
8. Fragmented Peace as Peaceocracy: A Critical Examination of Ethiopia's Disjointed Peacebuilding Architecture

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Abstract

Ethiopia's post-2018 political transition has been marked by an ambitious yet fragmented peace and peacebuilding process. This study critically examines the status of these efforts, identifying a landscape populated by isolated "micro-infrastructure for peace—including the National Dialogue, Transitional Justice process, Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs, and elite-brokered peace agreements, not to mention governance used as a means of resolving conflict. The research finds that these initiatives operate in silos and piecemeal, lacking the philosophical, conceptual, and operational synergy necessary for sustainable conflict transformation towards peaceful political community. This fragmentation is rooted in several fundamental tensions: a piecemeal approach that addresses conflicts in isolation, often transporting, postponing or even reproducing violence rather than resolving it; the core peace-versus-justice dilemma, manifesting as a competition between the National Dialogue's consensus-seeking ethos and Transitional Justice's victim-centered accountability; and a clash of paradigms between liberal, top-down models and local, bottom-up approaches to justice and dialogue. The paper argues that this lack of a coherent framework has led to inefficiencies, contradictions, and a legitimacy crisis, ultimately undermining the goal of sustainable peace and reducing peace efforts to a peaceocracy. To address this, the study normatively proposes the establishment of a national macro-infrastructure for peace (macro-I4P)—a coordinating platform designed to integrate these disparate efforts, reconcile competing approaches, and forge a comprehensive and politically viable peace architecture for Ethiopia.

Keywords: Peacebuilding, National Dialogue, Transitional Justice, DDR, Infrastructure for Peace, peaceocracy, Conflict Transformation

1. Introduction

In contemporary Ethiopia's political landscape, "peace" has become a pervasive political buzzword precisely because it is a profoundly contested concept, as the state is contested. Its meaning is fluid and strategically deployed: for the state, for example, it equates to "law-and-order" and compliance that might necessitate a "law preserving violence" which administrative function (Benjamin 1921, 284). It is worth noting that the "law-and-order operation" was the name that the Ethiopian federal government used at the beginning of the northern war. For rebel armies and opposition groups, it signifies self-termination, sharing of power, justice, and equity; in short, their struggle resembles "law-making violence" (Benjamin 1921). The first appears more of a struggle for criminal justice, and the latter, political justice as we read it from Mahmood Mamdani's recent book (Mamdani 2022). Given that Ethiopia entered political violence during the moment of political transition, the two functions may be co-constitutive, and actors may mobilize them interchangeably, conflating law-making and law preserving or peace and justice in contemporary Ethiopia. Therefore, a contextual reading of the conceptual, discursive, and institutional aspects of peace is essential.

Mirroring this conceptual conflation, the multiplicity of notions of peace, institutions have been flourishing in Ethiopia since 2018. Old institutions have made it their master category. New institutions such as the Ministry of Peace have proliferated to promote peace, to engage in peace-making and peacebuilding activities, producing narratives and imaginations. Many strategies and programs were accordingly introduced from these various institutions for multiple audiences, informing both fragmentation and instrumentalization. Despite all the proliferation of institutions and actors of peace, violence has spread, even the country found itself in a very complex civil war at the domestic level and

in interstate tensions and rivalries at the regional level.

While extensive research has diagnosed the dynamics of political violence in Ethiopia through conflict analysis and mapping (e.g., Semir, 2019; Yonas, 2020; Zemelak, 2023; Abbink, 2024), and others have explored transitional politics (Yonas & Kassahun, 2021; Lyons, 2022), national dialogue (Tegbaru, 2022; Yayew et al., 2024; Mersha, 2024) and peace agreements (Denbel, 2013; Mulugeta, 2017; Fana & Yonas, 2023; Gebru 2024), intrastate insecurity (Yonas and Fana, 2026) a significant gap mainly that focuses on conceptual and institutional aspect of peace and peacebuilding remains. The above studies have offered excellent diagnoses, yet the examination of subsequent conflict transformation and peacebuilding efforts is insufficient. There is a particular scarcity of research assessing the status of peace and peacebuilding initiatives undertaken since the onset of the transition. This gap creates an urgent need for a comprehensive study of the discourse of peace and peacebuilding in Ethiopia.

Accordingly, this study aims to assess these efforts and the effect of peace discourse in the political landscape of Ethiopia. It is normatively grounded in the necessity of a comprehensive approach that addresses both domestic conflicts and their regional ramifications. Furthermore, it argues for an organic integration of various initiatives under the broader umbrella of comprehensive peacebuilding without losing sight of the regional linkage. The persistent failure of peace efforts in Ethiopia, despite a prevalent discourse of peace, can be attributed to the fundamental contradiction in how different actors articulate “peace” for multiple audiences, local, regional, and even international. Without reconciling these contradictions, peacebuilding risks devolving into what “peaceocracy” is—the instrumentalization of peace to reinforce existing power structures and violence (Branch 2014) or to compromise democracy during the election and post-election season (Lynch 2019). This is often coupled with a tendency to prioritize stability and order at the expense of democracy, a dynamic noted by Lynch (2019) and Lynch et al. (2019). In the context of protracted conflict, belligerents may also engage in peace deals tactically, using them to buy time and reorganize for future war.

The protracted conflict in Ethiopia, therefore, persists not for a lack of peace institutions or rhetoric, but because the prevailing peace process is inherently fragmented and doomed to fail. It systematically excludes the root causes and drivers of the conflict from discussion, and hence, it is

seemingly used as a strategy by multiple political actors for different purposes. This exclusion further enables the instrumentalization of peace: the incumbent uses it as show showcase or report to the international community, reproduces its power and silences dissent, while rebel armies may exploit negotiations to consolidate their own legitimacy, internal and international, and regroup militarily for new offensive action. Consequently, peace itself becomes a weapon of war rather than a path to its resolution.

