

Research article

Ethnic-based Online Hate Speech in Ethiopia: Its Typology and Context

Tadesse Megersa^{1,2*} and Abebaw Minaye²

¹Department of Psychology, Ambo University, Ethiopia

²School of Psychology, College of Education and Behavioral Science, Addis Ababa University

*Correspondent author email: noh16509@gmail.com

Abstract: *Using language that devalues others is known to be the royal road to enemy-making, identity based conflict and genocide. Parallel to the explosive growth of social media users in Ethiopia, hate speech has increased to the point where it is threatening the social fabric of its people. The present archival qualitative study presents a conceptual grounded theory to explore and explain the various types of ethnic-based hate speech and the contexts in which they are embedded in present Ethiopia. To this end, data were manually collected every fortnight from July 2021- February 2022, from the public space of ten Facebook accounts, four YouTube news channels, and four Twitter accounts that are purposefully identified as hot spots. By employing inductive coding technique; codes, concepts and categories were generated and analyzed. The findings showed four types of hate speech: dehumanization, enemification, devaluation, and desire to attack and evict as well as five main contexts for the expressions: competition and disagreement over history and resource, the conflict in the North, lack of tolerance of diversity, failure to uphold law and order and destructive roles of the elite. In addition, key concepts are identified which explain how hate speech occurs.*

Finally, it is recommend that we should deal with the identified contexts, enhance media literacy and tolerance of diversity and counter toxic intergroup narratives.

Keywords: *Dehumanization, Enemification, Devaluation, Hate speech, Social media*

Article history: *Received 10 March, 2023; Accepted 31 May, 2023*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20372/ejss.v9i1.1643>

1. Introduction

Both globally and in Ethiopia, we have been witnessing a disturbing groundswell of hate speech (UN, 2019; FDRE, 2020). Public discourse on social media is weaponized and is characterized by incendiary rhetoric including hate speech (UN, 2019). Hate speech, which some call the language of hatred, is the process and outcome of enemy-making. Indeed, it is probably among few pairs of words that evoke a diverse range of feelings, perspectives, and reactions (ARTICLE-19¹, 2015). Despite the ubiquity and virulence of hate speech, the term is used in everyday discourse as a generic term and multiple meanings are attached to it (Sellars, 2016). Besides the contentious nature of the term "hateful" (UN, 2019), speeches could be disguised within the right to free speech (Sellars, 2016). Below, we have provided two broader definitions, followed by a third that we used for this study. The first definition is provided by the UN:

Any kind of communication in speech, writing or behavior, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, color, descent, gender or other identity factor (UN, 2019, P:2).

The Ethiopian Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression Proclamation defines hate speech as “speech that deliberately promotes hatred, discrimination or attack against a person or a discernable group of identity, based on ethnicity, religion, race, gender or disability” (FDRE, 2020, p: 2). While the above two definitions share the attacking nature of hate speech, they do vary in the details included in the definitions. For example, the second definition includes *intentionality*, which adds another layer of difficulty to the process of identifying hate speech. Due to the scope of our study (i.e., ethnic-based) and to bring the concept closer to our observation, however, we used the definition below:

Hate speech is words of incitement and hatred that, based on ethnic identity, advocates, threatens, or encourages violent acts or a climate of prejudice and intolerance (Gagliardone et. al., 2014), or expressions that are degrading, harassing, or stigmatizing which affects a group’s dignity, reputation and status in society (Ørstavik, 2015).

Even though the causes of hate speech are myriad and complex, we have categorized them into toxic narrations, sociopolitical factors and individual level factors. With regard to *toxic narration*, parts of hate speech are the result of negative intergroup narratives which are characterized by mutual accusation and portraying targets in devalued manner (Bar-Tal et al., 2014). Regarding the *sociopolitical milieu*, politicians supply hateful narratives to their followers (Glaeser, 2002) influencing whom they should hate and how much they should hate to vary

¹a human rights organization that works to defend and promote freedom of expression and freedom of information

according to the political milieu (Bar-Tal et al., 2014). In addition, hate speech is more likely to occur in the presence of group conflict and competition over resources, elections and regime change, high level of poverty and unemployment and existence of a weak legal system (Benesch, 2014).

Individual level factors that contribute to hatred and hate speech include personality traits, mainly antisocial personality disorder², (Livesley, 2001), low level of diversity tolerance and poor emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) and low level of media literacy (Glaeser, 2002). Collective identity could also be included in the list to make our factors four. According to Social Identity Theory, for example, individuals seek to achieve a positive and collective self-esteem partly by derogating relevant out-groups. Furthermore, individuals could join hate speech circles due to affiliation motive, which is a desire to fit in and not to be at odds with one's own group (Osborne & Frost, 2004).

The painful evidence from history shows that negative intergroup attitudes such as those manifested in prejudice and negative stereotypes have damaging consequences (Bar-Tal et al., 2014). Through the construction of a common enemy myth, and portrayal of others in devalued manner, hate speech separates and excludes the targets from the community of humankind, reduces their social standing and acceptance, prevents them from civic and democratic participation (Waldron, 2012) and increases their vulnerability to various forms of violence such as deportation, segregation, discrimination and genocide (Benesch, 2014). Hate speech is thought to desensitize haters (Soral et al. 2018) and hence contributes to genocidal acts such as those committed in Rwanda, Bosnia, Myanmar and Germany during the Nazi regime (Morrock, 2010; Smith, 2011).

Hate speech in Ethiopia has become a pressing social problem for at least three reasons. First, local studies and government reports show that hate speech is threatening social harmony, national unity and human dignity (FDRE, 2020; Muluken, et al., 2021; Tadesse and Tilahun, 2019). Ayele (2020) even argued that the level of ethnic hostility in Ethiopian media is comparable to Radio des Mille Collines, a radio in Rwanda known to have contributed to the 1994 genocide. Second, as compared to other media platforms, hate speech in Ethiopia is mainly circulated on social media (Skjerdal & Mulatu, 2021). While there are around 6.5 million active social media users in Ethiopia in January 2021, the figure is projected to reach 48.6 million by 2025 (Statista.com³). In fact, social media contributes to polarization by providing users anonymity that help them feel safe to freely speak out, by enabling conflicting parties to insult and accuse each other, while strengthening discussions among like-minded individuals (Sunstein, 2009) and by generating media hype (IFES, 2018). Since online hate speech signals offline conflict (ARTICLE-19, 2015), examining hate speech helps to take proper action in advance.

