Translation
	<p>TT: When TDF reaches Debre Berhan some ladies be like:</p> <p>BT: I was a virgin when the junta raped me in front of my kids:</p>

The use of humor and satire in this meme serves as a compelling demonstration of everyday resistance against entrenched systems of power as it serves as a subversive act for subaltern groups able to challenge dominant perspectives and create space for alternative ways of thinking and being. The meme subverts the Ethiopian government’s report on one of the most horrific allegations levied against the TDF - the allegation of mass rape in the Amhara region (FBC, 2021).

In line with the Ethiopian government’s accusation, Amnesty International confirmed that Tigrayan forces have shown utter disregard for fundamental rules of international humanitarian law which all warring parties must follow, including repeated incidents of widespread rape, summary killings, and looting, including from hospitals (Sara Jackson, 2022). Nevertheless, in a subversive and transgressive manner, the subaltern memer not only mocks


³⁵<https://www.facebook.com/groups/404125963502551/permalink/1266166077298531/?mibextid=KwgM2GW EWh1I2rGu/>. Posted on 24 January 2023. Accessed on 16 March 2023.

these claims but appears to challenge patriarchal attitudes towards rape survivors and the use of narrative in the war.

The subversion in the meme lies in the exaggerated claim that the woman featured in the meme was a virgin until the TDF raped her in front of her children. The deliberate usage of a male image in the meme underscores the subaltern’s treatment of the report as fiction. This claim by the memer further underscores the absurdity of the narrative the Ethiopian government used to demonize the TDF. The meme maker uses hyperbole as a tool to bring attention to what they think is the false narrative that is being constructed by the Ethiopian government. Moreover, by using a male character to represent the female experience of rape, the meme attacks the implausibility of the Ethiopian government’s narrative.

The defense offered by subaltern memers regarding the Tigray Defense Force raises concerns over its lack of consideration towards women who have been violated through acts such as rape and assault, particularly those who are not from Tigray. Such a stance establishes a hazardous precedent whereby those who fall outside this group become stripped off their humanity with little consequence: insisting instead on viewing them solely as war spoils susceptible to violence at any given time. This level of respect can lead to a deification of the TDF, leading to the justification of their actions, regardless of how unjustifiable they might be.

Figure 5.3.³⁶ The Ethiopian government and the TPLF, and the USA’s intervention meme.

The Meme	English Translation	
	TT:	TPLF Prosperity Party
	BT:	United States of America

This meme is concerned with the CoHA between the Ethiopian federal government and the TPLF. It subverts and transgresses the dominant narrative of the Ethiopian government against the United States of America (USA) by stressing the role of the USA in ending the conflict. The subversion is against the dominant narrative in Ethiopia, which painted the USA as a foreign power interfering in the internal affairs of the country and fuelling the conflict by funding TPLF (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021), reaching climax during the #NoMore movement against the HR 6600 (Ethiopian News Agency, 2022).


³⁶<https://www.facebook.com/groups/404125963502551/permalink/1253470228568116/?mibextid=KwgM2GW EWh1I2rGu/>. Posted on 5 January 2023. Accessed on 19 March 2023.

Through the use of Godzilla to cast the TPLF and Prosperity Party as giant monsters, the meme subverts the dominant narrative by emphasizing the monstrous and destructive nature of the war in which the two parties were engaged. The subversion in the image lies in the two giant monsters that were spitting fire and destroying everything in their path and were not all-powerful. They were afraid of what was seemingly a voiceless dog with a staff in its hand. The imagery is transgressive because it is a deviation from the usual visual representation of political leaders and parties in Ethiopia. Instead of using their real images, the creator of the meme used fictional characters to underscore the absurdity of the war.

In recognizing America’s role in facilitating a ceasefire agreement between two warring factions, the subalterns’ perspectives shed light on how biased narratives surround such interventions by global powers like America. The meme accompanying this acknowledgment underscores just how essential American diplomacy was for this fragile peace accord’s emergence. Yet from less powerful vantage points like Africa’s Horn, there lies worry over American indulgence with these interventions which may place undue emphasis on its interests alone while overlooking intra-regional realities and conflicts.

The US government’s interest in the region is primarily driven by its strategic geopolitical concerns, including its rivalry with China (Vertin, 2019), as it has a military base in neighboring Djibouti, from where it carries out drone strikes against alleged targets in Somalia and Yemen (Sun, 2016). The US government’s interest in the northern Ethiopia region may be aimed at diminishing China’s growing influence in the African continent by brokering or forcing the Ethiopian government and the TPLF into the CoHA (Mesfin, 2011).

Figure 5.4.³⁷ The Ethiopian government’s relation to Tigray in post-COHA months.

The Meme	English Translation
	<p>TT: TDF...TPLF...Prosperity</p> <p>BT: The people of Tigray</p>

Assuming the CoHA between the Ethiopian federal government and the TPLF, this meme challenges the Ethiopian government’s narrative on the post-war reconstruction of the Tigray region. The meme shows an image of a mother and children in a swimming pool: the mother is a metaphor for the Ethiopian federal government, as she is invested only in one child, which

³⁷<https://www.facebook.com/groups/404125963502551/permalink/1255203505061455/?mibextid=KwgM2GWEWh1I2rGu/>. Posted on 8 January 2023. Accessed on 5 April 2023.

depicts the TPLF while her other child is struggling to keep himself from drowning, represents the Tigray Defence Force (TDF). This comparison indicates that the TPLF is receiving preference over the TDF, even though they are both fighting for the same cause. The juxtaposition of the image and captions in them subverts the narrative of the government's intentions regarding the DDR process and the reconstruction of the Tigray region.

The Ethiopian federal government has maintained that it is working towards the DDR process of the TDF and the reconstruction of Tigray (FBC, 2023). The government has stated that it is committed to improving the livelihoods of the Tigrayan people and gradually restoring peace to the region (FBC, 2023). Nevertheless, the narrative portrayed in the meme suggests otherwise. The mother in the image is indifferent to the struggles of one child just as the government seems to be neglecting the needs of those not aligned with the TPLF.

Furthermore, the meme depicts a haunting image of a long-dead, forgotten, tied-to-a-chair corpse under the pond. For the memer, this symbolizes the situation of the Tigrayan people, who have been under a direct civil war for two years and are now abandoned by the Ethiopian government. The haunting image of a corpse under the pond emphasizes the severity of the crisis in Tigray and climaxes the government's neglect of the region. The meme's subversion of the government's narrative is that while the government is working on its promises to the TPLF, there is a considerable risk that it is ignoring the needs of the people of Tigray.

Although the meme creator's viewpoint may have inherent biases, it draws attention to an underlying reality that warrants examination. To bring about a peaceful environment in Tigray, instantaneous efforts must focus on implementing DDR processes for TDF and rebuilding socio-economic structures in the region; prioritizing human rights protection and justice restitution for victims should also be emphasized. It cannot go unsaid that while any message relayed through memes may not represent reality, dismissing this one could bear severe consequences. Recognizing this crisis's severity demands action from authorities toward a solution that ensures people-based priorities.

Figure 5.5.³⁸ Tigrayans reject to mourn over the schism in the EOTC

The Meme



English Translation

TT: When an Ethiopian says to me, “Aren’t you going to wear black?”

BT: I have been wearing black for the last two years, thank you very much!