The literature on peace, peacebuilding, and conflict transformation in divided societies features numerous binary debates. These debates form part of a broader discourse concerning liberal versus non-liberal models of intervention. Major points of contention include structure versus agency; mass-based versus elite-based political settlements; criminal justice versus restorative justice for transformation; peace vs democracy, infrastructure for peace versus peace constituencies; and small “p” versus big “P” peacebuilding approaches, often framed as peace agreements versus everyday peace (Lederach, 1997; Sriram and Pillay 2009; Mamdani, 2015; Branch, 2014; Bereketab, 2013; Firchow, 2018 and Lynch et al. 2019). Considering these theoretical debates when designing comprehensive peacebuilding frameworks and creating interfaces between various instruments of peacebuilding should be considered while being cautious of the instrumentalization of peace by belligerents, mainly the incumbents at the federal or regional state level.

This is particularly critical in the eastern Africa (both members of the East Africa community and Intergovernmental Authority on Development) where many peace interventions either become mired in the contradictions between local and international approaches or are implemented as piecemeal projects that address one conflict in isolation, disregarding other interrelated conflicts (Bereketab, 2013) or peace messaging instrumentalized reinforce the existing power and reproduce violence (Branch 2014) or compromise electoral democracy and silence opposition (Lynch 2019 and Lynch et al. 2019) Therefore, any peacebuilding activity must be designed with careful consideration of the historical and political context both domestic and regional, as well as the conceptual and theoretical debates that advocate for a comprehensive approach to peace on hand and see the possible instrumentalization peace for power and instrument of war.

Ethiopia, as it is passing through a very fragile political transition since 2018, lacks political settlement, and many other structural factors have fueled different types of conflicts in the country. As a response to the spread of violent conflicts in the country, numerous peacebuilding instruments have been emplaced. The government established various institutions such as the Ministry of Peace, Peace and Reconciliation Commission, Boundary and Identity Commission, and the National Dialogue Commission to transform conflicts in the country. Old and new institutions reformed, designed, and introduced to facilitate peacebuilding activities. However, they failed to transform conflicts, and instead of disappearing, they were relentlessly mobilized by actors. Hence, the paper aims to conduct a study on the conceptual and theoretical nexus between national dialogue, transitional justice, and peace agreement processes and examine the context of current peacebuilding efforts in Ethiopia. Despite the rich conceptual and theoretical debates outlined above, a significant gap persists in the literature and peace historiography and study in Ethiopia. There remains a scarcity of research on viable models of peace and peacebuilding, particularly concerning the need for a comprehensive interface between various peacebuilding instruments. Furthermore, there is a notable absence of literature that evaluates contemporary peace discourse through the critical lens of “peaceocracy—a political trend, as identified by Lynch (et al 2019), that is prevalent in contexts where mass violence remains a recent public memory.) When examining the status of the peacebuilding process in Ethiopia, the central question is: To what extent have institutions, sectors, and processes been integrated to form a cohesive and comprehensive system capable of transforming the country's conflicts? If not, what does the fragmentation of peace discourse inform? This inquiry focuses on whether the peacebuilding architecture organically engages the root drivers and all relevant actors of the conflict, rather than systematically excluding them. Hence, the major question of this chapter is to what extent the major peacebuilding strategies, such as national dialogue, transitional justice, and peace agreements conceptually and theoretically and functionally integrated?

This study employed a qualitative research design, utilizing a systematic document review and in-depth interviews to critically assess Ethiopia's peacebuilding efforts. The document review analyzed primary sources—including government proclamations, policy drafts, and commission reports—and

secondary scholarly literature to map the formal peacebuilding infrastructure and identify gaps. This foundation was supplemented by 22 in-depth interviews with key informants from government institutions, peacebuilding commissions, civil society, and academia, providing grounded insights into the operational realities, limitations, and possibilities of these initiatives. Data from both sources were analyzed concurrently through a comparative and thematic approach, drawing lessons from other post-conflict societies to inform the final analysis and the identification of a feasible model for integrating Ethiopia's disparate peacebuilding instruments.

2. Concepts and theories: Thinking Comprehensive Peacebuilding

The process of rebuilding a divided society after violent horizontal and vertical conflict is made intelligible through the notion of peacebuilding (Galtung, 1975).¹ Peacebuilding is defined as “a long-term process that covers all activities intended to build and promote peace and overcome violence” (Thania 2003). PB is hence a catch-all term for a wide variety of interventions designed to build or maintain sustainable peace and development. The goal of PB is the transformation of violent conflict into peaceful action by working deeper into the causes of conflict, and at the same time, it also refers to preventing violent conflict in a proactive manner. It also “constitutes a project to transform a post-conflict country's sociopolitical landscape to prevent the possible recurrence of conflict” (Brama 2017:12). Hence, both prevention and intervention should be linked to a sustainable peacebuilding strategy. Hence, the co-constitutive of peace and justice (Mamdani 2022) is embedded in the peacebuilding literature.

In the peacebuilding literature, integration, synergy, linkage center issues, and there are several concepts promote linkage. In this vein, the notion of transformation and a transformative approach is

¹ The concept has been popular gradually perhaps since the it is used by John Galtung (1975). “*Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, and Peacebuilding*” in *Peace, War and Defence: Essays in Peace Research*, ed. John Galtung (Copenhagen: Christian Ejlers, 282–304.

now popular in peacebuilding studies, mainly following the work by John Paul Lederach (1997). In this transformative approach, political actors mainly *middle-range leadership* and *local processes*, instead of a savior mission from abroad is valorized (see also Thania 2013). Against the tradition of the liberal interventionist model, the new model sees domestic processes and domestic political actors as critical to a successful peacebuilding project. Such conceptualization defines peacebuilding not as a mere technocratic matter, but rather as a multilayered process of “successful institution building is embedded in political processes, power structures, and societal sources of legitimacy” (Barma 2017).