²is a pervasive pattern of irresponsible behavior and disregard for the rights of others

³ A global web platform that delivers data such as social media statistics

Third, the dominant hate speech observed is that of ethnic-based which has psychological character and discursive resources which have the potential to degenerate into violence (Malešević, 2004). Skjerdal and Mulatu (2020) for example, showed how some Ethiopian media were ethnicized, used for political agenda, and contributed to polarization and the rise of hate speech.

Nonetheless, while ethnic-based hate speech on social media is a pressing problem, there are scant empirical studies that examine the types of hate speech and the contexts they occur. To our best knowledge, the available local studies check its occurrence, measure its prevalence, assess how ethnification of media is contributing to polarization, or how ethnic nationalists abuse the media. No study has so far assessed how hate speech occurs and circulates, the contexts in which it happens and types of hate speech, which could help us understand how the parties involved portray each other (Osborne & Frost, 2004). We contend that understanding these could shed light on how we can intervene to prevent it from its source.

Hence, the objective of this study based on a conceptual grounded theory is aimed at exploring and explaining types of ethnic-based hate speech, the contexts they are embedded in, and how hate speech occurs and is intensified on social media (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

2. Research Methods

Data for this study is collected by identifying hot spots – social media accounts or pages which are known by the researchers to be a hub for the circulation of hate speech. To this end, the researchers first identified Facebook, YouTube and Twitter to be the main sites for the circulation of hate speech in Ethiopia. Then, ten Facebook accounts, four Twitter pages and four YouTube news channels were purposefully identified.

Table 1: Hot Spots

Platforms	Account holder (code)	TA.D	TA.B	EL.B.	ABR.D	TFI	ZE.B	AC.T	GT	DW	AS
Facebook	≠ of followers	370.2k	170.	104 k	156 k	109.5k	124.	126.9k	126.	151k	162
YouTube	Account holder	Tigray Media		Abbay Media		Kello Media		Reyot Media		-	-
	≠ of subscribers	144k		381k		112k		131k		-	-
Twitter	Account holder	Habtamu		Kindeya		Girma Gutema		Daniel Kibiret		-	-
	≠ of followers	118k		120 k		95K		114K		-	-

≠ Number; K= 1000; the numbers in table1 are valid only during hotspot identification

Posting or sharing ethnically offensive message, having huge number of followers or subscribers (more than 100,000 for Facebook, 50,000 for Twitter and 100,000 subscribers for YouTube), and using at least both Amharic and English in their means of communication are the three criteria used to select the hot spots. At this juncture, it is necessary to disclose that the hate speech content collected from the public space of the hot spots were not necessarily produced by these account holders. They might save or share others' hate speeches, or host discussions in which

guests could offend others or they could also be the object of the hate speech. Hence, the hate speeches collected and analyzed were produced by a mix of individuals including high-profile politicians, activists, scholars, religious leaders, ordinary social media users including Ethiopians in the Arab world and the accounts holders.

Working definitions and a checklist were employed to help identify hate speech. Then, based on a schedule set, the public space of each hot spot was manually browsed once in a fortnight from July 2021 to February 2022 in two phases. Texts and pictures were directly copied and pasted while videos were downloaded and transcribed. In this study, only hate speeches that were ethnically-based, target ethnic Oromos, ethnic Amharas, and ethnic Tigrayans, and posted in the last three years (at the time of data collection) were collected and analyzed. The reason for this was the majority of hate speech in Ethiopia was generally related to ethnic-based politics; the groups are mainly implicated in it; and that the time period was marked by instability and rise of hate speech in the country (Skjerdal & Mulatu, 2021; Ayele, 2020).

The collected data were analyzed by employing inductive coding. First, irrelevant items such as incomplete sentences, useless symbols, and Arabic letters were removed from the dataset. Second, the authors immersed themselves into the dataset so as to be familiar with the content. Then, the authors managed to infer the subjective meaning of the contents by putting themselves in the shoes of the source (to infer what the source meant) and the target of the speech (what the object of the speech would more likely feel about the expression). This also helped us to understand the overall hate speech scenario, beyond the actual hate content.

While collecting data, interpretation was made right on the spot based on the prevailing contexts and reflective journals were written. Data collection and the analysis were made in an iterative manner, but in two phases. The first phase is to generate possible codes and categories from the dataset. As the data collection proceeded (in step two) the focus was narrowed to collect information that helped reflect the categories and concepts that required further development (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Moreover, care was taken so as to make the analysis not partial (i.e. leaving out significant data or giving more weight to some rich data categories at the expense of outliers) and comprehensive (i.e. does not omit key phenomena), but above all relied heavily on the rich data rather than reflecting on pre-existing ideas supported by highly selective examples. Nonetheless, while outliers were well recognized, reasonable distance was maintained not to present rare but colorful observation as theoretically and practically significant instances. Prolonged engagement with the dataset, data triangulation across sources, using external raters to assist with the coding process, documenting all raw data, writing reflective journals, and making the coding and analysis process categorically clear and in sufficient detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006) were mechanisms used to maintain the methods' robustness. When presenting each theme, thick description was provided such as using direct quotes, pictures, video links, and the contexts they were framed in.

Human Subject Protection: Because the study collected publicly available data, without communicating with the human subjects, concerns for human subjects brings little ethical concern. Yet, we have concealed particular profile names from direct quotes and images to prevent them from unintended harm.

3. Results

This section presents key findings obtained. The findings showed there are four types of hate speech: dehumanization, enemification, devaluation, and attacking and repelling. These are presented below, along with their subthemes, contexts and illustrations.

3.1. Dehumanization

The dataset contains expressions that depict groups as objects, animals, demons or worse. We considered such expressions as dehumanization as they all depict the target as non-human. Table 2 summaries the various phrases and words that referred to animals while describing targets, the ethnic group mostly referred to and the main context the expressions were found.