This meme subverts the expectation of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) members to symbolically express their grief by wearing black for three days, as per the Holy Synod’s three-day fasting and lamenting following the reverted schism within the synod (EOTC, 2023). The subversion and transgression in this meme are significant because they challenge the dominant narrative of the war. The war has been portrayed by the Ethiopian government as a successful military operation against a rebellious region that refused to comply with federal authority.

The meme underlines the human cost of the war, particularly for Tigrayans who have suffered immense losses, and challenges the expectations of the EOTC, which is seen as a pillar of Ethiopian national identity, especially for the northern Ethiopian community. The meme assumes that the EOTC has not declared lamenting days for the loss of their Tigrayan members, which implies the church sided with the Ethiopian federal government during the war. The meme makes a pointed comment on the lived experiences of Tigrayans, who have been mourning their losses for the past two years, unlike the rest of the church members.




The subaltern’s usage of the image of Tigrayan mothers wearing funeral clothing and lamenting their dead during the war carries a lot of emotional weight for a viewer as it evokes a strong sense of loss and grief and accentuates the tragic consequences of the war. The text at the top of the meme sets the context for the subversion. It presents a hypothetical situation where an Ethiopian member of EOTC asks a Tigrayan why they are not wearing black during the three-day fasting and lamenting, implying that the Tigrayan is not grieving properly.

The punchline of the meme, “I have been wearing black for the last two years, thank you a lot!”, transgresses the normative expectation for mourning. The subaltern is saying that, unlike the non-Tigrayan members of the church, Tigrayans have been mourning their losses for the past two years and that the three-day period of mourning mandated by the Holy Synod is inadequate to capture the depth of their suffering. The transgressive nature of the punchline is further emphasized by the use of sarcasm, which sets up a jarring contrast with the tragic

³⁸https://www.facebook.com/groups/404125963502551/permalink/1274969373084868/?mibextid=KwgM2GW_EWh1I2rGu/. Posted on 6 February 2023. Accessed on 4 April 2023.

image of mourning mothers. For the memer, by wearing black for two years, Tigrayans have set themselves apart from the rest of the church members and asserted their distinct identity and experiences. This meme is an example of a potent subaltern tool for expressing dissent and calling attention to the often overlooked or ignored human consequences of political conflict.

Figure 5.6.³⁹ ENDF as both fully equipped soldiers and the PoW by the TDF

The Meme	English Translation
	TT: Look at those soldiers
	MT: Ok...what?
	BT: Magic

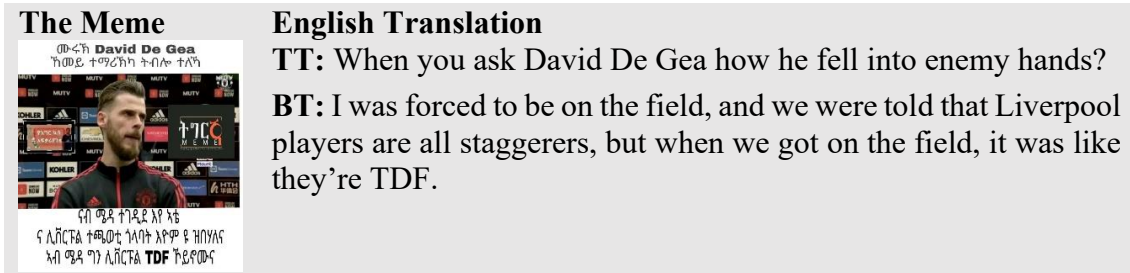
This meme subverts the narrative of the Ethiopian federal government regarding the ENDF’s military prowess and invincibility. The meme’s first image shows ENDF soldiers in their typical posture: upright, well-fed, and heavily armed – which would usually signal their dominance over TDF. However, the third image, which portrays a TDF soldier with a low-grade weapon proudly standing in front of the Tigray flag, marks a subversion of power and a transgression of the ENDF’s typically perceived superiority.

The first image is a picture of the elite Republican Guard formed to protect high officials in December 2018 (Ethiopia Forums, 2018) and is captioned “Look, how graceful and powerful these soldiers look! (paraphrased)” indicating that the ENDF soldiers are well-equipped, in good physical condition, and ready to attack. The juxtaposition of this with the second image showing these same soldiers as prisoners of war (PoW) (The New York Times, 2021) subvert the dominant power structures assumed by ENDF soldiers, forcing them into a position of weakness. From the subaltern’s perspective, the image exposes a shift in power from the dominant military force to the previously subjugated and oppressed Tigrayan people.

The TDF’s victory over the ENDF is framed as a magical transformation caused by the TDF’s skills and strategies. Through the TDF soldier’s proud response, “We are the magic that turned those soldiers with sophisticated weapons into prisoners of war (paraphrased)”, the image reinforces the idea that the Tigrayans’ strength and determination subverted the power of ENDF soldiers. Ultimately, this meme is an example of how subversive and transgressive action through the visual medium of a meme can challenge dominant power structures and reframe power relations.

³⁹<https://www.facebook.com/groups/404125963502551/permalink/883458238902652/?mibextid=KwgM2GWEWh1I2rGu/>. Posted 2 June 2021. Accessed on May 1, 2023.

Figure 5.7.⁴⁰ Manchester United’s loss to Liverpool versus the ENDF’s loss to the TDF



This meme further subverts the ENDF military prowess and transgresses the Ethiopian government’s official narrative concerning the invincibility of the ENDF. In creating the meme, the subaltern appealed to the Ethiopian government’s declaration that its law enforcement operation in Tigray would only take two weeks (FBC, 2020); however, the war took almost two years.

The memer achieves this by juxtaposing David Gea, one of the football stars in the world (Premier League, 2022/2023), and Manchester United’s goalkeeper who lost the game on 4 March 2023 to Liverpool with seven goals (Manchester United, 2023), with the ENDF’s loss to the TDF. The meme shows a downhearted picture of David Gea being interviewed by a journalist. The journalist asks David Gea, “Hey David, how did you fall into enemy hands?” David responds, “I was forced to be on the field, we were told that Liverpool players are all staggerers, but when we got on the field, it was like they’re TDF.”

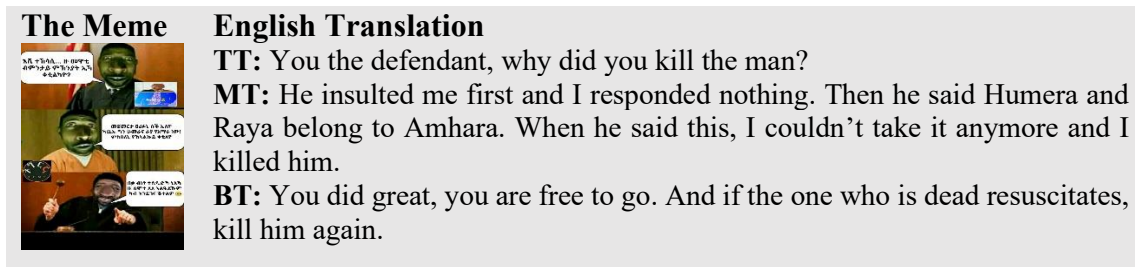
The subaltern’s meme is a subversion of the official narrative that portrays the ENDF as a victorious force against the TDF as it ridicules the initial claims of the Ethiopian government that the ENDF would win the war in two weeks. It is delivering a message that the ENDF’s military prowess was not as significant as advertised, and it succumbed to the TDF’s strength. The meme further exposes the lack of transparency in Ethiopian official news articles that often present a one-sided and false impression of the war.