In this sense, there is another similar conceptual and theoretical purchase in which peacebuilding approaches are divided into big-P and small-p Peacebuilding. The big-P refers to the liberal model comprising process, safety and security, rule of law and human rights, social services governance, etc. It focuses on structural and technical elements of peacebuilding. Peacebuilding is seen as state-building (Firchow, 2018: 32-33). The small-p peacebuilding focuses on agency and the “transformation or building of relationship with normative goal of peace”. It comprises “conflict prevention, transformation, and resolution, and reconciliation at the local community level in villages or neighborhoods” (Firchow, 2018: 34). The integration of the two Ps is called a hybrid peacebuilding model in which both top-down and bottom-up approaches synergize to craft a sustainable, inclusive, and participatory approach.

In this model, the local and international actors, processes, and activities combined to produce a web of peacebuilding to transform conflicts. In this transformative approach, transcending traditional boundaries of peacebuilding processes, activities, disciplines, and sectors is fundamental. This means an integrated peacebuilding is key to transforming conflict into sustainable peace. Integrated peacebuilding informs weaving peacebuilding methods into diverse sectors, including development, humanitarian assistance, gender, business, media, health, and the environment - areas where such work is needed the most (Ricigliano 2003). Integration is imperative to any comprehensive and sustainable peacebuilding (Lederach, 1997), and this can be thought into two conceptual categories: *time frames* and *linkage*.

In his seminal book, Lederach (1997: 74) suggests time frames as a mode of thought to

articulate conceptual and operative peacebuilding processes. For example, peace actors must think about the link between humanitarian responses and political reconciliation. He states that “any given immediate intervention is connected to movement toward a long-term goal” (1997: 75). The aim is to initiate movement or transformation towards peace and make the movement sustainable. This warrants a transformative approach where both short- and long-term goals are dialectically intertwined as an engine of the sustainable peacebuilding process.

Linkage in this sense refers to the connection between structures and processes. Structures signify, to thinking “*comprehensively* about the affected population” and “*systematically* about the issues” (1997: 79). The core aspect here is the root causes of the conflict seen in the *longue dure*. While “process underscores the necessity of thinking about the *progression* conflict and *sustainability* of its transformation by linking the roles, functions, and activities in an integrated manner”. There are issues such as crisis management, conflict prevention, and vision setting in this complex model. As one recognizes the linkage between crisis issues and root causes of conflict, prescriptively, one must envision the linkage between short-term with long-term goals and visions. In other words, conflict is seen as a progression, and peacebuilding is a process “made up of multiple functions, roles, and activities.” The question is how to integrate these functions, roles, and activities conceptually, theoretically, and operationally.

A similar, more operational concept is infrastructure for peace, dubbed as I4P. The concept of I4P was originally formulated in the 1980s by John Paul Lederach's comprehensive approach to address protracted internal conflicts. However, the concept appears very dynamic, undergoing metamorphosis until today (Kovacs, 2020). I4P, according to UNDP, refers to “a network of interdependent systems, resources, values and skills held by government, civil society and community institutions that promote dialogue and consultation; prevent conflict and enable peaceful mediation when violence occurs in a society” (cited in Kovacs, 2020). This network for Lederach looks like a cobweb that links interdependent peacebuilding micro-institutions, processes, and constituencies (Lederach, 2005: 84). Here, the concept informs the interface or linking role of the I4P either at the local or national level without losing the transformatory intention of each and the linkage thereof. It can be a network informing the general

framework or as a specific response to conflict. I differentiate the two in this paper as micro and macro I4P, in which the former signifies a specific peacebuilding initiative, process, or activity, while the latter informs the network of different micro-I4P at the local or national level. For example, the Ethiopian national dialogue can be seen as a micro I4P, as its specificity in terms of methodological specificity, despite its national nature. The integration between ND, TJ, and DDR could be seen as macro I4P, given that they involve various actors, methods, and processes. The difference is that the latter is a network, an interface and linkage between different peacebuilding processes, initiatives, activities, etc. E.g., National Peace Committee in Nigeria, or there seems to be a push towards a national cohesion council or commission in Ethiopia.²

Peace I4P, however, must be complemented by peace constituency. Peace constituency refers to “a network of people from different social sectors, who act in concert to build sustainable peace” (Mouly 2008: 302). Peace constituency is about people and their agency placed in the peacebuilding process, activities, and initiatives. This includes elites and the masses who are mobilized to transform and sustain peace in each society.

Hence, these conceptual and theoretical discussions can help us to assess how far the existing peacebuilding infrastructures in Ethiopia are forming a web by linking structure and process. If they linked to where and what type of I4P platform has been created? How do the peacebuilding infrastructures integrate to form a hybrid or transformative model conceptually, philosophically, and functionally? Specifically, the question is how far linkages are created that inform the weaving of peacebuilding instruments or infrastructures such as national dialogue (ND), transitional justice (TJ), disarmament, demobilization, and rehabilitation (DDR), and peacemaking agreements, including ceasefires and end of hostilities, etc. How do these processes, their respective time frame, and chronology integrate, linking long and short-term goals and visions? What matters most is a theory of

² Several interviewees in this research underlined the role of social cohesion and national inclusive narratives as foundation of peacebuilding and advocated for an institutional that cultivate cohesion and social capital etc

change or a roadmap that shows the interface of these diverse instruments and sectors prepared. In these complementary processes, political dialogue is a central strategy. Lederach highlights the importance of such a structure through the metaphor of a cobweb, of “strategic anchor points that link different but necessarily interdependent constituencies, processes, and geographic localities” (Lederach, 2005:84). By involving different sectors and levels of society, infrastructures for peace facilitate horizontal and vertical integration. This chapter aims to examine how far from the peace interventions in Ethiopia is complementary and comprehensive enough to address the complex political violence that links local, national, and regional contradictions in eastern Africa. The central lesson from the failures in Sudan (Mamdani 2014), South Sudan (Mamdani 2018), and Uganda (Branch 2014) is that peace cannot be delivered in a standardized package. A truly effective intervention must be a politically sophisticated, multi-layered, and regionally aware process (Bereketab 2013). It must connect the local to the national and the national to the regional, treating the Horn of Africa not as a collection of broken states, but as a single, complex ecosystem of conflict that requires a systemic and interconnected solution. As discussed before, response to political violence should underline the co-constitution of justice and peace, law and politics to make use of the moment of transition productively to create a political community that transcends its structural predicaments (Mamdani 2022). This is the essence of making peace comprehensive and multilayered, and the normative stance of this chapter.