Table 2: Animalization Expressions across Groups and their Contexts

Animalization expressions	Main Contexts	Labeled group
‘daytime hyenas’, ‘Bugs’, ‘chameleon’, ‘Serpents’, ‘lower than beasts’,	Conflict in the North ⁴	Tigrayans
‘Animals’, ‘Cattle’, ‘herds’, ‘worse than beasts’, ‘lower than animals’,	Irreecha ⁵ celebration; Shashemene ⁶ town, and internally displaced people	Ruin of Oromos Internally
‘Apes of Ras Dashin mountain’, ‘donkeys’, ‘dogs’, ‘herd’, ‘animals’	The conflict in the North, discussion over land ownership	Amharas

Because of the common element these expressions have, using animals, we considered such expressions as ‘animalization’. As illustrated, an apparently ethnic Amhara and presumably critic of the leading political force in the Amhara National Regional State is quoted calling ethnic Amharas as donkey.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/eth.zion.elias/videos/3405468382884611/>). In another context, another Facebook user seemingly from ethnic Oromo, shared a picture of donkeys with captions bearing the name Fano⁷, as seen in Figure 1 below.

⁴ A deadly conflict between federal government and TPLF, from 3 November 2020 and 3 November 2022

⁵ Irreecha is thanksgiving festival celebrated at the end of the winter by ethnic Oromos.

⁶ saw massive destruction the day after a prominent artist Hachalu Hundessa (of Oromo descent) was killed

⁷ armed group who claim to be a living savior for Amhara people and the Ethiopian spirit. Fano is known for supporting the Federal government during the conflict in the North.



Figure 1: Portraying Fano as Donkey

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=5235709903193774&set=a.339568829474597>

The caption in Figure 1 could be translated as ‘Eritrean government is creating job opportunities to Fanos and they are registering to get the chance.’ The satire the source used is that he mentioned ‘Fano’ in the expression but showed donkeys in the picture – apparently to mean Fanos are donkeys.

Animalization of outgroups is also well noted against ethnic Oromos and ethnic Tigrayans, as the following tweet linked to: <https://twitter.com/HabtamuAyalew21/status/1387972410675187715> shows:

"ከብቶች እየመሩን ፣ በከብቶች ጎዳና እበት ፋንዲያ እንጂ ፣ የምን ብልጽግና !!!"

The above excerpt from a Twitter page of a high-profile self-claimed analytical journalist says ‘we are led by herds, so (expect) no prosperity/progress but animals’ dung.’ This quote apparently targets the Prosperity Party (the leading political party in Ethiopia at the moment) which is repeatedly portrayed by its critiques to be unfairly controlled by ethnic Oromo politicians. To crystalize this animalization expression, the above tweet has obtained the following response:

it's actually disgrace to the animals. Those ppl don't have any creature to match. They are alian.

Source: <https://twitter.com/Kasaraya2/status/1388117953175031811>

This tweet, in response to the previous one, claims that animals are superior to the target group. In essence it depicts the target group as less than an animal. In addition, in a video an apparently Tigrayan was heard in a meeting, saying, ‘We considered ethnic Wolaitas as humans and turned the ethnic Oromos from Animal to Human’, which is applauded by the audience (<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=saved&v=403268334442223>).

Animals are frequently used in dehumanizing expressions as behavioral analogies, in which the target group is assumed to lack or possess the animal trait in question. For example, the word

‘daylight hyena’ was used in recent years in Ethiopia mainly to refer to the accomplices of Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF), which was accused by the Ethiopian Federal Government of the lethal grenade attack at Masqal Square on people gathering there to support the PM Abiy Ahmed, on June 15, 2018. This expression was used again to refer to the same target for presumably attacking the Ethiopian National Defense Forces at midnight while they were asleep. Apparently, ‘Daylight hyena’ metaphorically would mean the target is greedy and has belligerent propensity that can be revealed when conditions allow. During the conflict in the North, equivalent expressions such as ‘termites’ (implies working furtively to slowly kill its prey), chameleon (i.e. unreliable) and ‘serpent’ (evil) were frequently observed on social media, all of which contributing to portraying some ethnic Tigrayans as conspiring with and spying for TPLF. The following excerpt taken from Facebook illustrates this, ‘this is not the first time ethnic Tigrayans betrayed ethnic Amharas. During the reign of King Yohannes, the Tigray people collaborated with British colonials and attacked King Tewodros.’ Here, King Yohannes and King Tewodros are portrayed to be representatives of ethnic Tigrayans and ethnic Amharas, respectively.

In the same vein, some of the dataset's contents demonstrate how ethnic Oromos are referred to as "cattle" and "herd," as well as other analogous hateful expressions like "groups with no mind to think with". There were also ways in which the ethnic groups were portrayed to be sub-human. Figure 2 shows an unidentified person being allegedly burnt alive by an armed man.



Figure 2: Allegedly burning victims alive

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/yonas.abebe.1428/posts/pfbid02ngbqSZ7ZFojVkxX5Eo1p3SwBJPRAXthhUmPEbfw3QVKppdwRhhwDYT552RfKRaoGI>

The caption in Figure 2 assumes the use of ‘animals’ as an insult to humans is a misnomer and a disgrace to the animals because animals have better conduct than humans.

Our finding also shows how outgroups are portrayed as some kind of useless or harmful object, to be eliminated, ignored, or thrown away such as stones, animal waste, piles of litter, weeds, cancer and placenta. We labeled such portrayal of others as “objectification”. Table 3 shows sample objectification excerpts and the contexts they occurred.

Table 3: Objectification of Outgroups

Sample Excerpt	Immediate Context
These are stones who stood near other stones’ (against Qeerro)	Ireecha celebration in Addis Ababa
Congratulations, Amhara is freed from cancers’ (against TPLF)	The conflict in the North
Weeds and cancers (against TPLF)	The conflict in the North

An illustration for objectification is a live transmission aired on Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) in which a renowned professor portrayed TPLF as cancer, in the context of the conflict in the North. He said, ‘Cancer is treated with radiation and chemicals. If one cell survives it will replicate and destroy the host. TPLF is a cancer. We must systematically eradicate all of them.’ To this hateful expression, an apparently Tigrayan social media user responded as follows. We should remember that a Weyane means a Tigrayan, *especially when it is said by Amhara politicians*. The use of “weeds” and “cancer” is also evident from the following tweet by a high profile politician.

