Figure 1:

Prof. Dr. Magnus-Welcoming and Introducing

Dr Hagos Nigussie- Making Keynote speech

War-Time Communication in Ethiopia

Workshop Report: July 11 and 12, 2024

Hosted at: The Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Ludwig Maximillians University of Munich -LMU

Supported by: The Gerda Henkel Foundation

Organizers:

Prof. Dr. Magnus Treiber

Woldegiorgis G. Teklay

Compiled by: *Wol*degiorgis G. Teklay | LMU | Woldegiorgis.Teklay@campus.lmu.de

A. The flyer that was advertised on campus, posted on the host institute's **website**, and circulated among *scholars at risk*, funded by the Gerda Henkel Stiftung.

LMU LUDWIG-MAXIMILIANS-UNIVERSITÄT MÜNCHEN

FAKULTÄT FÜR KULTURWISSENSCHAFTEN
INSTITUT FÜR ETHNOLOGIE

GERDA HENKEL STIFTUNG

Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Oettingenstr. 67, 80538 München

Thursday, 11 July 2024, 2pm-7pm, Room 0.27
Friday, 12 July 2024, 9:30am-12pm, Room 1.31

War Time Communication in Ethiopia

Thursday, Room 0.27

2:15   Welcome and Introductions
2:35   Keynote: War and Hate - Media Coverage and Representation in the Tigray War (Hagos Nigussie)
3:40   Reporting Tigray's Cultural Heritage in Crisis (Alula Tesfay)
4:20   Challenges Faced by Journalists Reporting on the Tigray War in Ethiopia (Bereket Hassen)
5:00   Communication Strategies of Civilians in Conflict-Ridden Tigray (Efrem Nigussie)
5:40   Wrap-Up and Discussion (Wolbert Smidt)
6:00   Video Online-Presentation: The Fragility of Addis Ababa's Urban Heritage (Piet Nieder)

Friday, Room 1.31

9:30   Ethiopia, Transnationalism and the Tigray War, 2020-2022 (Mitiku Gebrehiwot)
10:10   Salvaged Propaganda Tools from the Derg Era in the War on Tigray (Samuel Kidane)
10:50   Weaponizing Hate During the Ethiopian War (Woldegiorgis G. Teklay)
11:30   Wrap-Up, Discussion and Closing Remarks (Magnus Treiber)

Guests are welcome!   Prof. Dr. Magnus Treiber & Woldegiorgis G. Teklay

Workshop

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B. Introduction

The workshop, titled *"War-Time Communication in Ethiopia: Case Studies and Perspectives with an Emphasis on the Conflict Since 2020"*, was supported by the Gerda Henkel Foundation and hosted at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich, on **July 11–12, 2024**. The workshop aimed to explore the nature of communication—its strategies, tactics, and dynamics—employed in historical, recent, and ongoing wars and conflicts in Ethiopia, focusing on research by student scholars who have received scholarships from the Gerda Henkel Foundation.

Participants engaged with a variety of case studies to examine how messages were delivered, received, and interpreted among both combatants and civilians, as well as how these communications influenced the outcomes of wars and conflicts. Special attention was given to the recent war since 2020, with analyses of the role of social media and modern advancements in media technology, and their impacts on wartime communication and its consequences.

The workshop was convened by **Prof. Dr. Magnus Treiber,** a professor of social anthropology at the Institute, and his PhD student, **Woldegiorgis G. Teklay**. They invited scholars, researchers, journalists, and practitioners—particularly Gerda Henkel Foundation scholarship recipients—to submit abstracts for paper presentations addressing the workshop themes. Based on the official call for papers, five papers from Gerda fellows and three additional submissions were presented, as detailed in the flyer above.

C. Objectives and themes:

The objective was to explore the theoretical scope and ethical dimensions of wartime communication, focusing on communication approaches employed during past and present wars in Ethiopia, the impact of media and propaganda on public perception, and implications for journalism and media practices. The major thematic areas covered included theoretical approaches to wartime communication, media coverage and representation of the war, propaganda, disinformation, claims of truth, and hate speech, as well as applied social media and digital narratives. Ethical considerations in reporting war, government communication strategies, humanitarian communication challenges, and the role of international media and global perspectives were also addressed.