3. Peacebuilding in Ethiopia: Mapping infrastructures

The guns have not yet been silenced in Ethiopia despite an overwhelming discourse of peace and proliferation of peace institutions, local and international, working in Ethiopia. Conflicts are active and, in some regions and localities, at their peak. Some other places are entering into post-conflict peacebuilding, albeit fragile, and at the cost of transporting the conflict elsewhere. This is half of the unfolding story. Domestic conflicts are also linked to regional interstate conflicts in the wider eastern Africa region (Bereketeab, 2013; Berhanu, 2013). Conflicts in Ethiopia are evolving in the regional in/security dynamics where interstate tensions (for example, Ethiopia-Eritrea; Ethiopia-Sudan, Eritrea-

Djibouti; Ethiopia-Somalia) dialectically linked to domestic conflicts in each state in the region (Kassahun 2013).

The other side of the story is that Ethiopia has become a site of global peacebuilding intervention. Like many states in Africa and beyond those pass-through violent conflicts (Branch 2011; Firchow, 2018), Ethiopia is now subjected to the discourse of peacemaking, peacebuilding, transitional justice, DDR, before a comprehensive peace accord is signed. All is evolving in the context of protracted conflict, and this significantly affects the process of peacebuilding.³ In short, peace and violence are unfolding simultaneously in Ethiopia. While conflicts, militarization, and mobilization persist, narratives of “silencing the gun,” peace negotiations, transitional justice, and national dialogue are proliferating. Given this paradox, the pervasive yet fragmented and ineffective nature of peace discourse suggests it is being instrumentalized and used as a strategy for effective peaceocracy. Rather than transforming conflict, it is likely being used as a tool by multiple powerful actors—both by the incumbent at the national level and by local powerholders—to consolidate power, continue violence, and silence dissent. This section provides a deep analysis of peacebuilding conception and process, as well as the making and unmaking of institutions in Ethiopia over the last five years. The aim is to explore what these peacebuilding efforts promise and how they are comprehensive and organically linked, interacting to form interfaces and synergies that expand the window of peace in the country.

The analysis will therefore assess how comprehensive these interventions are—in their conceptualization of peace, discourse, institutions, and processes—to address the nation’s complex political violence. It investigates how the fundamental contradiction between peace and justice for example used as an instrument of peaceocracy.

Peacebuilding infrastructures relentlessly put in place since 2018 even before violence spread in the body politics of the country. One of the major areas of institutions in the period was institutions that facilitated peacebuilding in the country. Many commissions, such as the Administrative Boundary

³ Key informant interview 1, scholar, on 7th of March, 2024 Addis Ababa

and Identity Issues Commission (ABIIC)⁴ and the Reconciliation commissions, were established in 2019 but disbanded in 2021. The Ethiopian National Rehabilitation Commission (ENRC) was also established in 2019 and dissolved in 2021. These institutions were the earlier efforts to transform conflicts in Ethiopia, but they were established for limited terms and mandates. No effort is made to extend their term, nor assessment of what has been done made public.

Ministry of Peace and other new commissions, such as the National Dialogue Commission, were also established to facilitate the peacebuilding process mainly through positive peace cultivation. For example, the Ministry of Peace aims to build sustainable peace by mobilizing both institutions, I4P and Peace constituency and citizens (Ministry of Peace 2021). Given the proliferation of the protracted conflict in the country, it is difficult to evaluate the performance of the Ministry of Peace. The ongoing violence also significantly affected the preparation of the national dialogue, given the absence of a window of peace that could be crafted through elite negotiations among others. However, compared to this, the effort to arrive at peace-making mainly agrees on the end of hostility, and the ceasefire is limited. The Pretoria agreement is the only successful effort when it comes to achieving an end to hostility and a ceasefire for a brief time in Tigray. However, as it displaces conflict from Tigray and causes a new conflict in Amhara made the success is very limited, instead creating a space of reorganization of belligerents, perhaps for looming war. To depict the pervasive presence of peace messaging and peace discourse in Ethiopia, the following section maps the different methods and institutions evolved in the name of peace since 2018.

4. Piecemeal approach: the efforts towards a cease-fire and an end to hostilities

⁴ Proclamation No. 1101 /2019 A Proclamation To Establish Administrative Boundary And Identity Issues Commission

There have been efforts to reach into ceasefire and end hostilities. Seychelles, Djibouti, Pretoria, Dar es Salam, Zanzibar, and Nairobi hosted this discussion between the Federal government and the rebel armies and groups in Tigray and Oromia. The Pretoria agreement for lasting peace through permanent Cessation of Hostilities (the Pretoria CoHA hereafter), signed in 2022 between the government of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF), is a good example worth mentioning here. It was envisaged to end the conflict that turned violent since November 3, 2020, in Ethiopia. The Pretoria agreement aims to bring lasting peace through a "permanent cessation of hostilities," as its names indicate, between the two parties. Silencing the gun as part of AU's agenda of silencing the gun in 2030 is a major goal. It promises restoring constitutional order, nonviolent means of resolving political differences, security for all parties in the conflict, reconstitution and rehabilitation of social bonds (AU, 2022). The major objective, therefore, is to create a window of peace as a foundation for sustainable peacebuilding.

So far, only the Pretoria agreement has succeeded in at least silencing the guns in Tigray for a brief time. Other attempts have not been fruitful so far. As one can abstract from the Pretoria agreement, the peace negotiation exhibits a particular feature. The approach seems a step-by-step negotiation between the incumbent and rebel armies, one by one. One conflict in isolation and in a piecemeal approach. The major objective is to achieve a ceasefire and end of hostility permanently. It valorizes nonviolence as a means of resolving conflicts. Above all, it embraces the political stance of the African solution to the African problem as stipulated in the Pretoria CoHA. However, it is neither comprehensive nor an inclusive process, and it only brings together two actors of conflict in an exclusive table staged outside of Ethiopia. It appears elitist and falls into the top-down approach of peacemaking as it focuses on elite negotiations through mediation by friendly nations such as South Africa and Kenya under the auspicious of the AU. The involvement of big powers, mainly personalities such as Mike Hammer from the US, played a mediation role. Moreover, creating a negative peace is the major vision of such of peace deal.