የጠምነው ጠላት የኢትዮጵያ ነቀርሳ የሆነውን ጠላት ነው። ጃንታው ያገኘውን
የፖለቲካ ሥልጣን የገዛ ሀገሩን ለማፍረስ የተጠቀመ ምናልባት በታሪክ ብቸኛው
ቡድን ነው። አብሮ የኖረ ሰይጣን በቶሎ አይነቀልም እንደሚባለው በግራ በቀኝ
መፍጨርጨሩ አይቀርም።

በርግጠኝነት ግን ጃንታው መልሶ እንዳይበቅል ሆኖ ይነቀላል።

Source: <https://twitter.com/abiyahmedali/status/1416666228907728906?s=21>

As seen in this tweet, TPLF was mainly portrayed as “cancer” and “demon”. In addition, portrayal of groups as “wastes” and “by-products” of animals is also evident in the dataset. For example; during the conflict in the North, a government officer publicly said, ‘Ethiopia is burying its placenta’. “Placenta” apparently means ‘pseudo offspring’ and presumably represents being useless. Objectification is also evident in inhumanly treating members of the targets group, (Figure 2)(source:<https://www.facebook.com/armofethiopia/posts/677902023656743>).

The dataset also contains a viral video, from an apparently Tigrayan woman, that indiscriminately portrayed the entire ethnic Amharas as ‘sons of witches’, ‘Debtera⁸’, and magicians (Source: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=saved&v=423859649440777>). This and many more expressions are found to portray an ethnic group as demons or Satan or its collaborators such as deadly beasts with the power to shed and/or drink humans’ blood. These expressions collectively make up the third sub-theme of dehumanization identified in this study, which we have labeled as ‘demonization’. Demons, monsters, messengers of the dark, cursed groups, decedents of nonhuman cursed race, blood suckers, cruel and savage, deadly serpents, killers and Debteras are key words found in the dataset used in various contexts to demonize others. Qeerro⁹, Fano, TPLF, and Minilik II are frequently portrayed in the social media as demons and its associates (by the relevant outgroups). All these demonizing words evoke fear and terror and elicit a fight or flight response.

⁸ a respected religious figure in Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Churches who is well versed in aspects of the liturgy, and who sings hymns for churchgoers. Yet, some use the word to mean witches.

⁹ While it traditionally means ‘bachelor’, within the political movement it symbolizes the struggle of unarmed Oromo youth, mainly in protesting against the TPLF led political coalition called EPRDF.

The following excerpt which refers to the alleged killing of innocent civilians in Wollega Zone of Oromia region illustrates demonization, ‘I think of Oromia as a place where rude monsters who are cold-blooded and merciless for infants and pregnant women are living in’. Another illustration of demonization reads: ‘You Satan, messengers of the prince of dark...you killed us via the beasts [i.e. soldiers], you made us orphans, brutally killed innocents, demolished our holy sites with artilleries, killed our priests, raped our women, you are deadly serpents....’ This excerpt is a comment given to a video ‘በሐረርሬሮቻችን ገርዞ ሚገዥ የፋና አባላት ጀገኑ’ broadcast on Amhara Communications on September 1, 2021 in the context of the conflict in the North (source: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=212084204286251>). In a discussion over Geda system and ownership of land of Addis Ababa, by three academic elites, a discussant is quoted saying this:

Before the Oromo invaded, scholars had been living in Shewa province. The Oromo clan brought with them acts of barbarism like cutting genitalia when they arrived in Ethiopia's Shewa province. There is also proof that the Abune Abraham monastery's monks and residents had their genitalia cut by the Oromos. They used to emasculate others. I think that their arrival in Ethiopia caused the spiritual decline of Ethiopian people.

(Source: <https://www.facebook.com/achamyeleh.tamiru.3/videos/3397427523612506>)

As we have seen in the ‘sub-human’ descriptions, the dataset also shows expressions which portray out-groups as ‘worse than demons’. For example, one expression in the dataset described a group as "worse than demon" and "inherently and structurally evil collaborators" (<https://www.facebook.com/watch?ref=saved&v=986232581984357>), while another described a group as "having more devilish techniques than Satan does."

3.2. Enemification

Hate speech is also manifested in expressions that portray targets as exploiters, land grabbers, oppressors, assimilators and killers of in-groups’ ancestors. Because the common theme running throughout such expressions is seeing others as enemies, we set conceptual boundaries to such expressions under the label “enemification”. In some of such expressions, the tone seems strong as seen in using the adjective ‘historical’, ‘inherent’ or ‘eternal’ to the label ‘enemy’. In many instances, enemification takes accusatory narratives and portrays others as a potential threat to the present and the future life of in-groups who are portrayed as sole victims. This theme is manifested in Figure 3 and Figure 4, wherein targets are depicted as land grabbers.



Figure 3: Accusation against ethnic Oromos Figure 4: Accusation against ethnic Amharas:

<https://encrypted-tbn0.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:AND9GcTNhRSIM>

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=saved&v=357017799188991>

mZpJIHTmualY7dnGVf6ZUXXCBAQ3zEHdU_QV_FZ6iCpCUPLY9FR9wEbFKd2Q6s&usqp=CAU

Figure 3, which are found to be photo-shopped, with added captions in Amharic which is translated as ‘Register! The clear robbery of the Oromuma has been evident to all concerned. Since its establishment, Nech-sar National Park in Gamo Zone in southern Ethiopia, tourism...’ In the post, the source accuses the Oromos as if they seized the land of Southern Nations, Nationalities and People’s Region (SNNPR). The source of the post put a wrong caption to an Oromo politician standing in Borena National Park as if the site is in Nech-Sar National Park, which is managed by the SNNPR. This picture also reminds us that hate speech is partly achieved through disinformation by twisting realities. The Amharic caption, which is added by the one who edited the original photo, reads ‘not only the Earth, the sky is also ours’ which implies having insatiable desire to grab everything they come across. Figure 4, on the other hand, is an instance of accusation against ethnic Amhara by portraying them as people grabbing/invading Oromos’ land in the name of establishing churches and calls on ethnic Oromos to be cautious of what he labeled as ‘the invading Amharas’. In addition, Figure 5 below which illustrates how targets are portrayed as potential land grabbers is captioned, ‘Our adversary's intention is to systematically eradicate ethnic Oromos and give the land to the settlers. They called the technique of evicting the indigenous Oromos and replacing by the invaders 'alerting citizen.’