D. Abstracts of the Papers Presented

Keynote Speech: Hagos Nigussie (Dr.)

1. Media Coverage, Representation and Hate Speech in During the War in Ethiopia

Dr. Hagos Nigussie opened the workshop with a keynote presentation that combined insights from the following two significant research papers, addressing critical issues related to communication in conflict-affected Tigray, northern Ethiopia.

1.1. Citizen Journalism for Social Mobilization in War-Affected Tigray

Dr. Hagos examined the emergence of citizen journalism as a powerful tool for social mobilization amidst the war in Tigray. The study utilized a mixed-methods approach, including interviews, focus group discussions, and content analysis, to explore the role of citizen journalists as eyewitnesses who document and share the realities of war. Key findings emphasized that citizen journalists:

- Played a critical role in uniting and mobilizing the Tigray community, especially by providing essential information during an information blackout.

- Highlighted atrocities, such as the use of rape and hunger as weapons of war, thereby inspiring international investigations into genocide.

- Contributed to the recruitment and strengthening of the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) by sharing impactful stories and visuals.

The study underscored how citizen journalism, enabled by mobile phones, became a primary source of news during the conflict, amplifying voices otherwise silenced in traditional media.

1.2. Echoes of Violence: Analyzing Hate Speech in Ethiopian Broadcast Media

The second paper focused on the prevalence and impact of hate speech in Ethiopian broadcast media from 2020 to 2022, particularly targeting the Tigray population. Dr. Hagos analyzed hate speech propagated by influential figures, including government officials, religious leaders, and elites, who labeled Tigrayans as "enemies of Ethiopia." Key observations included:

- Hate speech in broadcast media played a central role in justifying and escalating state-led violence against Tigray.

- Religious leaders, across denominations, actively participated in spreading hate narratives, often during public religious events, aligning themselves with the Ethiopian National Defense Forces.

- The study highlighted the role of polarized media and elite-driven hate speech in fueling ethno-political divisions and violence.

Bio*: Dr. Hagos Nigussie is an Alexander von Humboldt Fellow at Paderborn University, Germany, and an Assistant Professor at Mekelle University, Ethiopia. He holds a PhD in Communication for Development and Media Studies from the University of Queensland, Australia, and has published extensively in international peer-reviewed journals.*

2. **Weaponizing Hate in Ethiopia:** Understanding Hate Messages Socialized During the War

Woldegiorgis G. Teklay, PhD candidate, LMU, Gerda Henkel Foundation Scholarship holder

Woldegiorgis G. Teklay, a PhD student at the host institute, presented part of his research on the weaponization of hate messages during the Ethiopian genocidal civil war from November 2020 to November 2023, the Pretoria Ceasefire Agreement. His study tries to understand the propagation of hate speech targeting ethnic Tigrayans, analyzing content disseminated through mainstream and social media by figures in public offices, religious institutions, academia, political parties, the arts, and media.

Using a qualitative approach that includes case studies, discourse analysis, and digital ethnography, Woldegiorgis explores the timing, context, and impact of hate messages. He focuses on texts, audio, and video content shared by leaders and influencers, contextualizing their weaponization during the war. The research highlights the role of hate speech in manipulating public opinion, exacerbating tensions, and legitimizing violence. Key concepts examined include:

- Demonization: Portraying a group as a monstrous threat.
- Dehumanization: Equating groups with subhuman entities.
- Dangerous Hate Speech: Explicit incitements to violence.
- Early Warning Extreme Hate Speech: Assigning harmful stereotypes and criminality.

By investigating these mechanisms, the study sheds light on the strategic use of hate speech in the Ethiopian genocidal civil war and its devastating consequences. Woldegiorgis's

research contributes to understanding the societal impact of weaponized hate and the roles of various actors in perpetuating it.

3. Salvaged Propaganda Tools from the Derg Era in the War on Tigray

Samuel Kidane Haile, Gerda Henkel Foundation Scholarship holder

Samuel Kidane's presentation analyzed the Ethiopian Federal Government's revival of propaganda methods from the Derg regime (1975–1991) during the war on Tigray (Nov 2020–Nov 2022). These propaganda tools, originally designed to suppress secessionist movements, were repurposed to demonize Tigrayan forces, labeling them as treasonous, anti-national, and mercenaries of enemy states. Key highlights included:

Context: The war was triggered by tensions over many disputes, drawing in international actors like Eritrea, the UAE, and Turkey.