The success of Pretoria's end of hostilities agreement can only be primarily seen from one regional state, as it aims to end a particular conflict between two actors, at least in silencing the gun. It

was also believed that it may contribute to broader peacebuilding efforts as it rejects violent means of doing politics and promises the restoration of constitutional order as a foundation for future peace.⁵ However, the new possibility that CoHA was expected to create a window for peace appeared short-lived. For example, it immediately caused and intensified a new sporadic violence in the Amara region.⁶ Furthermore, its failure to formally engage Eritrea as a major belligerent has exposed the fragile peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea, raising the specter of a broader conflict that is now attracting both regional and extra-regional actors. This dynamic not only renders the peace in Tigray precarious but also increases the probability of a new, wider wave of conflict elsewhere. The result has been a violence of peace—a concept from Branch (2014)—precipitated by the CoHA. Instead of laying a foundation for lasting stability, the agreement has become a mechanism for transporting and changing the grammar of violence, now involving local militias across northern Ethiopia and the state actors of Ethiopia and Eritrea. It also seems to be used as a means of buying time by and securing international legitimacy for belligerents. Concurrently, efforts to reach similar negotiations in Oromia have thus far been unsuccessful. This stalemate underscores the difficulty of securing even a basic ceasefire between the conflicting parties and highlights the profound complexity of the conflict in the region. Should such negotiations eventually succeed, however, they would likely lay a crucial foundation for future peacebuilding. The failure of peace efforts, despite their pervasive messaging, points directly to a state of peaceocracy. In this context, the language of peace is instrumentalized not for genuine resolution, but to achieve strategic ends: either to reproduce the existing power structure by the incumbent state, or to allow belligerents to reorganize for future conflict.

While peace negotiations are strategically vital for addressing the lack of a political settlement—the central problem of Ethiopia’s crisis—their potential has been undermined by a piecemeal approach, fragmentation, and peaceocracy. The exclusion of key actors and the failure to address conflicts evolving within the same interconnected security system have rendered these efforts largely futile. Moreover,

⁵ Key informant interview 1, scholar, on 7th of March 2024 Addis Ababa

⁶ Key informant interview 6, and 13 civil society members, on 8th of March, 2024 Addis Ababa

like many African peace deals (Berketab, 2013; Mamdani, 2018), the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) appears non-comprehensive, piecemeal as well, and seems an instrumentalization of peace by belligerents unfolded (Lynch et al, 2029). This is a critical shortcoming, given that the political violence in northern Ethiopia involved multiple state and non-state actors and was caused by various interconnected factors—historical, structural, institutional, and geopolitical.

5. Putting the gun without silencing: The Limits of DDR

I.

One of the natural outcomes of the above approach is the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR). For example, one of the components of the Pretoria agreement is DDR stipulated in Article 6 of the agreement. The article navigates between the right to monopoly of legitimate violence of the FDRE and the Tigray region's law and order needs. The National Rehabilitation Commission (NRC), which was established on November 25th, 2022, has with major task to implement the DDR program under the agreement. However, the regulation 525/2022 (FDRE Negarit Gazette 29th year no 4, 2022) that established the commission mandated to organize any DDR programs in the country, beyond the promises of the Pretoria agreement. While the Pretoria agreement focuses only on the rehabilitation of combatants in Tigray, the regulation and the commission mandate broad DDR programs that may unfold following a similar CoHA.

DDR is not new to Ethiopia (Mulugeta 2017). Many wars ended with a similar disarmament and reintegration process. The 1990s DDR process is critical in terms of shaping the ongoing program. Even in the last three years, there have been attempts to reintegrate ex-combatants who returned to Ethiopia as part of the politics of transition that unfolded since 2018 in the country. Most have been unsuccessful DDR efforts, mainly when it comes to Ginbot 7⁷ and OLA armies' reintegration programs. The DDR in

⁷ Gibot 7 was a rebel army operated from Eritrea until 2018 in the wake of the reform process and the ex-combatant supposed to pass through DDR process which was not successful and must have

Tigray faces various conceptual and operational challenges (Mulugeta 2023). The failure of this program served as a proximate cause of conflict in the Amhara and Oromia regions. This shows the critical role of the failure of the DDR process in intensifying web conflicts in the country.

The newly established National Rehabilitation Commission (NRC) is tasked with implementing key aspects of the Pretoria Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA). Established as an autonomous federal institution accountable to the Ministry of Peace, the commission's central organ—the National Reintegration Council—is composed of state ministers from seven ministries, including Peace, Defense, Education, Finance, Women, and Labor.

Notably, the NRC's founding regulation makes no explicit mention of the Pretoria Agreement or of any future negotiations that might expand its mandate. While it is self-evident that the commission's tasks are derived from and dependent upon existing peace deals and their subsequent negotiations, the limitations of the CoHA itself have severely complicated the NRC's work. Specifically, the agreement's role in expanding the conflict in the Amhara region and exposing the interstate hostility between Ethiopia and Eritrea has made the envisioned Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) process profoundly complex and, in some respects, perhaps impossible to execute. The continuation of DDR as one pillar of peace discourse and messaging without a genuine engagement of the drivers of conflict and the major actor of the violence also informs a peaceocracy by those who are involved in the process.