Moreover, by juxtaposing David Gea’s experience during the Liverpool game with the ENDF’s experience during the war, the meme transgresses the idea that the ENDF were victorious and instead compares them to David Gea who faced a humiliating defeat. The subversive humor in the meme is evident as it climaxes the unexpected outcome of both events, reinforcing the transgression of the dominant narrative. Further, the use of humor in the meme also serves as a form of resistance and makes it easier for the subaltern to challenge the

⁴⁰<https://www.facebook.com/groups/404125963502551/permalink/1292050228043449/?mibextid=KwgM2GWEWh1I2rGu/>. Posted on 5 March 2023. Accessed on 12 12 April 2023.

dominant narrative, the power of digital activism, and the need for multiple perspectives in the representation of events.

Figure 5.8.⁴¹ A subaltern perspective on the Tigrayan-Amhara tension over Raya and Humera



This meme encounters the dominant narrative of the Amhara armed forces' ownership of Humera and Raya and their annexation of four districts in West Tigray and Northwest Tigray zones (Ethiopia Insight, 2022) through a depiction of a court scene where a Tigrayan man is brought to trial for killing an Amhara man. The reason for the killing was that the Amhara man insulted the Tigrayan man and claimed ownership of the disputed regions of Humera and Raya. The judge, who is also Tigrayan, exonerates the accused man and even suggests that if the dead man resuscitates, he should be killed again.

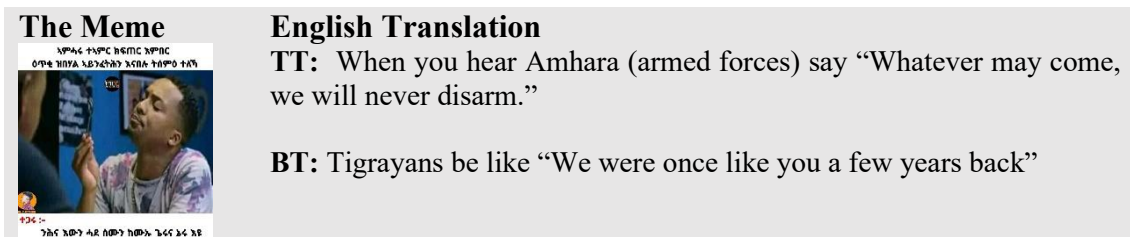
This meme has both understandable and concerning perspectives. While it is understandable that the Tigrayan subaltern feels the need to challenge the Amhara's narrative of ownership, embracing killing someone who opposes their narrative is not productive in bringing peace and security to an already tense situation. The judge in the court scene being a Tigrayan further challenges the Amhara narrative through his response to the accused man is not one of condemnation, but rather of support. The judge acknowledges the insult that the accused man experienced and rewards him for his act of resistance. This response subverts the Amhara narrative and gives voice to the Tigrayan subaltern. It further contests the power dynamics that have allowed the Amhara forces to claim ownership of Tigrayan territories during the war in northern Ethiopia.

While the intention behind the meme might be to challenge Amhara's narrative, it is concerning that violence is being suggested as a means to resolve the dispute. To reach an equitable solution regarding land rights disputes amongst Tigrayan and Amhara communities, valuing diverse voices including those seen as "oppressed" or "invisible" is essential; prioritizing productive communication methods like dialogue may also prove fruitful moving forward.

⁴¹<https://www.facebook.com/groups/404125963502551/permalink/1280946659153806/?mibextid=KwgM2GWEWh1I2rGu/>. Posted on 15 February 2023. Accessed on 23 February 2023.

Unfortunately, however, the meme creators’ subalterns’ voice implies that there exists only one clear path forward, which prioritizes the Tigray people’s rights over determining territorial ownership. However, dividing lines within this conflict run deep historically with legitimate competing claims from each group critical to address fairly before concluding. It then becomes about creating opportunities for open dialogue that nurtures multi-faceted perspectives and takes into account the historical foundations of those involved.

Figure 5.9.⁴² A Tigrayan challenges Amhara forces’ rejection of the DDR program by the federal government



The creator of this meme utilizes irony in expressing his dissent over the Amhara forces’ rejection to disarm while at the same time acknowledging the Tigrayans’ experience of the war in northern Ethiopia. Creating this meme on 7 April, 2023, the subaltern memer points out the futility of war and suggests that the Amhara armed forces (Fano and the Amhara Regional Special Forces) should learn from the Tigrayan people’s experience to avoid further conflict in their region. Thus, this meme not only serves as a mockery of the Amhara militia but also as a satirical commentary on the politics of the region.

The Amhara armed forces’ rejection of the federal government’s plan to reintegrate regional special forces in favor of creating “a strong centralized army” has sparked protests in the region, leading to tensions between the regional and federal authorities (Guardian, 2023). Based on news sources, the Amhara military units are displaying reluctance towards yielding their weaponry. Their apprehensions stem from concerns surrounding insecurity and anticipated attacks from hostile parties. Nonetheless, it’s vital to understand that the government initiative for the reintegration of fractioned armed forces aims toward restoring tranquility and safety in an area characterized by conflict and turmoil.

Furthermore, the memer’s use of humor and satire underscores the absurdity of the Amhara forces’ decision to hold on to their weapons, despite the dangers of conflict and violence. The man’s facial expression, juxtaposed with the top text and bottom text of the

⁴²<https://www.facebook.com/groups/404125963502551/permalink/1310259276222544/?mibextid=KwgM2GWEWh1I2rGu/>. Posted on 7 April 2023. Accessed on 1 May 2023.

meme, can suggest as if he is saying “...if you, the Amhara forces, think you can handle the price of war, go for it”. For the memer, the Amhara forces are jeopardizing their own people’s safety by not relinquishing weapons; accordingly, the meme’s central theme is an appeal for harmony and comprehension in the area, calling on all parties to learn from previous experiences to avoid more clashes while advancing reconciliation.

The use of irony in the meme suggests a critical engagement with the political dynamics in the region for the subaltern as he is someone who is out of the dominant narrative, and is situated at the periphery of the socio-political landscape. Nonetheless, his use of humor and satire allows him to challenge the dominant discourse and expose the contradictions and absurdities of the power structures that oppress them.

5.2.2. Eritrea: President Isayas Afeworki and the Eritrean Defense Force


Among the 2020-2022 actors in the war in northern Ethiopia, the Eritrean Defense Force (EDF) and President Isayas Afeworki are prominent. Eritrea framed its involvement in the conflict as a way to defend its national security and respond to TPLF’s aggression towards it (Aljazeera, 2020). In its letter to the United Nations (UN), the Eritrean government provided several justifications for its engagement in the war (Sophia, 2021). The justifications included Eritrea’s blame of the “TPLF clique” for “attacking the Ethiopian army stationed in Tigray to confiscate the army’s weaponry and subsequently invading Eritrea” (Ibid.).

