

Current Ethiopian Crisis: Inquiries into Fundamentals

25-26 April 2023
09:00 a.m.-05:00 p.m.
IPSS New Conference Hall



The Institute for Peace and Security Studies and the College of Social Sciences, Addis Ababa University, in collaboration with Makerere Institute of Social Research, Makerere University, Uganda, are organizing a two days conference on the theme “Current Ethiopian Crisis: Inquiries into Fundamentals”. The conference focuses on the historical roots of the war that has been going on in northern Ethiopia and the widespread ethnic-based violence throughout the country since 2018. This crisis and a good deal of the conversations about it are in some ways based on and continuations of what have been going on in the country since, it is conceived, the adoption of ethnic federalism in the mid-1990s. Three major limitations seem to inform these conversations: (i) spatio-temporal confinement, (ii) dichotomous theorizing and practice, and (iii) the spell of finding solutions.

Working in narrow spatio-temporal vistas, a great majority of the reflections on the current situation would tend to caricature it. In terms of time framework, the fact that the majority of the analyses go back only as far as the 1990s is problematic since the roots of the problem could be traced to many decades before the 1974-Revolution. As a matter of course, the spatial aspect cannot be separated from the temporal and hence the conceptual strains that would follow from singling out the Ethiopian political geography. The conference is assumed to engage the debate between those who see peculiarity of the Ethiopian situation vis-à-vis those that explain it in terms of the coloniality/modernity scheme.

The second constraint revolves around dichotomous theorizing and practice. Categorizations such as the “West” vs. the “East,” “modern” vs. “traditional,” “society” vs. “culture,” “state nationalism” vs “ethnic nationalism,” etc incarcerate and freeze the intellectual and political space so much that the analyses that come out of these binaries end up caricaturing the situation under scrutiny.

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As scholars that call for decolonization point out, it is not only that these dichotomies are products of the colonial scholarship but also that many African and Africanist scholars of the modernist persuasion do not seem to give heed to it, eventually inflicting epistemic injuries on their own scholarship and the political reality of the areas that they cover. This situation is much worse a problem in the Ethiopianist discourse because there has been little cognizance of the permeating modernist/coloniality assumptions behind much of the prevailing discursive practice.

The third and equally prevailing and commanding tendency is the haste to stumble on solutions before any effort to problematize what needs to be addressed.

The major objective of the conference is therefore to problematize the three sets of issues that are just outlined and deconstruct them within the larger modernity/coloniality entanglement.