

## The Challenges of Demography and Democracy in Ethiopia, Part II: Internal Conflicts and the Fighting Youth Force

Weaving the facts of war, deaths, and dislocation into a coherent narrative supported by statistical discourse isn't for the faint of the heart. Propitiously, however, the air is laden with contented calm as a nation savors the sweet taste of spectacular war victories won by a yet fully unheralded force – a new generation of young men and women fighters. This, I believe, gives me license to launch right into such a discourse and provide data-supported narratives by carving out slices from the demographic underpinnings of Ethiopia's population now approaching 115 million<sup>1</sup>. The main goal of this exercise is to offer a solid statistical foundation supporting the subtleties of the subheading to today's article: Internal Conflicts and the Fighting Youth Force. The slice I have chosen is the war-scarred age structure (past and present), of Tigray *Kilil* – the region hosting the most recent conflict.

“...pay homage to the only Nobel Peace Prize winning leader whose masterful wizardry in war-making salvaged the peace he received a prize for and saved a nation on the brink...”

This article is 1) a follow up to my June 13 Reporter article by the same title 2) intended to highlight the near impossibility of true peace in a toxic environment strained by seemingly endless overabundance of hoodwinked youngsters led by cowardly old men stocking war from a perch atop the apex of a regional government power. I will refer to these craven old men henceforth as pseudo alpha males while respecting everyone else's prerogatives to call them Junta. I am naturally not given to name calling but the beyond the pale satanic cruelty perpetrated in Mai-Kadra leaves me no choice 3) uses as a fitting example, the November 4 bestial nightly attack on the young men and women of the Northern Command (*Semien Ezz*) while asleep in their beds 4) will

pay homage to the only Nobel Peace Prize winning leader whose masterful wizardry in war-making salvaged the peace he received a prize for and saved a nation on the brink – Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (PhD) war and peace wizard extraordinaire 5) a revisit of some predictions I made in my June 13 Reporter article by the same title; six months is an eternity in the political life of Abiy Ahmed’s fast changing Ethiopia!

A Central Statistical Authority (CSA) report<sup>2</sup> of the 1984 population count – the first ever census in Ethiopia - and of the second national census (1994), would be excellent resources to get us started. CSA’s documents remind the worn and weary of notable facts of the 1984 census results for Tigray *Kifile Hager* and Eritrea *Kifile Hage* (that was what regions were called then). The most salient fact being that the counts in both *kifile Hagers* were incomplete. And the reason?

“...the insidious plan (nearly five decades in the making) was thwarted by demographics - a new generation of stone-throwing youths sporting crossed wrists and clenched fists.”

You guessed it! Military confrontations of Ethiopia’s fighting youths in the rural countryside of Eritrea and Tigray had not allowed it. Dare I remind the reader that on one side were fighters of the Tigrian Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), and on the other side the young and poorly led but brave men and women making up the *Derg*’s army? Dare I also tell esteemed readers of this news magazine that the fight was to avert Eritrea’s secession as well as nip in its bud an insidious plan for Ethiopia’s dismemberment espoused in TPLF’s 1976 manifesto<sup>3</sup>? Well, I just did and, by the way, the insidious plan (nearly five decades in the making) was thwarted by demographics - a new generation of stone-throwing youths sporting crossed wrists and clenched fists. More than half of Ethiopia’s populace (not yet born then), may be reminded too that, in the span of just seven years following the 1984 national census, TPLF’s and ELF’s fighting youths (many in shorts, really short shorts) would find themselves marching into Addis Ababa as

well as the regional capital Asmara. As a courtesy to those not yet born at the time, I would add a not too insignificant cue that this marked the end of the gorilla fight and the start of a total state capture by TPLF; the birth of a new nation in the case of Eritrea.