Eritrea’s involvement in Ethiopia’s Tigray conflict has earned vociferous criticism from several corners citing alleged war crimes. Human Rights Watch reports indicate at least thousands of soldiers deployed from Eritrea illegally carried out different abuses including rape, mass killings, deprivation; looting; destruction to an already beleaguered region. The US Department of State further strengthened these reports by highlighting that what they term “widespread atrocities” featured other violations such as sexual violence, mass killings as well as looting being committed across this zone. It is interesting to note however that in all these noise no perspectives or views regarding the share from Isayas’ regime or their army have emerged from locals living within this conflicted zone; thus, adding to concerns about accountability and transparency moving forward.

In this subsection, subaltern perspectives in *Tigrigna Meme* towards Eritrea’s involvement in the war are analyzed as they are important for several reasons. First, it provides insight into the experiences of the subaltern Tigrayan population, who are outside of the dominant discourses of TPLF’s narrative. By looking into them, the perspectives make it

possible to understand the impact of EDF and Eritrea’s government. The subaltern perspective further sheds light on the complexities of the war and the broader geopolitical context in which it is occurring. Tigrayans who were impacted by the war and have first-hand knowledge of the Eritrean government’s involvement can provide valuable insights into the motivations and strategies of various actors in the conflict. The most engaged memes regarding Eritrea’s president and EDF were collected through a Facebook image search algorithm and analyzed them.⁴³ Among these memes, the nine most engaged memes were selected and analyzed in detail.

Figure 5.10.⁴⁴ A meme subverting EDF’s prowess and transgresses into a mere bandit.

The Meme	English Translation
 <p data-bbox="209 875 432 987"> ማዘሩ፡-“እያኛ ሊባ 'ዩ ገይሩ ዘማቲ ዘይገደቁ ዳይፐር ይኾን ብገንቲ ገሰገሱ ንትግራይ ገፀ ወፈሩ ካብ ምስ ገሬ ምስ ዘለቁ መኻሩ” ካብኡ እማ... ሰሪቐ ክኾይ ብሊይቲ ቆሊቦምዎ ብኾልቲ </p>	<p data-bbox="464 757 1034 790">TT: Eritrean – Mum, where did my dad go?</p> <p data-bbox="464 792 671 826">BT: His Mum –</p> <p data-bbox="464 828 1458 1043"> Your dad was a bandit soldier looting underwear even a diaper went to invade Tigray, to plunder deliberating with Zeleke, not Ghere his brother, and then...during the night wanted to steal and bolt they dropped him dead with a cap from their colt. </p>

Posted in February 2023, more than two months after the CHA, this meme is a typical example of how subalterns can subvert dominant narratives and transgress social, cultural, and political narratives. The meme, recalling the 2020-2022 war in northern Ethiopia, challenges the narrative of Eritrean soldiers as a well-equipped and disciplined force and depicts them as nothing more than bandits who loot everything, including underwear and diapers, implying their deficiency of military integrity. The meme achieves this through a subversion of the dominant narrative and a transgression into a new one that is different from the status quo.

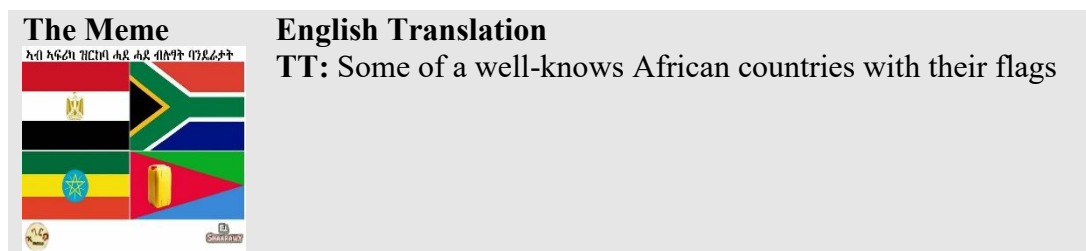
From this meme, we can learn that an Eritrean mother tells her son about her late husband who used to be an armed soldier fighting for Eritrea but later crossed enemy lines during the war with Tigray where he took advantage of his position by looting properties along with his comrades participating in similar unethical practices against locals. The mother describes how the father went to invade Tigray as part of the EDF and how he was planning to plunder and loot. The subaltern now transgresses the story by adding hyperbole to the mother’s response. A new transgressed narrative now assumes that an Eritrean soldier should have sided

⁴³ Access the thematically collected memes here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/10kclCLEqpyTyTGK5aITJO3jf6K7CERl3/view?usp=sharing/>.
⁴⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=905237777187909&set=gm.1286663575248781&idorvanity=404125963502551/>. Posted on 24 February 2023. Accessed on March 28, 2023.

with his Tigrayan brother, Ghere, instead of Zeleke, an Ethiopian official and enemy of both Eritreans and Tigrayans. The mother then describes how her husband wanted to steal and bolt during the night, but was stopped and killed by Zeleke and Ghere with a cap from their colt, because they made peace, resonating the CoHA in November 2022.

The meme can be considered a subversion in the sense that it disrupts the dominant narrative about Eritrean soldiers being a well-equipped and disciplined force (Global Security, 2021). The mother’s description of Eritrean soldiers as bandits who loot everything, including underwear and diapers, is a complete contradiction to the image of Eritrean soldiers portrayed by the Eritrean government and their media (Eritrean Defense Forces, 2015). The subversion is also evident in the mother’s assumption that an Eritrean soldier should have sided with his Tigrayan brother, Ghere, instead of Zeleke. The meme’s power lies in its ability to challenge the status quo and offer a counter-narrative that is often ignored by those in power.

Figure 5.11.⁴⁵ Eritrean flag’s emblem subverted from a Camel to a jerry can.



This meme, created by a Tigrayan subaltern is a potent form of subversion and transgression, challenging the dominant narrative of both Ethiopian and Eritrean governments about the war, which has often ignored the impact of Eritrea’s engagement (Rédaction Africanews Africa News). The meme mocks Eritrean engagement in the war by emphasizing a crucial aspect of the conflict: Eritrean soldiers’ obsession with jerry cans, which challenges Eritrea’s military ethics and competence, revealing the dire situation in the country.

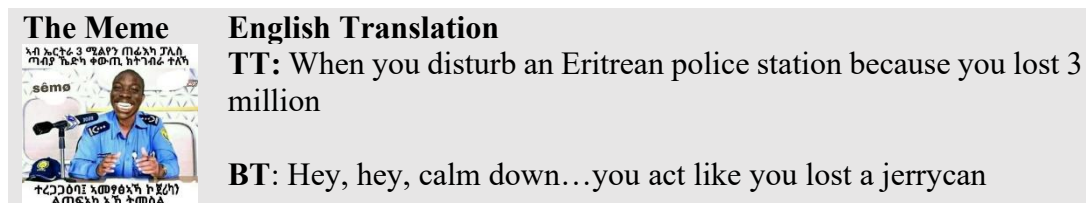
The meme shows flags of some African countries, sarcastically calling them “some of well-known African countries”, including Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and South Africa. The use of appropriate emblems for Egypt, Ethiopia, and South Africa represents a standard practice; however, the subversion and transgression happened when the memer replaced Eritrean flag’s emblem from a Camel to a jerry can. This is a potent critique that exposes Eritrea’s looting of materials, including Jerry cans, that they used to hoard during their invasion of Tigray. A

⁴⁵<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=696627488661219&set=gm.1258824454699360&idrvanity=404125963502551/>. Posted on 13 January 2023. Accessed on March 18, 2023.