6. Dialogue for Peace: Ethiopian National Dialogue

National reconciliation and dialogue have been the agenda for a long time in Ethiopia. Many national and international actors advocated for dialogue in Ethiopia. For example, Opposition political parties

contributed to the conflict in the Amharic region.

such as Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) advocated for a similar political platform for a long.⁸ There have been efforts to make national dialogue a national agenda as a central peacebuilding instrument since 2018, and there were various initiatives, such as the Multi-stakeholder Initiative for National Dialogue (MIND), to this effect. The MIND was the result of collaboration between the government, represented by the Ministry of Peace, CSOs, and the Ethiopian Political Parties Joint Council (EPPJC). The joint council played an active role in setting the momentum of the initiative, bringing together, later, about 15 stakeholders, including the peace and reconciliation commission, Destiny Ethiopia, Political Parties Joint Council, *Ye Hasab Ma'ed*, Justice for all, Initiative for Change, Ethiopians for Inclusive Dialogue, and the Ministry of Peace. The initiative laid the foundation for the preparation stage of the national dialogue, mainly determined the model of the national dialogue, identifying around 22 potential sections of society to make the process inclusive, and the mode of agenda setting, which is left to the participants.⁹

The MIND seemingly adopted an elite-based dialogue like Tunisia's national dialogue model, combined with community participation. MIND couldn't continue as the government wanted a formal commission to facilitate the national dialogue, possibly due to a lack of trust in the team's capacity¹⁰ or political stance. The Ministry of Peace representation of the government, had less political heavyweight despite the ministry was established for this purpose (FDRE *Negarit Gazette* 28th year No. 4 article 41). Given the political culture where the state plays a predominant role, the MIND was a unique initiative, had it continued to facilitate the dialogue¹¹.

The Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission was also established to organize and lead the national dialogue. According to the proclamation No. 1265 /2021 (FDRE *Negarit Gazette* 28th year no 5 2022), the national dialogue is imperative to Ethiopia because of the existence of "differences of

⁸ Key informant 21 from opposition political party March 22, 2024

⁹ Key informant 22 from The Ethiopian Political Parties Joint Council April 26

¹⁰ Key informant 16 from CSO March 19 2024

¹¹ Key informant 22 from The Ethiopian Political Parties Joint Council April 26

opinions and disagreements” among political elites and the society at large. The aim is to “resolve the differences and disagreements ... engender national consensus.” Moreover, the proclamation underlined how such national dialogue could “bolster national consensus along the way, a culture of trust and of working together as well as mend degraded to restore social values”. The object of the commission is also framed broadly, encompassing, facilitating inclusive, transparent public dialogue and continuation on fundamental national issues and root causes of difference; to prepare the dialogue so it improves the vertical between state and society and horizontal between segments of society of Ethiopia, and to support the implementation of the outcome of the dialogue. Like any national dialogue facilitator, its role is spread from preparation to implementation.

The commission's objective is to *develop a political culture and create a conducive environment for building a democratic system, lay social and political foundations for sustainable peace*, above all, “lay a firm foundation for national consensus and the building of a State with strong legitimacy.” These are very ambitious objectives of the commission that transcend the immediate outcome of the national dialogue. In other words, the model embraced the big-p model of peacebuilding as these broad objectives include state building, development of political culture, and building of a democratic system. In addition, in the preparation phase, the commission advocated for a local and bottom-up approach as the model of the Ethiopian national dialogue.¹² This local turn signifies the small-p model being incorporated mainly in identifying community representatives at the local level as the major participants of the dialogue. Hence, the Ethiopian national dialogue is taking shape, and its features resemble Yemeni’s and South Sudan’s national dialogue in its participation of many community representatives from below. The major category of the national dialogue is *hagerawi mekikir* Amharic word for dialogue and consultation, and hence the ethos of the national dialogue signifies a bottom-up approach to dialogue for peacebuilding.

The commission was established for a term of term however, extension of this term is inevitable given

¹² Key informant interview from Ethiopian National dialogue 12th of March 2024 Addis Ababa

the broad objectives it has, and progress was slow. The HoPR appointed the eleven commissioners, of whom two are female. The process of nominating the commissioners generated a debate, and suspicion arose because the process falls under the hands of HoPR, which is monopolized by the incumbent ruling party. The commission, however, established and continued to organize the dialogue, and many actors work with it, keeping their critical distance from it. Some of the features of the model, for example, the agenda-setting process and the identification of potential participants from the various cleavages of society, are seemingly influenced by the MIND aborted national dialogue model.

The Ethiopian Political Parties Joint Council (EPPJC) has been active and critical at the same it with regard to the national dialogue. Civil societies have been working to advocate and even facilitate dialogue at the local level for the last five years. The newly established Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations Council (ECSOC) and its members are very active in this regard. The national dialogue also served as a connector among these actors, despite many appearing suspicious of the impartiality of the commission. However, the national political landscape the proliferation of conflicts in different regions, made the process of the dialogue challenging and slow. The mere mobilization of the discourse of national dialogue as a means of messaging peace.

7. Justice for Peace: Ethiopian TJ

The quest for transitional justice to correct past and contemporary injustice has been on the table since 2018. However, the discourse of transitional justice becomes official following the Pretoria CoHA. According to Article Two of CoHA, the issues of justice and accountability are one of the principles (AU 2022). The article embraces both the FDRE constitution and the AU's transitional justice policy framework. The FDRE Ministry of Justice established the TJ Working Group of Experts (the Working Group) to advise and lead the process. The group first published a "green paper" in January 2023 to generate imputes from the public. Finally, the policy was approved by the Ministry of Council in April 2024 after passing various processes, including public consultations.

The draft policy begins by recognizing the absence of a comprehensive transitional justice

process in Ethiopia concerning the violent past. The document assesses the history of similar initiatives during the Derg and more in the EPRDF period. It identified limitations of previous attempts, mainly a lack of “truth-seeking, reconciliation, and reparation”. The previous process also falls into “victors’ justice.” Moreover, the victim’s participation was limited to testimony.

The draft policy also briefly touched on the effort made under the transitional politics unfolded since 2018, which focused on past violations. These efforts were part of the transition process, focused on “creating a conducive environment for democratic consolidation”, the formation of commissions such as the Reconciliation, as well as the Identity and Boundary Commission. In general, broader “institutional reforms that support transitional justice” were part of the efforts since the last 2018. The document assesses these efforts and identifies gaps mainly in terms of embracing the standard transitional justice in three areas: persecution, amnesty, and creating an institutional framework. Lack of inclusion, public participation, and comprehensiveness.