Propaganda Use: Old ballad songs and Derg-era documentaries were broadcast indiscriminately, promoting irredentism and vilifying Tigrayans.

Impact: The reuse of these divisive materials mobilized dormant actors with grievances against the TPLF, intensifying the conflict and contributing to atrocities, including genocide.

Samuel argued that this reliance on outdated propaganda, coupled with foreign interventions, transformed the war into a full-scale crisis with devastating consequences for Tigrayans.

Bio: *Samuel Kidane Haile is a PhD fellow at the Gotha Centre for Transcultural Studies, Erfurt University, focusing on northern Ethiopian geo-history in the 18th century.*

4. Unveiling the Nexus: Challenges Faced by Journalists Reporting on the Tigray War in Ethiopia

Bereket Hassen, Gerda Henkel Foundation Scholarship holder

Bereket Hassen's presentation focused on the challenges encountered by journalists covering the Tigray war in Ethiopia, based on qualitative interviews with journalists and editors involved in reporting the conflict. The study combines multiple theoretical frameworks such as conflict reporting, journalist safety, media systems, and trauma theory to understand the difficulties faced by media professionals in a war zone. Key findings include:

- Lack of Experience: Journalists reported having limited prior experience in conflict reporting, which hindered their ability to handle the complexities of the Tigray war effectively.

- Safety Concerns: The absence of adequate safety measures and training left journalists vulnerable in a dangerous environment.

- Information Blockage: Both sides of the conflict denied facts, creating an "Information Black Box" where access to accurate information was severely restricted.

- Political Economy Divide: A stark contrast between state and private media led to biased reporting, undermining the integrity of conflict coverage.

- Self-Censorship & Intimidation: Journalists faced intimidation, leading many to practice self-censorship, and were also subjected to direct digital attacks, further exacerbating their psychological stress.

- Psychological Impact: Journalists experienced significant mental health challenges due to the traumatic content they encountered and the pressures of reporting in a highly polarized and dangerous context.

Bereket's study provides valuable insights into the unique challenges journalists face while reporting on conflict, highlighting both physical and psychological risks.

Bio: Bereket Hasen Beddecha is a PhD candidate in Communication Science at the University of Erfurt, Germany, and a Lecturer in Journalism and Communication at Mekelle University, Ethiopia. He is a member of the Graduate School of Communication and Digital Media (ComDigMed) at Erfurt University.

5. Ethiopia, Transnationalism, and the Tigray War of 2020-2022

Mitiku Gebrehiwot

Mitiku Gebrehiowt's presentation explored the role of the Ethiopian diaspora, particularly the Tigrayan community, in influencing the Tigray War (2020-2022) through transnational engagement. Drawing from over two years of research in Europe, the study examines the diaspora's evolving involvement, shaped by ethnic, political, and historical ties. Key findings include:

Divisions Within the Diaspora: The Tigrayan community, along with other Ethiopian diaspora groups, has been divided along ethnic, political, and religious lines. The Tigrayans, in particular, faced challenges in amplifying their voices amid competing interests, especially from government actors in the US and Europe.

Shift in Political Engagement: Historically less politically active, the Tigrayan diaspora saw a surge in political engagement during the war. Grassroots initiatives focused on raising funds for those affected by the war and promoting political awareness, while fostering social cohesion through local gatherings.

Demonstrations and Lobbying: The community utilized demonstrations and lobbying tactics, significantly affecting Ethiopian politics beyond the state's influence, especially in the US and Europe.

Influence of the 'No More' Movement: The short-lived 'No More' movement supporting the federal government, which had strong support from the Ethiopian diaspora, added complexity to the political dynamics of the conflict, influencing both domestic and international perceptions.

Mitiku's research highlights the critical role of diaspora communities in shaping both the narrative and the political landscape surrounding the Tigray War.

Bio: Mitiku Gebrehiowt is an associate professor at Mekelle University and a researcher at EHESS, Paris.