Reuters news article in December 2022 confirms the subaltern’s perspective on Eritrean soldiers’ practice during the war (Reuters 2022).

Eritrean soldiers’ collection of jerry cans is not just a mere curiosity; it is a concrete representation of their incompetence in military equipment. The soldiers’ use of jerry cans to transport materials demonstrates a lack of logistical capacity and an inability to sustain a war. Moreover, their reliance on jerry cans highlights the desperate situation in Eritrea, where the military forces do not have access to proper military equipment. This meme is a compelling way to expose the reality of the situation in Eritrea and the impact of its engagement in the war, showing how the war has exposed Eritrea’s limitations as a nation.

Figure 5.12.⁴⁶ A meme subverting EDF’s military competence by transgressing their obsession with a ‘jerry can’ in Tigray.



Out of the fifty memes collected from the *Tigrigna Meme* regarding Eritrea, fourteen memes expose Eritrean soldiers’ obsession with jerrycans during their operation in Tigray. These memes illustrate Eritrean soldiers’ involvement in the northern Ethiopian war, through subversion and transgression. Posted by a Tigrayan subaltern after the war in northern Ethiopia, the meme juxtaposes an Eritrean millionaire who has lost three million dollars with someone, possibly a soldier, who has lost a jerrycan and exposes the profound economic desperation that exists within the Eritrean society and military.

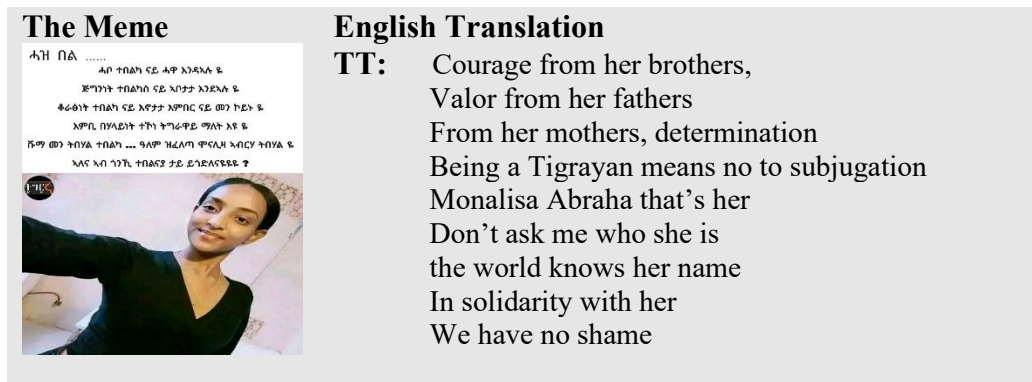
At first glance, the meme may appear to be humorous, with the police officer’s response to the millionaire’s complaint seeming absurd. However, upon deeper reflection, the meme paints a vivid picture of the severe material poverty that exists within the Eritrean military that was active in Tigray and which is responsible for much of the violence and destruction that took place during the war (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Furthermore, the meme exposes the harsh realities of the war in northern Ethiopia, especially as it reveals the lack of adequate military equipment and resources being provided to Eritrean soldiers on the frontlines.

⁴⁶<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=115203294788991&set=gm.1255272771721195&idorvanity=404125963502551/>. Posted on 8 January 2023. Accessed on March 18, 2023.

The subversion and transgression of the meme lie in its challenge to the dominant narratives about the Eritrean military and the war in northern Ethiopia as it challenges the popular notion that the Eritrean military is a powerful, well-funded, and well-equipped force (Global Security, 2021). The meme instead highlights the poverty and neglect that lie at the core of its operations. While the Eritrean soldiers were supposed to bring standard military equipment, the meme is showing that the soldiers are stealing non-military items for military purposes, which raises questions about their role in the war.

Figure 5.13.⁴⁷ A meme subverting EDF’s military ethics and proclaim Monalisa Abraha, their victim as a symbol of courage in the face of adversity



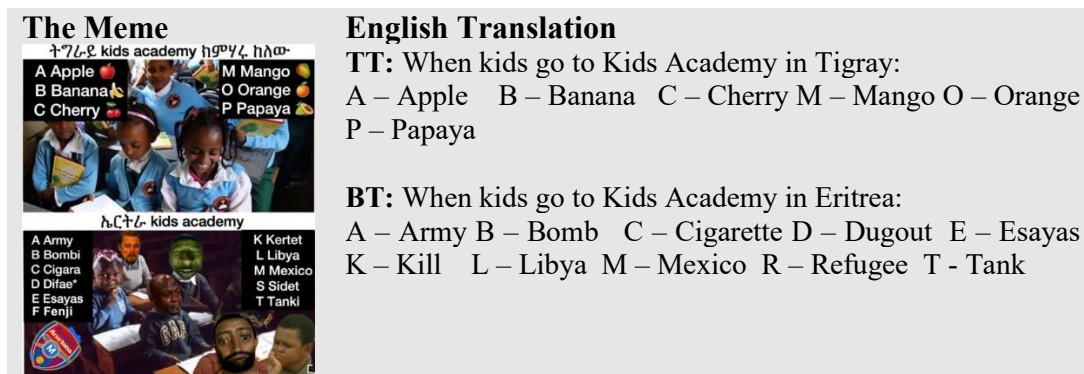
This meme is a clear example of subversion and transgression of Eritrean soldiers’ brutality including rape in Tigray during the war in northern Ethiopia (Human Rights Watch, 2021). The subalterns, instead of lamenting for atrocities committed in their society, celebrate the bravery of their people, especially of the victims. The meme further subverts the traditional power dynamics and portrays Tigrayans, particularly Tigrayan women, as formidable individuals who have the courage and determination to fight back against subjugation. The meme is a bold statement of resistance to the oppressive Eritrean forces that have carried out violence against the Tigrayan people (Ibid.).

In the meme is an image of Monalisa Abraha, a Tigrayan teen, who rejected a passive rape victimization by the EDF, and the soldiers amputated her multiple limbs, and left her for dead (Tigray Action Committee, 2021). Yet, the memer did not choose to use a picture of Monalisa after the atrocity. The meme shows her image, as a young girl taking a selfie and smiling, which sends a powerful message of resilience in the face of adversity. By using her smiling picture, the meme could be interpreted as asserting her bravery amid violence and trauma. The caption on the photo can be interpreted as the collective strength of Tigrayans during the war and honors Monalisa Abraha as a symbol of their resistance against atrocities

⁴⁷<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1612177762557686&set=gm.1293207024594436&id=404125963502551/>. Posted on March 7, 2023. Accessed on March 12, 2023.

amidst brutality. It further portrays Tigrayan women as powerful agents of resistance and liberation, rather than passive victims.

Figure 5.14.⁴⁸ A meme subverting EDF’s military ethics by depicting them as “uneducated.”



This meme is another illustration of the subalterns using a meme to express their rejection of Eritreans involved in the war in northern Ethiopia. The memer uses an image of two groups of kindergarten students to draw a contrast between Tigrayan children and Eritrean children. The Tigrayan group is shown as a typical group of young children, learning the alphabet through examples of fruits such as A for Apple, B for Banana, and C for Cherry. This is a widely accepted teaching method that helps to familiarize young children with common objects and their corresponding letters.