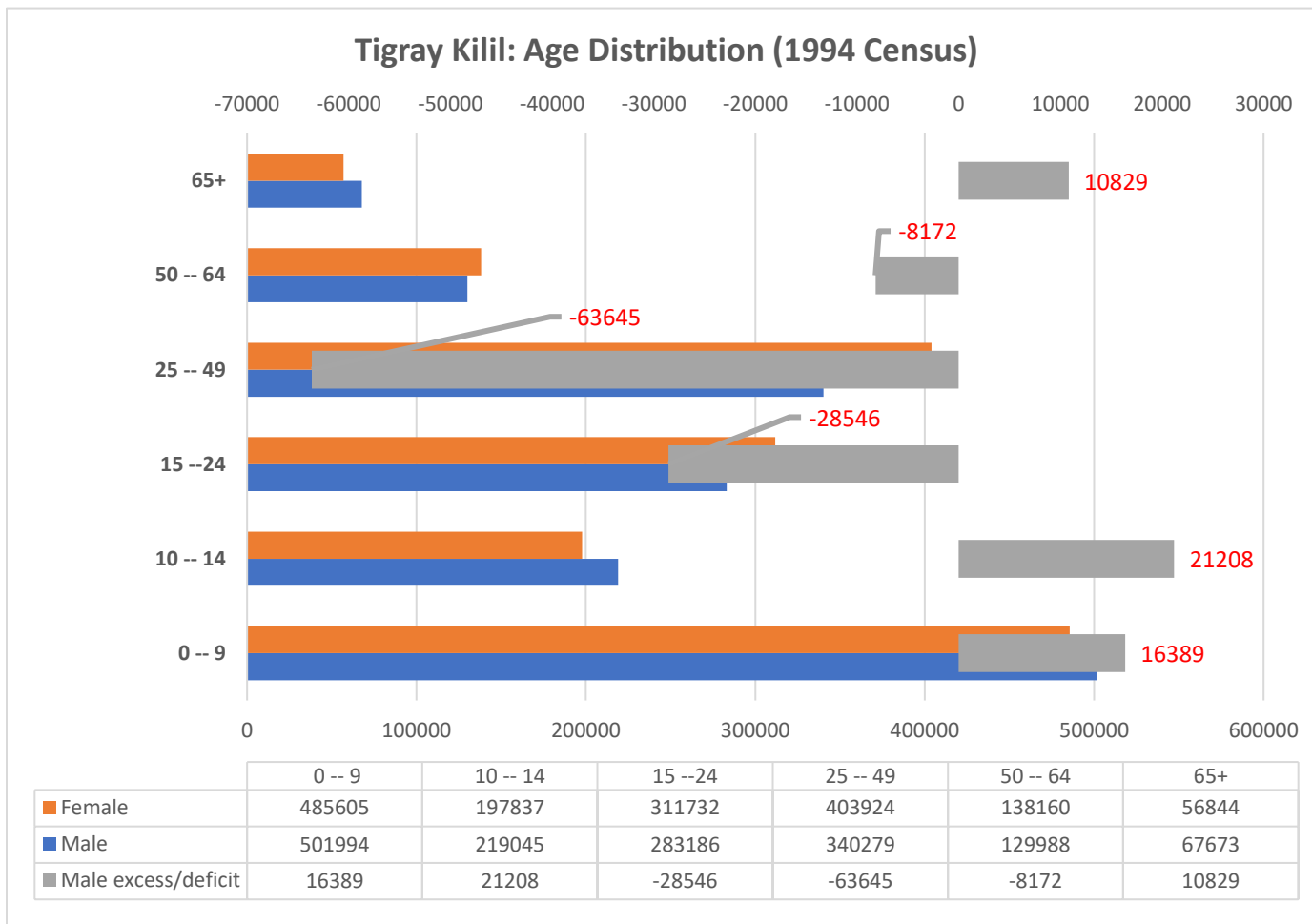
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The second national census was conducted in 1994. It took place three years after TPLF’s founder Meles Zenawi had arm-twisted battlefield captive heads of three fighting youth groups to form the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Although the 1994 population count took roughly 10 days to wind down, the above source cites October 11, 1994 as the official day of the census in Tigray *Kilil* (yes, *Kifle Hager* had given way to *Kilil* by then). This date would come to precede by 26 years and 26 days, the infamy of the November 4, 2020 slaughter of

Ethiopia’s fighting youths of the *Semien Ezz* in the dark of night upon the order of criminal escapees who had been dislodged from the nation’s capital two and half years prior.

Figure 1 is based on the 1994 census. It lays bare in the most spectacular fashion, the scars of war already baked into Tigray *Kilil*'s age structure by the time of TPLF's power grab, and the start of its malignant entrenchment in the fabric of Ethiopian society. A careful examination reveals excesses of nearly 38,000 males below the age of 15. Although the male excess below age 15 requires its own explanation, I will sidestep it for now. The excess turns into a nearly 30,000 deficit in the 15 to 24 age group - characteristic of a young male population impacted by significant loss of life. Even more dramatic is the male deficit of nearly 64,000 in the 25 - 49 age group. Figure 1 also shows a deficit in the 50 - 64 age group; men in this age group were in the 30 to 44 years age band at the writing and publication of TPLF's manifesto. Taking into account male surpluses in the below 15 age group and adding up all the deficits in subsequent ages, an unsophisticated arithmetic unencumbered by demographic modeling and projection rules would produce a male war casualty estimate of at least 100,000 from TPLF's inception to its leaders' rise to power as the undisputed pseudo alpha heavyweights in Ethiopia's political theatre. Given the size of the generation of mothers in the 50 to 64 age group numbering around 138,000, it is logical to assume that each Tigrian mother had lost a son on average, including thousands killed by TPLF itself. The word average needs emphasis here as some mothers had lost a lot more sons and, on occasions, daughters too.