Against the backdrop of the ongoing TJ, there is the practice of victor justice implemented during the early period of the EPRDF. Following the release of the EHRC/OHCHR Joint Investigation Team (JIT) Report in November 2021, the advocacy by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for credible transitional justice became impactful and government respond to this quest in 2023 by establishing TJ Working Group of Experts under the Ministry of Justice. The working group introduced a green paper on TJ and organized a national public consultation in 2023. Based on this, a draft policy was introduced in 2024. The TJ became one of the pillars of peacebuilding in Ethiopia. The draft document justified the rationality of TJ in Ethiopia as follows:

Ethiopia needs to deal with its past and organize its future based on the pillars of justice, equality, human right,s and inclusiveness. Attempts so far in implementing transitional justice have not met their objectives. Therefore, it is imperative to design a comprehensive, human rights-based, and victim-centered transitional justice policy framework that draws on the experience of other jurisdictions and considers Ethiopia's sociopolitical context.

Ethiopia's transitional justice framework was therefore designed to be comprehensive, human rights-based, and victim-centered. These three principles define its foundational scope. However, despite initial progress, the process has since stalled. A key contradiction—or at least a competition—has emerged between this framework and the national dialogue's "big tent" approach. The transitional justice process's conceptual priority of justice, which aligns with a liberal model as seen in its reliance on the court system, and despite the promise to embrace communitarian justice, creates a fundamental tension with the national dialogue's bottom-up, inclusive methodology. The contradiction between the Ethiopian national dialogue and Transitional justice manifests a peace-justice dilemma that exists in Africa's transitional justice exercises (Sriram and Pillay 2009). The initiative seems to be a result of the pressure from the international community, with "no justice, no peace" discourse, to mention the necessity of centering the victims of war in the Tigray, Amhara, and Afar at the center of the peace process. Hence, this is also indicative of that different peace discourses were crafted for multiple audiences, allegedly the national dialogue for the local audience and the TJ for the international community. Hence, as they fragmented and contradicted served multiple actors for their respective political ends, other than peace.

8. Fragmented peace: the Dilemma of Dialogue and Justice in Ethiopia

Various challenges and opportunities can be identified if one assesses each peacebuilding infrastructure and intervention in Ethiopia. The major success of Ethiopia's peacebuilding efforts is the establishment of institutions making such as many commissions and the Ministry of Peace, with the task of facilitating the peacebuilding process.¹³ Many activities were placed to achieve a particular goal, for example, justice or consensus, reintegration or reconciliation. Peace, Justice, truth-telling,

¹³ Key informants 1, scholar 9th of March 2024, Addis Ababa many other informants from CSO and political parties recognized the effort.

reconciliation, amnesty and dialogue were popularized in this process.

The challenge worth mentioning here is each peacebuilding efforts face a crisis of legitimacy since most of the infrastructures for peace such as the commissions are established with the heavy hand of the government in addition to the absence of minimum political settlement.¹⁴ Credibility and legitimacy depend primarily on inclusivity of various actors in the process. Without political settlement government efforts to peacebuilding likely face legitimacy crisis. Most of the peacebuilding activities in Ethiopia hence have been subject to critics as a result. For example despite the plausibility and popularity of the need for national dialogue, the Ethiopian National Dialogue faced legitimacy crisis and had to build its constituency and legitimacy from scratch given its initial establishment under the House of Peoples Representatives appeared controversial.¹⁵ The critique forwarded against such a commission is proximity or being a monopoly of the ruling party while excluding others.¹⁶ However, despite established under the prerogative of the HPRs, the commissioners are independent professionals who should be judged based on their performance as organizers of the national dialogue. With its cautious and slow progress, the END crafted a methodology that valorizes a bottom-up approach.

The TJ has also been subject to criticism, mainly because it does not stipulate the role international actor in the process, while at the same time it was seen as a response to international community demand for accountability rather than a genuine peacebuilding effort. Like the commissioners of the national dialogue, the question of impartiality, representativeness, and trust raised against the TJ working group of experts (Tadesse 2024). The TJ is unfolding in a context of protracted conflict and lack of political settlement, and this is seen as the major challenge to it.¹⁷

This fragmentation indicates that each component was likely designed for a specific audience

¹⁴ Key informant 21 Key informant 21 from opposition political party March 22, 2024, Addis Ababa.

¹⁵ Key informant 14 Scholar 9TH OF March 2024 Addis Ababa

¹⁶ Key informant 6 scholar 8th of March 2024 Addis Ababa

¹⁷ Key informant 1 Scholar 9th of March, 2024

and backed by actors for instrumental purposes—a clear manifestation of peaceocracy. Ultimately, this division not only sustains a violent and unstable peace but also demonstrates how peace itself is instrumentalized by multiple actors in Ethiopia as a tool within a broader peaceocracy system.

The national dialogue appears more of a small-p model of peacebuilding, focusing on a local and bottom-up approach. Its ethos seems local and endogenous dialogue for peace. Its approach appears critical of the liberal model despite incorporating the state-building element of the big-p peacebuilding model. It also disregards the short-term and crisis issues and only focuses on the long-term goals and future visions, such as reaching a national consensus through popular participation. The major activity of the commission also prioritizes mobilizing the society for dialogue and, through this, creates a peace constituency. Hence, it targeted the local audience, albeit also attracted international support. However, as it does not synergize and link with other peacebuilding infrastructure, mainly those infrastructures designed to address crisis issues, including peace accords, governance, and humanitarian intervention, its progress has remained very slow. For example, there is no mechanism to include the outcomes of peace accords in the national dialogue. How to include the demands previous combatant after the peace accord into the national dialogue is not clear. How the promise of the national dialogue considered in the negotiation table is not clear, as most opposition, mainly the rebel groups and even opposition political parties, see the national dialogue as an instrument of the incumbent party.¹⁸

The TJ appears more of a liberal model with an inclusive focus but valorizing human rights and a victim-centered approach. The victim justice seems to be the ethos of the TJ; they can be sought at the courtroom as a form of prosecution, in social space through reconciliation and amnesty, truth and recognition, in the political space through political dialogue, negotiation, and in the marketplace through repartition and reconstruction. However, there is no clarity on how TJ's ethos, which mainly justice for victims and criminal justice, synergizes with the ethos of national dialogue, which is peace

¹⁸ Key informant interview 8 CSO and scholar March 15, 2024, Addis Ababa

through dialogue. There is no clear design on how to integrate other overlapping processes, such as truth and reconciliation issues, which the TJ embraced from the outset, while the ND may expect them to be one of the outcomes of the ND. Operationally, the ND commission and the Ministry of Justice also had limited interaction.