On the other hand, the Eritrean group is shown as weird and bored adults in a kindergarten setting. The use of a bizarre-looking and adult-like appearance of the Eritrean students is a clear deviation from cultural norms that dictate that children should study in a child-friendly environment. This makes the meme visually striking, as it grabs the viewer’s attention by featuring an unusual group of people in an unlikely setting.


Eritrean Grade 12 students are required to undergo military training at the Sawa Military and Educational Camp (United States State Department, 2014). This requirement extends even to students under the age of 18 who must complete this training to receive high school diplomas or be eligible for certain jobs or advanced education. The initial six months of the program entail military instruction prior to beginning active duty. Conversely, Ethiopian educational policy does not necessitate military service among its students. As such, Tigrayan youth have more opportunities for growth and development compared with Eritrean soldiers as asserted by a meme on this issue.

⁴⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=2728288510823135&set=gm.756713311577146/>. Posted on 29 October 2020. Accessed on April 15, 2023.

The text accompanying the meme further highlights the contrast between Tigrayan and Eritrean approaches to education. While the Tigrayan children learn through examples of fruits, the Eritrean students are taught through examples of government-imposed militarized adult objects such as A for Army, B for Bomb, and C for Cigarette. The use of militarized and adult-centered objects instead of everyday objects is a significant deviation from accepted teaching norms and is a clear critique of Eritrea’s education system. Furthermore, the meme includes other letters E for Esayas, the president of Eritrea, and F-Fenji (explosives). The inclusion of F-Fight is a nod to Eritrea being a militarized country one-man country, and the addition of these letters serves to further highlight the militaristic tendencies of the Eritrean government and serves as a biting criticism of the regime.

This meme is a potent way of critiquing Eritrea’s obsession with the militarization of its people rather than giving them an appropriate education. The use of humor and satire in depicting the two different kindergarten groups and their methods of learning effectively highlights the contrast between the two countries. The subversion and transgression of societal norms through this meme are powerful tools in social and political engagement. This meme is a clear illustration of the power of memes in challenging dominant narratives and figures.

Figure 5.15.⁴⁹ A meme depicting President Isayas Afeworki as a reason for Eritreans’ despair

Meme	English Translation
	<p>TT: Poetry from the children of Eritrea (Eritreans)</p> <p>BT: If there was no Sweden, where would we flee to? If there was no sorghum what would eat and brew? Oh, the heights we would reach if there was no Isaias; We can’t do it anymore, let’s undo life!</p>

This meme is a powerful subversion and transgression of the prevailing narrative of the war in northern Ethiopia, which is often dominated by the perspectives of the powerful Eritrean soldiers’ involvement in the war. The creator of the meme is a subaltern group in Tigray, using humor and irony to challenge the dominant Eritrean narrative of its military prowess and to expose the reality of its unlivable political and economic situation, as well as the brutal regime of Isayas.

The meme is a critique of Eritrea’s long-standing dependence on foreign aid, its citizens being refugees in different countries mainly Ethiopia and Sudan as their way to European countries, and its failure to build a sustainable economy and society. The image of the meme, of the two idly seated youth suggests a sense of despair and helplessness of the Eritrean youth,


⁴⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=569313843969714&set=gm.653044831943995/>. Posted on 31 May 2020 amidst the war. Accessed on 22 March 2023.

as they have no prospects in their own country. The punchline that follows is an ironic twist that mocks their predicament. The line, “If there was no Sweden, where would we flee to?” highlights the desperate desire of Eritrean youth to escape their own country, where they face a wide array of hardships, from poverty and unemployment to political oppression and militarization. The line, “If there was no sorghum what would we eat, brew?” adds another layer of irony to the meme, as it exposes the dire food insecurity that plagues Eritrea and its people (Hirt, 2012).

The meme’s final line, “Oh, the heights we would reach if there was no Isaias; We can’t do it anymore, let’s undo life!” is a subversion of the Eritrean regime and its ideology of militarism and nationalism, while leaving the important portion of its society, the youth into disparity, bleakness, and meaninglessness. By using humor and irony to critique their situation, the meme’s creator is challenging the prevailing narrative that Eritrea under Isayas is better than Tigray. The image of the two youth reminds the meme’s reader of an uncertain future caused by the regime and its oppression.

The meme further challenges Eritrea’s military prowess and its role in the war in northern Ethiopia. The meme suggests that Eritrea’s military engagement in Tigray exacerbates its failures, rather than a show of strength or power. By attacking its neighbor, Tigray, Eritrea is only aggravating its problems and should focus instead on its development and transformation.

Figure 5.16.⁵⁰ A subaltern perspective on freedom in Asmara as compared to Addis Ababa and Mekelle

The Meme	English Translation
	<p>TT: Eritreans going to Eritrea and making memes after Isayas’ death</p> <p>BT: What you’re looking at is neither Addis Ababa nor Mekelle...it is Asmara.</p>

In this meme, a subaltern Tigrayan youth subverts the narrative that the EDF’s involvement in the war in northern Ethiopia by being a part of a law enforcement operation, and transgresses to demonstrate the dire situation related to freedom of expression that exists in Eritrea. The meme depicts an image of Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, and highlights the tyrannical nature of Isayas Afeworki’s regime by suggesting that as soon as their President dies, Eritreans across the world will gather back home and ‘make a meme’. There is humor in the top text that is

⁵⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1605142586309926&set=gm.632109707370841/>. Posted on 20 April 2020. Accessed on 12 April 2023.

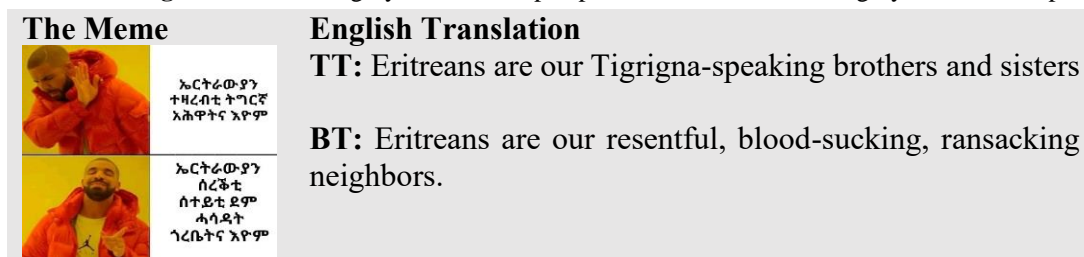
rather ironic, given that the people of Eritrea live in a repressive and authoritarian state (Ibid.), and the subaltern is comparing it with Ethiopia.

Nevertheless, the use of humor is part of the subversion and transgression that takes place in the meme: instead of an oppressive regime controlling the narrative as Isayas does, the meme is an expression of the people’s freedom to create in their creative way. The subaltern’s comparison of Asmara with Addis Ababa and Mekelle in this sense is important. The subaltern is saying that Tigray has at least the freedom to ‘create memes’ which Eritreans lack merely because Isayas is alive.

In the bottom text, the meme goes on to show how Eritreans, once back on native soil, plan to share their lived experiences with the world on social media. The transgression here is that the meme’s creator chose social media to mock the repressiveness of the Eritrean regime, precisely because it is a space where free speech and dissent are allowed. It is also a subversive move because the creator is mocking the lack of freedom of media and speech in Eritrea, precisely through social media, which is unavailable to the majority of Eritreans living under the dictatorship’s rule (Amnesty, 2019).