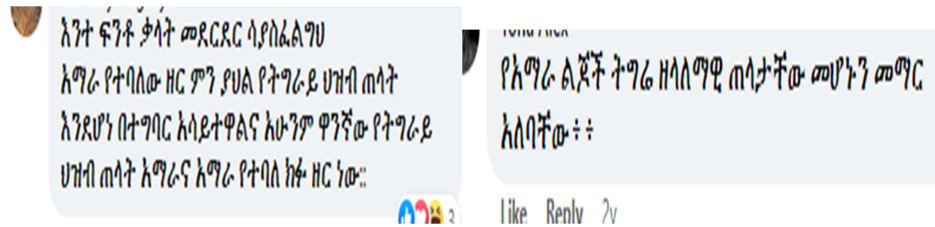


Figure 5: Enemification during the 2021 Election

Source: <https://twitter.com/BirhanSegni/status/1405217512715788288>

In the same token, Tigrayans are not immune to the accusation for having incurable desire to invade others’ land, as seen in the following deleted post from Facebook: ‘Not only TPLF, but also the entire Tigrayans want to grab others’ land; they are expansionist in their approach....’

The second sub-theme found under enemification is the portrayal of targets as historical enemies and unreliable partner with the tendency of betraying others. In the next two excerpts, comments made in response to a post, two social media users who appear to be members of different ethnic groups accuse one another's group (i.e. mutual accusation).



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/achamyeleh.tamiru.3/posts/pfbid0jiVDeNYuaVtfhFRpuLXEnm4BSM9jmKfj5z1cDDc3TmUWWVnJCNxgC12gNaihyRI>

As it can be inferred from the above two excerpts, one significant finding from our analysis is the role reversal or reprisal that occurs in the accusation or enemification, whereby the group that was accused in one context becomes the accuser in a different context or time.

In the context of the conflict in the North, a high-profile politician made a televised speech, on July 25, 2021, in which he referred to Tigrayans as enemies to Ethiopia and added, ‘We will not take rest until we have annihilated this enemy.’ This speech, which we believe to be a nearly slip of the tongue (at least for referring to Tigrayans than TPLF), is a highly incendiary remark which went viral and caused huge anger. Needless to say, this and other hateful expressions found in the context of the conflict in the North capture the zeitgeist and show how individuals succumbed to it, which made many assume that their lives were under serious threats (Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcQCFIzDAho>).

3.3. Devaluing

In some of the contents, targets are described as burden and cheap people (e.g. daily laborers, slaves, beggars, commercial sex workers, and hunger strike), and uncivilized or backward (e.g., unsanitary, uneducated) in ways that evoke contempt and disgust. We labeled the conceptual representations of these kinds of expressions as “devaluation”. The following quotes illustrate devaluation: ‘The word Tigre came from the Amharic root word ተግሬ (meanings ‘I engage in suffering due to hard work’) which implies the forefathers of Tigrayans were brought by the Axumite Amhara from Yemen as slaves’, ‘Amharas are the same in the past and today too; they make a living by begging and working as commercial sex workers’, and ‘Amharas are ‘leprosy hit people, laborers, settlers’. We encapsulated such devaluing expressions under the sub-theme ‘Cheap’. Devaluation can also reveal itself in another sub-theme, ‘backward’ that portrays the target group as uncivilized, inherently unwise/fools, and uneducated, as seen in this excerpt, ‘The Amhara is living like the apes in the mountains’ and ‘Oromos are stupid, lazy people who don’t like working, and have no skill in their entire history. Labels and adjectives such as ‘nomads’, ‘uncircumcised’, ‘lead life like people in the stone-age, ‘not able to cook and feed themselves’,

and ‘still follow a cow’s tail’ are also contents found in the dataset which represent this sub-theme (<https://www.facebook.com/1357285723/videos/1487984155005519/>).

The third sub-theme identified under devaluation is portrayal of an ethnic group as a group without its own history which includes depiction of ethnic groups as ‘not Ethiopians by origin’, ‘have no good history’, and ‘usurpers of others’ history’ and this refers to mainly disagreements over resources such as land and the Amharic/Geez alphabet and historical issues such as patriotism. An illustration to this is the following excerpt: ‘Oromos have no history of building a nation; but destroying a nation’. In what we called ‘aberration’, another sub-theme under devaluation, ethnic groups are assigned undesirable traits or behavioral tendencies such as being inherently traitors and thieves, as seen on the following post, which is a comment given to the link associated with it.

ኢትዮጵያን ሲከዱ ነው የኖሩት በእንግሊዝ አዘረፉን መቅደላ ላይ በጣሊያን ጊዜ 5 አመቱን አቃጣሪ ባንዳ ሆነው ለጣሊያን ሲሸረግዱ በሽፍትነት ሲዘርፉ ሲገሉ 27 አመቱን ሀገሪቷን ሲዘርፉ ግብረሰዶምን ሲያስፍቱው የስንቱን ተስፍ አጨልመዋል አሁንም አየናቸው ደሴ ላይ አብሮ የኖረን ጎረቤቱን ምን እንዳደረጉት ሊጥ ዘርፈው እህል ከብት ገለው የገበሬው ቤት ውስጥ ተፀዳድተው ይሄ ነው። ኢትዮጵያውያን በገብረሰዶም ስር መሆን

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=saved&v=475409370533745>

The aberration sub-theme is also manifested depicting the target as being the lower ebb of the moral hierarchy such as lacking religion, conscience or a moral compass. The excerpt ‘you are pagan people’ is a typical example of this sub-category.

