

In Search of ‘Oromo Democracy’: Intellectual Contribution of Oromo Diaspora in the Nordic Countries to Political Discourse in Ethiopia

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The paper will analyze the way the Oromo intellectuals living in diaspora in the Nordic countries have reflected on and positioned themselves in the ethnopolitical conflict between the ‘Abyssinian’ groups and the descendents of the various Oromo polities which were conquered by the Amharic and Tigrinya speaking ‘Abyssinians’ during the 19th century. Even though they are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia with approximately 25 million members, a large part of the Oromo perceive themselves as discriminated and exploited by the groups holding political power. While the confrontation has deep historical roots, it is currently characterized by conflicting interpretations of selected keywords taken from the master-narrative of the Enlightenment, such as sovereignty, rights and democracy. In the debate, the diaspora has had an important role in expanding the bases of argumentation to international academic discourses (such as the Nordic tradition of peace research) and alternative ‘non-hegemonic’ interpretations of local histories in Ethiopia, both made possible by their life situation in diaspora.

Theoretically, the paper takes off from the concept of ‘orientational frame’ launched by Kevin Gillan (2008), which is developed further with support from post-colonial theory, particularly Arjun Appandurai’s discussion about ‘ideoscapes’ (1990), and Homi Bhabha’s formulations on ‘strategic intellectual’ and his/her role in the ‘social process of enunciation’ (1992).

The paper is based on about 20 individual interviews of members of the Ethiopian diaspora in the Nordic countries and representatives of academic institutions and NGOs in Ethiopia, participant observation in three ethnic identity-based culture & history workshops organized in Europe, and selected research papers and books published by members of the diaspora. These are complemented by relevant research literature.

References

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