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**Source:** The 1994 Population Census of Ethiopia: Results for Tigray Region, Addis Ababa, November 2015. The scale below the bar graph is for male/female population sizes. The scale above the bar graph is for male excess or deficits. Minus sign show deficit.

Nearly all of TPLF's civilian and military leaders were in the middle two age groups of Figure 1 at the time of the 1984 census but they weren't counted then on account of being foxhole combatants beyond the reach of census takers. I am reminded, here, of George R.R. Martin's war quote: "every man should lose a battle in his youth so he does not lose a war when he is old". Pseudo alphas Sibhat Nega, Debrtsion Gebremichael, Getachew Assefa, Abay Tsehaye, Siyoum Mesfin, etc. etc. would be forgiven for taking this quote to heart in ordering the November 4 massacre. Unfortunately for them, however, history did not repeat itself in this instance and they now find themselves in the throes of death whether by violence or through justice for treasonous acts.

### **The Demographic Undertones of the Attack on the Northern Command (*Semien Ezz*)**

"... launched this day's nightly massacre buoyed by tantalizingly surreal certainties of harnessing this demographic potential to score countless victories culminating in a triumphant do over. The do over would, of course, be a return to power in the nation's capital for another quarter century of rule over what the alphas thought would be an emaciated fragmented Ethiopia that is at war with itself. As the esteemed reader knows, it did not end that way."

Table 1 shows projected 2020 population sizes of Tigray's youth in various age groups based on their age during the 2007 census count (the latest census in Ethiopia). The purpose of this exercise is to address a question that already has a patently obvious answer: who attacked the young men and women of *Semien Ezz* the night of November 4? Specifically, what was the size of the force that had aligned itself against the *Semien Ezz* on the night of November 4? For a robust response built on demographics, I trust that the reader will persevere a quick escapade into the hidden crevices of Tigray's 2007 population and housing

census<sup>4</sup>. The last two columns of Table 1, do not directly confirm TPLF’s claim of a million strong men and women in arms. They do nevertheless prove the demographic potential Tigray *Kilil* had to raise such a force. The projected 2020 numbers equate to two and half million men, women and boys between the ages of 14 and 37 the night of November 4, 2020 (see brief notes below the table for projection methodology). TPLF’s pseudo alpha launched this day’s nightly massacre buoyed by tantalizingly surreal certainties of harnessing this demographic potential to score countless victories culminating in a triumphant do over. The do over would, of course, be a return to power in the nation’s capital for another quarter century of rule over what the alphas thought would be an emaciated fragmented Ethiopia that is at war with itself. As the esteemed reader knows, it did not end that way.

**Table 1. Population of Tigray by Select Age Groups (2007 Census)<sup>5</sup>**

Age group in 2007	Male 2007	Female 2007	Age group in 2020	Death Rate Per 1000	Male, projected (2020) **	Female, projected (2020)
1 -- 4	259,796	251,414	14 - 17	2	253,121	244,955
5 -- 9	324,407	316,894	18 - 22	3	311,980	304,755
10 -- 14	315,241	299,331	23 - 27	4	299,236	284,133
15 -- 19	244,674	251,827	28 - 32	5	229,238	235,940
20 -- 24	175,573	186,931	33 - 37	6	162,360	172,863
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,319,691</b>	<b>1,306,397</b>			<b>1,255,935</b>	<b>1,242,646</b>

**Source:** Based on Summary and Statistical Report of the 2007 Ethiopian Population and Housing Census., Population Size by Age and Sex. Federal Republic of Ethiopia Population Census Commission. Addis Ababa, 2008, PP 113. \*Assumptions based on reference (5). \*\* Example: Projected males aged 14 – 17 in 2020 = Males aged 1 – 4 in 2007 multiplied by  $(1 - 0.002)^t$  t = 2020 – 2013 t = 13

How many of the two and half million Tigrian young men women and boys (yes boys were deployed too) in the last two columns of Table 1 ended up dead following the national military's response to the November 4 nightly massacre? Only time will tell. Another war quote, this time by Herber Hoover, would be fitting here: "older men declare war but it is the young who must die".