3.4. Attacking and Repelling

Calls made either to attack or discriminate against the target, or to evict targets, withhold help, or maintaining distance from them make up the fourth category of hate speech which we named *Attacking and Repelling*. This theme is in turn manifested in the following sub-themes. The first one is ‘Direct Call for Attack’ in which calls that request for emotional hardening, registering and identifying potential victims, putting targets into concentration camps, and calls made to attack target outgroups were frequently observed, yet mainly in the context of the conflict in the North. The following two social media posts are presented to illustrate this sub-theme:



NB: this post is deleted or made private

Source: <https://twitter.com/ProfKindeya/status/1455396351315955713>

The above two excerpts illustrate various issues. In the first post, the source labels the out-group as enemies and attributes their being affluent to their exploitive and abusive nature (against in-groups) and request WBO (Oromo Liberation Front) and the entire Oromo people to fight back the target group that was referred to. The word ‘ወጥረ’ which means ‘be firm and committed’ imply the commitment needed to fight back the group identified as enemy. In the second post, the source uses the word ‘virus’ to describe the target group and urges supporters to come together to speed up the process of cleaning the virus, which was supposed to be ongoing at the moment. In the tweet below, a social media user warns that thinking about putting ethnic Tigrayans in concentration camps will backfire on people who are proposing it; the people who proposed it were presumably ethnic Amharas.

ተጋራን ሁሉ ለቅመን ወደ ካምፕ
ማስገባት አለብን ያላቸው አማሮች ነፃ
ጠዋት አማራን ከኦሮሚያ ለቅመን ወደ
ካምፕ ስናስገባ ቅር አይላቸውም ብለን
አናምናለን።

Source: <https://twitter.com/Lolaasaa/status/1454734215514370053>

It has to be noted that although the idea of placing some people in concentration camps was suggested by some during the conflict in the North, primarily for security and safety reasons, some others feared it might encourage genocide. It is worrisome that many of the calls for an assault made during the conflict in the North exploited survival concerns as a motive or justification, which could tempt followers to heed the call in order to avoid the alleged threat. This tendency is termed in the psychology literature as accusation-in-a mirror (Marcus, 2012). Innocent members of out-groups are also targeted for retaliation in the call for action made (scapegoating), as seen in the following excerpt which is in response to the news circulating in the social media about the killing of ethnic Amhara students in Universities found in Oromia region: “We must retaliate by killing Oromo students who are learning in universities found in the Amhara region; otherwise, Amharas will continue suffering such killings.”

As described earlier some of the calls for attack are made by the elite or public figures and persuasive communications are employed, which according to Benesch (2004), make things easier for followers to accept the call. In the excerpt below, for example, a post by a public figure is shared by another social media user but by adding more content to the original post. The overarching message is the target group is unreliable and dangerous, and hence taking action against them is about ensuring survival of an in-group.

• ጦርነቱ ያለው የዘመናት ጎረቤትህ ሆኖ አብሮ አደግህ
ሆኖ ለዘሩ እድልቱ እንተን እኛ ህዝብህን በጠላትነት
ፈርጆ ሞትህን ከሚጠባበቀው ጋር ነው።
• ጦርነቱ ያለው አገርሰህ ካሳደግከው ከሄዱ ጋር ነው።
• ጦርነቱ ያለው ከትግራይ ተነስቶ... See More

ባትራልገደውም አድርገው!!
ከህልውናህ አደበልጥም!!
ከኢትዮጵያ አደበልጥም!!

Source: https://www.facebook.com/Newethiop.9465/posts/281108100687782/?locale=hi_IN

There is also role of interpretation in which a hate speech is extrapolated as call for measure. In Figure 6, for example, demonstrators are seen holding a banner which reads ‘let Oromuma¹⁰ be destroyed’, to which an apparently ethnic Oromo social media user assigned additional meaning beyond what is visible in the banner. This seems part of the art of fueling hatred by evoking stronger emotions.



Figure 6: Interpretation in Hate Speech

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=787191945569499>

In a call to action, the sources can also engage in what we termed as ‘ally formation and separation’ in which the source calls on different out-groups to join hands together against the target group, as illustrated in the following excerpt: ‘Why is that Qeerros are not killed as they kill others? Where is our unity as Ethiopians? We must have one voice and each ethnic group should stand for the others.’

The second subtheme under this theme is ‘warning and threatening’ in which target groups’ survival and wellbeing are told to be conditional in such a way that unless they fulfill certain preconditions (i.e. blacklisting), they will be attacked, killed, deported, etc. as seen in these excerpts: ‘Tigres are chameleons; they will cry sooner or later’, ‘It is necessary to deport these entities who never learn to Madagascar’ (to Oromos), and ‘Unless the settlers of Minilik II keep quiet, they will be deported to their land (to Amharas).’ ‘Cursing and ill thinking’, the third sub-theme, is about expressing the desire to see the misfortune of the out-group and wishing their suffering, as seen in these excerpts: ‘May the womb of Tigrayan mothers be infertile.’ and ‘Even in modern times, ¹¹Gallas worship trees ... God's wrath be upon you’ (in the context of Ireecha celebration).

The fourth sub-theme in this category is ‘distancing and repelling’ out-groups such as withholding help and avoiding befriending them or living with them. The dataset has calls made to members of a specific ethnic group to divorce their spouses if they are members of an out-group, as seen in the following excerpt: ‘Amhara women who marry or have children with Galla or Tigre lousy men, may God make you infertile; may your womb produce worms and cancer!’ In the same vein, a call is made by a high-profile person who advised Tigrayans to boycott Ethiopian owned businesses, mosques and churches. Thwarting help coming from the target ethnic group is also included in our list, as seen in this excerpt: ‘We don’t need your help; you

¹⁰ For many Oromos it is about the essence of being Oromo; yet others assume it has hidden political agenda

¹¹ A pejorative and disparaging term used to refer to the Oromo people.

bastard settlers ...'(https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=saved&v=1179375379178905). This comment was made in response to a social media post that mentioned apparently ethnic Amharas who were mobilizing resources to support Tigrayans, who were supposedly suffering as a result of the conflict in the North. The fifth sub-theme identified under this category is being 'Indifferent' to the pain and suffering of out-groups. This mainly implies expressing happiness when target groups get hurt or lose something valuable such as death of respected members. The intention of the expressions in this sub-theme is more likely to put a stick in the target ethnic group's wound. For example, the dataset included a post with mockery on internally displaced people who are apparently from ethnic Amharas, while another post celebrated the death of Hachalu Hundesa, presumably to irritate his admirers.