This meme is not only humorous but also cleverly subversive. By using irony and humor to critique the lack of freedom of media and speech in Eritrea, the subaltern has successfully provoked thought and discussion about the situation in Eritrea, which is particularly impressive given that creative and subversive expression is extremely limited in Eritrea. The meme shows how in the face of repression, subaltern groups continue to find ways to speak truth to power. In this way, the meme transcends its humorous tone to become a bold rejection of power.

Figure 5.17.⁵¹ A Tigrayan subaltern perspective on Eritrean and Tigrayan relationship



This meme was posted in September 2021, and possibly by someone outside of Tigray by the time, given network was a blackout in Tigray. In light of the war, Eritrea comes an intriguing yet subversive meme. The graphic emphasizes a counternarrative to Ethiopia’s claim of

⁵¹ <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=584797439535206&set=gm.949914228923719/>. Posted on 21 September 2021, and accessed on March 12, 2023.

unbroken solidarity within its geographical area while also challenging notions held about friendly relations between the people at a grassroots level. Despite assurances Prime Minister Abiy to maintain amicable ties with its bordering neighbor under his ‘brothers and sisters’ platform espousing common ground shared among varying ethnic groups within both countries since 2019; the subaltern Tigrayan youth seem keen on refuting such rhetoric. These young groups have pushed back against the inkling of goodwill displayed towards Eritrea by depicting it more like an unfriendly and hostile neighbor through this particular meme.

The subversion, therefore, lies in the fact that the image and caption of the meme seem to reflect the frustrations of Tigrayan youth about the war and Eritrean soldiers’ involvement in it (Human Rights Watch, 2021), which has resulted in the loss of lives, displacement, and economic hardship. The Human Rights Watch further documented in the same month that Eritrean refugees were targeted in Tigray (Ibid.), which the meme possibly shows the sentiment was within the general community of Tigray.

The transgression in this meme is also apparent within the bottom text “Eritreans are our resentful, blood-sucking, and ransacking neighbors.” The text transgresses the norms of brotherhood and unity that have been espoused by both the Ethiopian government and previous generations (Abiy, 2019, Abbay, 2004). Tigrayans and Eritreans have coexisted peacefully for generations, with intermarriages, trade, and cultural exchanges occurring regularly. The use of emotive languages, such as “resentful” and “blood-sucking” to describe Eritreans is a transgression of the values of tolerance and respect for cultural diversity that is taught in both Tigray and Eritrea communities and focuses on that time’s sentiment. The use of such language in the meme, therefore, reflects a reactionary mindset of anger and detestation among Tigrayan youth towards Eritrean soldiers’ atrocity in the same month (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

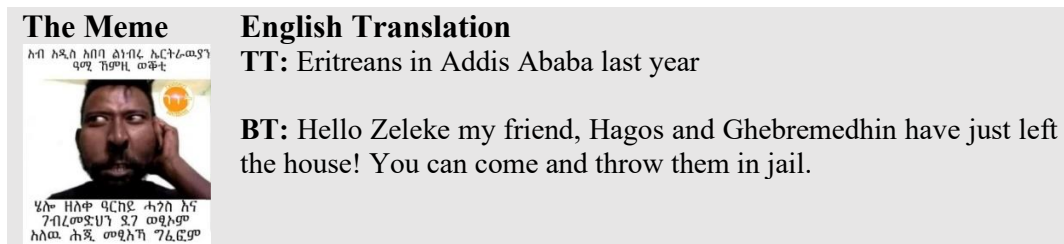
The meme seems to be calling for a change in attitude towards Eritreans, particularly in light of the atrocities committed by Eritrean soldiers in Tigray (Gavin, 2021). The message conveyed by the text, “Eritreans are our resentful, blood-sucking, and ransacking neighbors” is a challenge for the members of the *Tigrigna Meme* to plan suspicion and caution towards Eritreans, as opposed to the narrative of cooperation and integration that has been promoted by the Ethiopian government, with Eritrea sided.

This meme can be categorized as hate speech against Eritreans as it transgresses the norms of brotherhood and unity that have been preached by both the Ethiopian government and previous generations. The language used in the meme is emotive and divisive, and it seeks to create suspicion and caution towards Eritreans instead of promoting cooperation and integration. The meme’s message conveys a reactionary mindset of anger and detestation

among Tigrayan youth towards Eritrean soldiers’ atrocities, resulting in loss of lives, displacement, and economic hardship.

It is therefore essential to address the underlying issues causing this reaction, such as the war and atrocities committed. Addressing these underlying issues through peaceful means and dialogue is imperative to ensuring long-lasting peace and security in the region. It is also important to foster a culture of tolerance and respect for cultural diversity to prevent hate speech and promote peaceful coexistence among communities.

Figure 5.18.⁵² A meme exposing Eritrean refugees’ involvement in Tigrayan “prosecution” by the Ethiopian government.



The meme was created by a Tigrayan subaltern youth, depicting an Eritrean man talking on his phone with Zeleke, an assumed Ethiopian official on a mission of arresting Tigrayans living in Addis Ababa. The top text of the meme reads “Eritreans last year” which suggests that the story being narrated happened during the war. The bottom text reads, “an Eritrean calling Zeleke” which implies that the person being called has a non-Tigrayan Ethiopian name and is possibly a member of the Ethiopian government.

The meme’s narrative describes an Eritrean man, who is a roommate with a Tigrayan in Addis casually informing Zeleke that two Tigrayans, identified as Hagos and Ghebremedhin, had just left their house, thereby allowing Zeleke to arrest them. The meme assumes that the Eritrean is related to Hagos and Ghebremedhin as they all speak the same language, and are neighbors. At first glance, one might see this meme as merely a joke meant to mock Eritreans for betraying their Tigrayan brothers during the war. Nevertheless, when viewed through a critical lens of cyber pragmaticism, this meme reveals deeper nuances of subversion and transgression that challenge the power dynamics at play during the war.

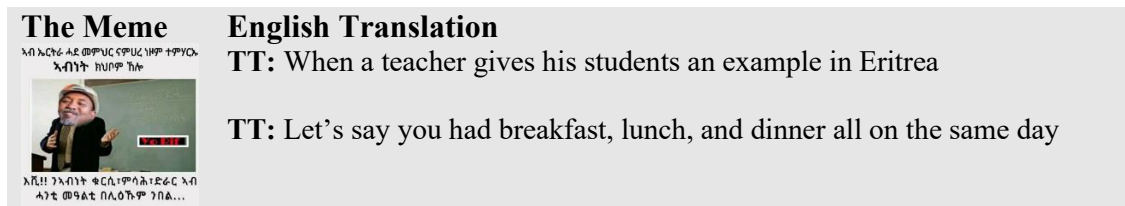
The first layer of subversion is the role of Eritreans during the war. Traditionally, Eritreans have been portrayed as the “enemy” by the TPLF-dominated previous Ethiopian government and media. Therefore, the fact that an Eritrean is depicted as aiding in the arrest of two Tigrayans subverts this narrative, presenting Eritreans as not only allies but also active

⁵²<https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=910478593633754&set=gm.1270085996906539&idortvanity=404125963502551/>. Posted on 30 January 2023. Accessed on 13 April 2023.

participants in the persecution of Tigrayans. The subaltern is saying that Eritreans, even in the TPLF-dominated EPRDF were not ‘enemies’ of all Ethiopians, but only for Tigrayans.