The peace deal and negotiations focus on a bilateral agreement between conflicting parties, such as the incumbent party or the federal government, the TPLF, excluding other actors in the web of conflict. Similarly, there have been similar efforts in Oromia with the Oromo Liberation Army. The process appears like Colombia's response to its protracted conflict by engaging one rebel army at a time. The approach is elite-centered and top-down. There is a natural link with the DDR process, at least when it comes to the Pretoria agreement. The DDR process was otherwise nationally designed before reaching a peace accord in the Oromia and Amhara regions. It preceded the silencing of the gun in these regions. Similarly, the Pretoria agreement laid the foundation for the TJ, although the TJ has been designed for a national scale.

There is no roadmap on how ongoing and future peace deals will build various peacebuilding infrastructures. For example, the ND model focuses on a bottom-up approach and popular participation, while the peace negotiation brought to the table the elites. There is at least a clear lack of synergy or visible contradiction at most. Moreover, an institution such as the Ministry of Peace focuses on expanding the peace constituency to build positive peace. It valorizes peace and has been working to create subjects of peace.¹⁹ Similarly, there is no clarity on how its concepts of peace, approaches, and ethos are placed in the national peacebuilding infrastructure. If one considers the numerous civil society organizations with various approaches to the small-p peacebuilding model, the lack of integration and synergy appears very visible.

The incumbent party also enhanced efforts to address issues through governance. The decision to address the questions in the South increases the number of regional states. The political economic

¹⁹ Key informant 15 interview expert from Ministry of peace March 12, 2024, Addis Ababa

liberalization is unfolding swiftly. Demarcations of the boundary between Addis Ababa and Oromyia, including the newly introduced Sheger city, are part of the governance model to address grievances. Grand renewal of Addis Ababa city arose contestation over displacement, dispossession, and erasure of history and heritage on one hand, renewal, and prosperity on the other.²⁰ All these inevitably shape the peacebuilding process, and no clarity on how such governance decisions are designed considering conflict sensitivity, if not as part of peacebuilding.

These instance shows a lack of conceptual synergy, mainly between peace and justice; elite and mass, and theoretical liberal and community-based between different approaches to peacebuilding. There is also no operational coordination between various commissions and institutions that facilitate each infrastructure of peace. The peace constituencies are seemingly divided between different approaches, concepts, and the ethos of peacebuilding. Institutions and commissions have little space and time for coordinating and linking their activities. This fragmentation directly explains the failure of peacebuilding to adequately address the complex drivers of the conflict and engage its multiple actors. The reproduction of peace as discourse, messaging, and isolated institutions does not signify genuine progress. Instead, it reveals a strategy of peaceocracy, wherein various actors—including those perpetrating violence—instrumentalize the language of peace to serve their own strategic ends, thereby perpetuating the very cycles of conflict they claim to resolve.

9. Conclusion: Towards Comprehensive Peacebuilding

The pursuit of sustainable peace in Ethiopia is at a critical juncture, defined by a fundamental paradox where peace initiatives proliferate while political violence is unfolding. The mobilization of the same fragmented micro-discourse and institutions of peace and peacebuilding amid protracted violence informs a particular form of peaceocracy. While significant initiatives like the Cessation of Hostilities

²⁰ Key informant 14 interview Scholar 9TH OF March 2024 Addis Ababa

Agreement (CoHA) and the establishment of transitional justice frameworks have been launched, their impact remains constrained by internal contradictions and a piecemeal approach. Treating the conflicts in Tigray, Amhara, and Oromia as isolated issues has proven futile, as they are deeply interconnected within a single, complex security system. This system is further complicated by a crucial regional dimension, where the fragile peace with Eritrea and the involvement of other regional and international actors significantly influence internal dynamics. The failure of the CoHA to formally engage Eritrea, for instance, has not only exposed a looming interstate hostility but has directly contributed to the fragility of internal agreements and made disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) processes profoundly complex, if not impossible.

Internally, the peace process is fraught with tension, where the top-down, liberal-legalist model of transitional justice competes with the bottom-up, communitarian ethos of the national dialogue. This conceptual dissonance is mirrored in structural weaknesses, where domestic peace infrastructures lack the political influence to drive a unified strategy. Therefore, the path forward necessitates a fundamental shift. A comprehensive framework is urgently needed—one that strategically integrates domestic stakeholders through a comprehensive peacebuilding roadmap. Critically, this framework must also account for the regional security architecture. Any viable peacebuilding model must develop a strategy to engage with neighboring states, particularly Eritrea, to prevent external actors from undermining internal settlements. Without such a holistic approach that simultaneously addresses both the intricate internal fragmentation and the volatile regional interdependencies, Ethiopia's peace efforts will remain fragmented and fragile, perpetually vulnerable to renewed cycles of violence on multiple fronts.

The fragmentation seemingly risks disciplining the masses for various contradictory discourses of peace, only united in this peaceoractic effect. Moreover, the risk of a fragmented peacebuilding approach is falling into peaceocracy and the disciplining effect of communities for competing discourse of intervention, be it justice or dialogue or peace, reconciliation or development, etc., where democracy and participation are low, the tendency to mobilize peace for instrumental purposes will be high. Therefore, peacebuilding infrastructures must compromise, integrate, and negotiate their various

concepts, methods, components, activities, actors, and visions to evolve into a comprehensive and inclusive political project that addresses the complex violence in Ethiopia and the regional conflict dynamics it interacts with.

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