4. Discussion

Our findings show four types of hate speech: dehumanization, enemification, devaluation, and attacking and repelling, and five contexts in which they occurred. While we believed that no previous study has identified hate speech types in the way that our study does, the combined findings of available studies provide support for our findings (Benesch, 2014; Article-19, 2015; Giner-Sorolla et al., 2017). Moreover, our study advances the body of literature by introducing the "sub-human" and "worse than demons" expressions which, as to our knowledge, are unknown in the literature. In the "sub-human" and "worse than demon" expressions the target ethnic groups are given extreme versions of undesirable traits that are rare in the animal or demonic world.

Various identity-based violence such as evicting citizens from their residential areas (IDPs), extrajudicial killings, and barbaric acts and vandalism that we observed in various corners of the country are seen to contribute to the rise of hate speech in Ethiopia. As such, we assumed that the failure of the government to uphold law and order has its own share in the hate speech observed. In the same vein, some of 'worse than demon' and "sub-human" expressions we observed emanate from actual heinous deeds committed by members of the ethnic groups labeled as such. We called this instance-based hate speech 'earned reputations'. Earned reputation, in our study, implies the hate speeches are based on real time obliterating criminal episodes that caused the source to be labeled a group as such. It denotes that ethnic groups are dehumanized because of the misdeeds or undesirable acts of their members (i.e. causing damage to the reputation of their own ethnic group), and members of some out-groups think that they deserve the pejorative label. Hence, earned bad reputation assumes presence of members of one's own in-group who expose their in-group to hate speech from other and strengthening of an already held negative stereotype. In line with our observation, Macrae and colleagues noted that when members of an in-group show stereotype-congruent behavior, stereotypes are strengthened and justify the label, even to the extent of challenging conscious attempts to suppress the stereotype (1995). Despite the fact that this observation calls for correcting rogues within one's own group in order to save the group's reputation, it is rare that individuals condemn wrongdoers from within. In support of this, the video link presented on page 9 shows how in-groups applauded a man who was

dehumanizing ethnic outgroups. Indeed, discussions among those who share similar ideas are more likely to endorse the dominant idea in the in-group (Sunstein, 2009).

We have also noted that many of the hate speeches embedded in the historical narratives are claims thought to be evidence by the elite to substantiate their narratives, which are mainly accepted and echoed by their respective followers. We called such thick and ‘document-based’ hate speech ‘textual hate speech’. We contend that textual hate speech challenges the processes of countering hate speech, including the legal measures against it, as haters can appear as if they were presenting factual evidence. In addition, one of an important observation we had is that individuals take it as normal or safe to dehumanize and demean subgroups such as Qeerro, Fano, TPL, which have connections with an entire ethnic group. Yet, most often, we noted that the attacking sub-groups degenerate into intergroup level hate speech.

For the following reasons, therefore, we contend that hate speech is a pressing social problem in Ethiopia. First, as exposure to hate speech on the social media increases, it is more likely that the expressions will become self-evident, desensitizes labelers to the suffering of the victims (Soral, et.al, 2018) and provides social support for violent actions against the victims (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Second, because online hate speech signals offline aggression (Giner-Sorolla et al, 2012), the call for attacking and evicting and other dehumanizing expressions identified requires intervention to reduce their potential link to actual violence (Benesch, 2014; Smith, 2011). Third, our study shows the ripple effect of attacking such as traditional leaders, the elite and history in intensifying hate speech. As cultural symbols can be used as a potential starting point for social chaos (Malešević, 2004), enhancing tolerance of diversity helps counter hate speech. Fourth, many of the enablers that help hate speech to cause violence such as speech made by someone with a high profile, intergroup conflict, economic strain, and poor legal protection from attacks (Benesch, 2014) are prevalent in our study context.

It is important to note that the conflict in the Northern part of Ethiopia has ushered in many hate speech expressions mainly call for attacks and dehumanizing expressions. We contend that the zeitgeist has the power to lead what otherwise were descent and productive individuals to emotional outbursts and hate speech. Hence, the findings of this study should be understood in light of the difficult situations created during the conflict.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The present research identified four types of ethnic-based hate speech on social media: dehumanization, enemification, devaluation and attacks and evictions, and the contexts that created them: competition over history and resource, the conflict in the North, ethnicity and identity, failure to uphold law and order, and the destructive roles of the elite. Our study also identified the ‘sub-human’ and ‘worse than a demon’ expressions and introduced concepts like textual hate speech, earned reputation, and image abusers which have relevance to understanding the mechanism of hate speech on social media.

We have the impression that hate speech is a burden to Ethiopians in general and the three ethnic groups mainly implicated in this study – as objects and subjects of hate speech: ethnic Oromos, ethnic Amharas, and ethnic Tigrayans. The presence of unstable political atmosphere, toxic intergroup narratives, and lack of tolerance of diversity, and poor media appearance of the elite are believed to exacerbate hate speech. We, hence, recommend the following so as to eliminate or mitigate hate speech before it costs us our country. First, the elite should be restrained or helped to adjust their presence on social media so as to contribute to peace we all seek. Second, social media users should be helped in how to constructively deal with historical narratives, and enhance their media literacy and ethnic tolerance. Hate speech content which is archived on social media and offline (which contributes to textual hate speech) should be moderated or removed through media campaign and peace education.