The second layer of subversion is the use of humor in exposing the absurdity of the situation as the idea that an Eritrean would casually inform a non-Tigrayan Ethiopian of the whereabouts of two Tigrayans is so outrageous that it forces viewers to confront the reality of Tigrayan persecution in Addis Ababa.

Figure 5.19.⁵³ A meme transgressing Eritrea’s underdevelopment



In this meme, a subaltern Tigrayan youth subverts a narrative that Eritrean superiority over Tigrayans and the assumption that transgresses into Tigray, under the TPLF has witnessed better development than Eritrea under Isayas. The meme features an Eritrean teacher with an ironic twist on daily meals in Eritrea. The top text of the meme reads, “When a teacher gives his students an example in Eritrea”, and the bottom text reads, “...let’s say you had breakfast, lunch, and dinner all on the same day.” The meme seeks to imply the stark reality of Eritrean underdevelopment and poverty, despite the country’s claim to being better off than its neighbor, Tigray. The Tigrayan youth uses satire and ridicule to highlight the irony of Eritreans’ sense of superiority over Tigrayans when they cannot even afford to feed themselves three times a day.

The subversion and transgression in the meme go beyond mere mockery. They unveil the political and economic implications of the war in northern Ethiopia, which brought to the surface historical tensions between Tigrayans and Eritreans. The Tigrayan subaltern youth’s message is clear: Tigray, under the TPLF, has achieved a better level of development and progress than Eritrea, which has become a nation of refugees due to poor governance. The meme raises critical questions about Ethiopia’s development and progress and challenges the dominant discourse that has long portrayed Tigray negatively.

5.3. Conclusion

This chapter provided an in-depth analysis of the subaltern Tigrayan use of internet memes as subaltern satires for everyday resistance to power in post-CoHA months in three subsections.

⁵³<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=740631927687717&set=gm.1294399097808562&id=404125963502551/>. Posted on 9 March 2023. Accessed on 21 April 2023.

The first subsection of this chapter introduced and highlighted key arguments and findings. In the second subsection, the researcher analyzed memes framed thematically and discussed the findings from the analysis. This subsection now concludes the chapter by highlighting key themes and findings discussed in the chapter.

The chapter provided an analysis of the use of internet memes as compelling subaltern satires for everyday resistance to power in *Tigrigna Meme*. The findings aimed to contribute to the discourse on internet memes, their importance as a tool for political expression, and the empowerment of subaltern groups emphasizing the important role they play in subverting and transgressing dominant narratives and giving voice to subaltern groups.

The study demonstrated how humor, sarcasm, hyperbole, and absurdity are utilized to challenge dominant narratives and frame actors and narratives in the war in circumstances where freedom of speech and expression is limited or non-existent. This was undertaken through the cyber-pragmatic approach to meme analysis, in which the referents of the meme were established to understand the subaltern subversion of the dominant narratives and the intended message. This approach further enabled the researcher to deconstruct the meaning behind the memes, their intended audience, and the conveyed message. The next chapter concludes the study by verifying how the analysis and discussions met the objective of the research, along with recommendations for both policy developers and succeeding researchers in the area.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Conclusions

The thrust of this research has been to understand the subaltern Tigrayans' use of internet memes, in a public Facebook group *Tigrigna Meme*, as a form of everyday resistance to power during the post-Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) months. With the mainstream media being used for conscription and mobilization of the war in northern Ethiopia, subaltern perspectives remain unheard, making it crucial to examine how these groups resist dominant narratives and power in the context of the 2020-2022 war.

While previous studies on subalternity and everyday resistance have robustly explored the importance of cultural and political memes as tools for challenging dominant structures and social media as a platform for dissidents, there has been a gap in understanding the subaltern use of memes as everyday resistance to power and war-actors in post-war contexts. Hence, this study aimed to explore how Tigrayan subaltern groups utilize internet memes to resist dominant narratives and power during the post-CoHA months; as well as investigate internet memes as a replicator for cultural evolution in subaltern peace building efforts.

In examining how *Tigrigna Meme* serves as everyday resistance, the research employed a qualitative method with content analysis to identify relevant memes on Facebook and developed a frame of analysis to understand the subaltern framing of actors and narratives in the war.

The analysis of the memes revealed that subaltern Tigrayan groups perceive the TPLF as incompetent, authoritarian, manipulative, and causing multiple problems in Tigray society, and in alliance with it, the Tigrayan traders have been exploiting the society of Tigray—a coalition between the state apparatus and the unrestricted predatory capitalism of the traders. Nevertheless, despite their open dissent towards the TPLF, the analysis exhibited that subaltern Tigrayans virtually revere and accept the cause of the TDF as heroes worthy of respect.

Regarding “the others” in the war, the analysis showed that the ENDF, the EDF, and Amhara forces have blatantly violated the federal government's narrative of safeguarding the country's territorial integrity and countering terrorism, with serious human rights violations executed underscoring the complexities caused by the involvement of Eritrea in the war within the broader geopolitical context in which it has occurred.

These subaltern voices provided unique insights into subalterns' experiences of the war, which are valuable in the peace and security field. It is argued that by revealing the root causes

of the war and tailoring policies to their specific needs, these subaltern insights can guide post-war reconstruction policy and account for the ways in which the war has affected them. Overall, this study contributes to the literature on peace and security by underscoring the importance of understanding subaltern contributions to peace building through the efficiency of memes as a replicator for cultural evolution.

6.2. Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest that both researchers in Peace and Security Studies as well as policymakers should acknowledge the valuable unique insights into subaltern experiences of the war provided by the subaltern groups in *Tigrigna Meme*, which can contribute to constructing more sustainable peace building strategies. As the study showed cultural memes as essential tools for subaltern resistance to dominant structures, policymakers should consider utilizing these memes as a replicator for cultural evolution in subaltern peace building efforts, and subaltern perspectives, which remain unheard in mainstream media should be prioritized while designing sustainable peace building policies.

Moreover, the research revealed Tigrayan subaltern groups' perception of the TPLF as incompetent, manipulative, and authoritarian, and exposed their coalition with the Tigrayan traders exploiting Tigray society. These insights are essential in identifying the root causes of problems the subalterns in Tigray encounter and tailoring policies to their specific needs. In this regard, policymakers should emphasize addressing these issues while implementing post-war reconstruction policies that account for the ways in which the war has affected society.

Furthermore, the study exhibited the serious human rights violations by the ENDF, the EDF, and Amhara forces, emphasizing the complexities caused by the involvement of Eritrea in the war in the broader geopolitical context in which it occurred. Therefore, policymakers should prioritize investigating these human rights violations and holding the violators accountable while addressing their concerns.

Overall, this study recommends considering the Tigrayan subaltern voices in post-war Tigray while developing peace and security policies, utilizing subaltern insights as a replicator for cultural evolution in subaltern peace building efforts, and prioritizing investigating human rights violations.

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APPENDIX I

To access the memes analyzed in this thesis, please click [here](#).