### **More on TPLF's Pseudo Alpha Males: Obituary First**

Alpha is a reference to the highest-ranking male in social hierarchies of the animal world. It turns out that the term pseudo alpha also exists (I thought I invented the pseudo part, but no). The Urban Dictionary<sup>6</sup> (a bible for America's preteens seeking to burnish their street cred) defines alpha male as someone who is completely fraudulent and lacks any of the real attributes of an alpha while conversely acting like one.

But why use the word obituary? Is TPLF dead? The answer is quite unequivocally, yes. The paper-tiger TPLF which passed off for decades as an irreproachable slash invincible politico-military force, is now dead. Born in February 1976 in cave/tunnel formations of the rugged hillsides surrounding Hagere Mariam, Tigray, TPLF and its pseudo alpha succumbed to brutal onslaughts by a disquieted fighting youths led at the helm by the one and only Abiy Ahmed. More about the Prime Minister later. TPLF died near its original place of birth - in Kola Tembien Work Amba cave/tunnel formations of the rugged hillsides surrounding Hagere Mariam, in December, 2020. Despite the punishing onslaught it received, TPLF's cause of death was ruled a suicide, exhibit #1 being the November 4<sup>th</sup> nightly attack on *Semien Ezz*.

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*The pseudo alpha's early years:* Despite the harshness of its formative years compounded by grueling droughts of the 1970s and 80s depriving its host - Tigrian mothers and fathers – of ability to provide sustenance, TPLF was able to weather devastating battle field losses. It did so aided by demography – Tigray's bottom-heavy age structure providing continuous supply of fighting men and women - and by commandeering international food aid to buy arms. The mid to late 1980's brought the pseudo alpha a reversal of fortune with ramped up battle-front assistance from the Eritrean side as Mengistu Hailemariam's flailing erratic headship atop a weakened chain of command and a demoralized army left the ranks of *Derg's* fighting youth dispirited and in disarray. Propelled by Mengistu's departure and the façade of inclusiveness EPRDF brought, the pseudo alpha took control of a nation grappling to shake off the shackles of a communist experimental debacle.

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*Coming to power:* The 1990s and 2000s saw TPLF grow into adulthood with coincidental collapse of the Soviet Union freeing up hundreds of billions of Western aid dollars a substantial chunk of which was allegedly routed to the National Bank of Ethiopia only to be siphoned off by the pseudo alpha in tens of billions for safe keeping in Euro-Asian and US Banks. It is widely claimed that much, too much, was also spent buying off lackies and so-called federalists - henchmen masquerading as heads of nations and nationalities - to tear apart Ethiopia at the seams with ethnicity as the preferred line of cleavage. Time eventually ran out on the pseudo alpha as their ways grew too old for the times, with the death of its founder Meles Zenawi in 2012 hastening its inevitable demise.

## **War is Peace: Commander in Chief Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed**

My third and final war quote, “war is peace”, is by George Orwell. Remember the census day of October 11, 1994? Fate has brought another shine on this date, for October 19 was the day in 2019 (25 years later to the date) when the Nobel Committee in Oslo, Finland announced the winner of the 2019 Nobel Prize for Peace. Abiy Ahmed was just seventeen years old on October 11, 1994. The Nobel Committee might have as well awarded him a prize for saving a nation they declared themselves to be a citizen of (committee members had declared themselves to be Ethiopians citing Lucy). There is no denying, and he has admitted as much, that the seventeen-year-old had been preparing for his premiership role all his 25 years since.

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Having spent two thirds of my life abroad listening to, and on occasions meeting with, the great political, legal, and scientific minds of the world, I find myself at a loss trying to pin down an all rounded (repeat all rounded) equivalent for the one and only Abiy Ahmed. And I believe that demography (at 43, he is the youngest leader in Africa) more than college degree, is the prime factor. I also attended a December 19, 2020 conference in Addis

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Ababa titled Ethiopia 2050, joined in by the country’s bright minds and top-notch academics. Lo and behold, Abiy Ahmed has us all conference participants beat to the punch! I saw footage of him declaring that he sees Ethiopia in 2050 as the second most powerful nation in Africa. I believe that high intelligence quotient (IQ), natural-born leader instincts, and 25 years of readiness (having been anointed King by his mother) have a lot to do

with his all roundedness. Although I would not go that far on account of my less than stellar religious credentials, I would throw it out there that the late Professor Mesfin Woldemariam never retracted, or revised, or watered-down his statement that he thought Abiy Ahmed was sent by God to help Ethiopia turn a new leaf in its historic chapter by bringing true unity among its people and by ensuring democracy, freedom, and prosperity for all.