In terms of future research, it would be useful to extend the current findings by examining to what extent online hate speech has contributed to the offline conflict; quantifying the various types of hate speech identified in this study; and examining the role of textual hate speech and earned reputation in the intensification of hate speech. It is also important to extend this study by examining the link between interpersonal level of hate speech and intergroup level of hate speech such as how insulting individuals could degenerate into group level hate speech. Studying how dehumanizing and degrading subgroups (e.g., Qeerro, Fano, and TPLF) degenerate into and promote intergroup hatred and hostility is also crucial. One limitation of this study is that, for some of the hate speech content analyzed in this study, especially comments made by online followers of the elite, we couldn't exactly know to which ethnic group the people who made the speeches belonged and the actual the motive they had. We assumed their ethnic affiliations at face value by just looking at their names and the idea they promoted.

Data Availability Statement: The dataset used in this study can be obtained from the corresponding author and could be available upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no potential conflict of interest.

Acknowledgements: This study is financially supported by the Office of the Vice President for Research and Technology Transfer of Addis Ababa University, French Center for Ethiopian Studies, and the UK Research Innovation and African Research Universities Alliance through the Institute of Peace and Security Studies of Addis Ababa University.

Prologue: This manuscript contains devaluing expressions which could emotionally challenge readers, especially those who are members of the ethnic group directly implicated in the findings. We wish to emphasize that the content of this article consists of personal statements and does not necessarily reflect the views of any particular ethnic group. We advise readers to abstain from fueling hatred by selectively presenting instances presented in this study.

References

- Article-19 (2015). *Hate Speech Explained. A Toolkit*. London. Retrived on june 6, 2021 from <https://www.article19.org/data/files/medialibrary/38231/'Hate-Speech'-Explained---A-Toolkit-%282015-Edition%29.pdf>
- Ayele, AG. (2020). *Ethnic Nationalists Abuse of Media: Lessons of Yugoslavia and Rwanda for Ethiopia*. European Scientific Journal, 16(16), pp. 98–122.
- Bar-Tal, D., Oren, N., & Nets-Zehngut, R. (2014). *Sociopsychological Analysis of Conflict-Supporting Narratives: A general framework*. *Journal of Peace Research*, 51(5), 662–675.
- Benesch, S. (2014). *Countering Dangerous Speech: New Ideas for Genocide Prevention*. DOI: [org/10.2139/ssrn.3686876](https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3686876)
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). *Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology*. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2): 77-101.
- Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) (2020). *Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression Proclamation No.1185/2020*. Available at <http://www.lawethiopia.com/images/>
- Gagliardone, I., Patel, A., & Pohjonen, M. (2014). *Mapping and Analyzing Hate Speech Online: Opportunities and Challenges for Ethiopia*. <https://pcmlp.socleg.ox.ac.uk/mapping-and-analysing-hate-speech-online-opportunities-and-challenges-forethiopia/>
- Giner-Sorolla, R. Leidner, B., & Castano E. (2012). *Dehumanization, Demonization, and Morality Shifting: Paths to Moral Certainty in Extremist Violence*. doi.org/10.1002/9781444344073.ch10
- Glaeser, E. L. (2002). *The Political Economy of Hatred*. Working Paper 9171. National Bureau of Economic Research. Cambridge. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w9171>
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence*. New York. Scientific American
- International Federation for Election/IFES, (2018). *Disinformation Campaigns and Hate Speech*: https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2019_ifes_disinformation_campaigns_and_hate_speech_briefing_paper.pdf
- Lakoff, G. & Johnson, J. (1980). *Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language*. *The journal of Philosophy*, 77 (8), 453-486
- Livesley, W. J. (2001). *Handbook of Personality Disorders: Theory, Research, and Treatment*. New York: Guilford.
- Livingston, M. M., & Pace, L. A. (2005). *Protecting Human Subjects in Internet Research*. *Electronic Journal of Business Ethics and Organization Studies*, 10(1): 35-41
- Macrae, C. N., Bodenhausen, G. V., & Milne, A. B. (1995). *The Dissection of Selection in Person Perception: Inhibitory Processes in Social Stereotyping*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69(3), 397–407.
- Malešević, S. (2004). *The Sociology of Ethnicity*. London. Sage.

- Marcus, K. L. (2012). *Accusation in a Mirror*. *Loyola University Chicago Law Journal*, 43 (2), 357 - 393
- Morrocco, R. (2010). *The Psychology of Genocide and Violent Oppression: A Study of Mass Cruelty from Nazi Germany to Rwanda*. London. McFarland & Company.
- Muluken A., Biset AN. & Mulatu AM. (2021). *Ethnic Politics Driven Social Media Hate Speech in Ethiopia Interregnum: A Triangulation of Prevalence, Perceptions, and Regulations*. Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Advanced Research in Social Sciences and Humanities
- Ørstavik, S. (2015). Hate Speech and Hate Crime. Accessed on July 2021 from https://www.ldr.no/globalassets/03_nyheter-og-fag/publikasjoner/hate-speech-and-hate-crime.pdf
- Osborne, R. E., & Frost, C. J. (2004). The Anatomy of Hatred: Multiple Pathways to the Construction of Human Hatred. *Humanity & Society*, 28(1): 5-23
- Sellers, A. (2016). Defining Hate Speech. Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2882244
- Skjerdal, T. & Mulatu AM. (2021). *The Ethnicification of the Ethiopian media: A research report*. Addis Ababa. Available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=378541>
- Smith, D.L. (2011). *Less Than Human: Why We Demean Enslave and Exterminate Others*. New York. Martins Press.
- Soral, W., Bilewicz, M., & Winiewski, M. (2018). *Exposure to Hate Speech Increases Prejudice through Desensitization*. *Journal of Aggressive behavior*, 44(2): 109-220
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Sunstein, C.R. (2009). *Going to Extremes: How Like-Minds Unite and Divide*. New York Oxford.
- Tadesse M. & Tilahun S. (2019). Unveiling Ethnic Hate Speech on Social Media: A Social Psychological Examination. *Ethiopian Journal of Behavioral Studies*. 2 (2): 1-24
- UN (2019). *United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech*. available at: https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/advising-and-mobilizing/Action_plan_on_hate_speech_EN.pdf
- Waldron, J. (2012). *The Harm in Hate Speech*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press