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“Chaos of the last two and half years, orchestrated and financed by TPLF’s pseudo alpha, egged on by power-hungry returnee diaspora locking arms with egotistical political opportunists, threatened to produce alternative narratives about Abiy Ahmed and his character. And they almost succeeded.”

and his character. And they almost succeeded. He has been maligned, disparaged, denounced and made to dodged bullets and grenades at every turn. Echoes of “down, down Abiy ” have rang through corridors and alleyways in national capitals of Europe and North America including by individuals who have never set foot on Ethiopia’s soil. His book - *Medemer* - was burned on live video in Oromiya, his region of birth. It did not matter that much, or not at all, that what was put out there about Abiy was blatantly untrue, for falsehood itself had found equivalency with freedom of expression and democracy in the minds of a populace that has never known true freedom or democracy. Pundits, opinion writers, pseudo intellectuals, federalist secessionists, and political newbies made Abiy-bashing fair game. Regardless, he has indisputably risen from a prisoner Prime Minister status to a vanquisher of TPLF whose ashy relics are destined for the dustbins of history assisted by demography. By demography, I am once again referencing Ethiopia’s twenty and thirty something year old men and women in uniform and the forty or fifty something year old generals. Having said this about demography, and acknowledging the truths now permeating the pregnant air of contented calm on account of new war victories referenced in the opening passages of today’s article, my hopes are firmly pinned to the fighting youths’ generals’ future peace making (not war making) abilities and actions.

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## Revisiting my June 13 Article<sup>7</sup>

In a Reporter article, the Challenges of Demography and Democracy in Ethiopia (June 13, 2020), I wrote this: “The whirlwind ride could give one a whiplash except for the calm manners and call for unity – *Medemer* – espoused by the new leader who may have

“The whirlwind ride could give one a whiplash except for the calm manners and call for unity – *Medemer* – espoused by the new leader who may have subconsciously discovered the built-up wave of demographic momentum in the country and its capacity to wipe away everything in its path unless managed with care and due diligence.”

subconsciously discovered the built-up wave of demographic momentum in the country and its capacity to wipe away everything in its path unless managed with care and due diligence.” At the risk of being unashamedly glib, I would hasten to assert that I was right. The consignment of TPLF to the dustbins of history was consummated by none other than the youth bulge I referenced in that article and the masterful harnessing of this force by PM Abiy Ahmed. I also wrote this: “With readers’ permission, I would like to start by laying out the main premise – that, in my view, and given Ethiopia’s youthful age structure, activist leaders of Ethiopia’s youth movement will not be a force for stability in the long run unless they mend their ways”. Right again! All three (without exception)

of the most prominent activists I had in mind – Jawar Mohammed, Bekele Gerba, and Eskindir Nega - are now in jail.

My June 13 article started with this opening statement: “Do not ask me why former President Lemma Megersa’s trip to Bahir Dar and his declaration of Ethiopian-ness as an addiction became the launching pad – a time-stamp – for my near-compulsive tracking of

the travails of Ethiopian politics". It ended by concluding that "Ethiopian-ness does not have to remain an addiction— just a principled acceptance coming from somewhere deep in one's own convictions". Though history will show kindness and reverence for his role in the launch of a movement that jettisoned TPLF to its final destination in Kola Tembien Work Amba cave/tunnel formations of the rugged hillsides surrounding Hagere Mariam, Lema Megersa's declaration of addiction to Ethiopian-ness did not proved to be a principled acceptance coming from somewhere deep in his own convictions. As a result, our hope for democracy, peace, and prosperity in the next decade and beyond are singularly pinned onto the hopes, aspirations and actions of Ethiopians themselves, the selfless, indefatigable, and incorruptible leadership of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, and a free and fair national election in 2013 (Ethiopian calendar).

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Last but not least, a revisit of my objection to an article in Addis Standard titled "Dangerous Interregnum: Anatomy of Ethiopia's Mismanaged Transition" is warranted. It sought to highlight the author's conviction that the reform movement was being mismanaged by the PM. I disagreed with the author's viewpoints but called it a family feud (gross naivete on my part given recent revelations of the author's alleged coordination with TPLF and its pseudo alpha). I called it family feud then on account of the writer and I growing up

in the same sleepy town of Nekemt (I hear that it is sleepy no more) attending the same schools. Lo and behold, the Professor and resident of these great United States is now on a most wanted list put out by Ethiopia's Federal Police.

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