6. Surviving Siege: Communication Strategies of Civilians in Conflict-Ridden Tigray

Efrem Negusie, Gerda Henkel Foundation Scholarship holder

Efrem Negusie's presentation focused on the innovative communication strategies employed by civilians in Tigray during the conflict, specifically the siege imposed by the Ethiopian government starting in November 2020. The study examines how people, despite extreme challenges such as communication blackouts and isolation, were still able to stay in contact with their families and communities within and outside the region. Key findings include:

Communication Blackout and Siege: The war caused a complete communication blackout in Tigray, as well as the destruction of essential infrastructure, electricity, and transport systems. This left civilians struggling to communicate not only within the region but also with the outside world.

Mobile Applications as a Lifeline: Despite the siege, civilians utilized mobile applications like Xender and Bluetooth to share recorded voice messages and audio files, thus bypassing traditional communication channels.

Strategies for Staying Connected: Civilians also sought ways to charge their cell phones, often relying on others to transport these messages to people in areas with internet access or NGO workers who could relay the information.

Information Sharing: These communication methods were crucial for sharing news about safety, survival, and seeking financial assistance amidst the conflict. The study highlights the resourcefulness of civilians in maintaining communication and support networks during times of extreme adversity.

Efrem's research emphasizes the resilience of the Tigrayan people and how even in the most challenging circumstances, creative communication strategies enabled them to maintain connections and navigate the hardships of war.

Bio: Efrem Negusie is a PhD candidate at the University of Göttingen, Faculty of Humanities.

7. Reporting Tigray's Cultural Heritage in Crisis

Alula Tesfay Asfha (Dr.), Gerda Henkel Foundation Scholarship holder

Alula Tesfay Asfha's presentation examined the devastating impact of the Tigray war (2020-2022) on the region's cultural heritage. The war caused extensive damage to both tangible heritage sites and intangible cultural practices such as festivals and religious rituals. Despite the widespread coverage of the human toll of the war, the destruction of Tigray's cultural legacy has often been underreported. Key points from the presentation include:

Impact on Cultural Heritage: The conflict severely threatened Tigray's cultural heritage, which has been an essential part of its identity. The destruction of historical sites and the disruption of cultural traditions were compounded by the communication blackout that isolated the region.

Challenges of Reporting in Crisis: Reporting on cultural heritage during such crises is fraught with difficulties, especially concerning safety, human rights, and ensuring accurate representation.

Documentation Efforts: Alula highlighted the critical role of documentation in preserving cultural heritage, emphasizing the importance of community involvement and ethical reporting practices. The presentation underscored the need for evidence collection and local engagement in safeguarding heritage sites.

Post-Conflict Recovery: Moving forward, as Tigray transitions to peace, comprehensive documentation strategies are vital for identifying areas of significant cultural loss. However, these efforts face severe challenges due to budget constraints and limited funding for restoration projects.

Global and Local Partnerships: The presentation called for coordinated efforts between local communities and international partners to prioritize the recovery of cultural heritage. By adhering to ethical reporting practices and prioritizing restoration needs, the cultural legacy of Tigray can be preserved for future generations.

Alula's research aims to highlight the urgency of protecting and documenting Tigray's cultural heritage, especially in the aftermath of the conflict, while providing strategies for recovery and resilience.

Bio: Alula Tesfay is a Gerda Henkel Fellow at the Frobenius Institute of Goethe University-Frankfurt and an Assistant Professor at Mekelle University.

8. The Fragility of Addis Ababa's Urban Heritage

Piet Nieder (TU Berlin)

Piet Nieder's presentation highlighted the fragility of Addis Ababa's early urban architecture, focusing on the distinctive "Addis Ababa Style" that emerged during Ethiopia's initial urbanization starting in 1886. This style blends vernacular building techniques with cosmopolitan influences, resulting in unique pavilion-like structures made of stone, earth, and wood. These buildings are characterized by their expressive pinched roofs, generous verandas, and intricate detailing, tailored to the local climate and resources.

Nieder, in collaboration with the Institute for Architecture in Addis Ababa (EiABC) and Berlin's Technical University, discussed how these buildings are now under threat due to economic and political pressures that overlook their architectural and environmental value. His research examined how these buildings were adapted to the local context, showcasing their potential for sustainable, non-industrial architectural solutions.

The presentation emphasized the importance of preserving Addis Ababa's urban heritage, calling for a balance between modern development and the protection of culturally significant architectural forms that reflect the city's unique historical and climatic conditions.
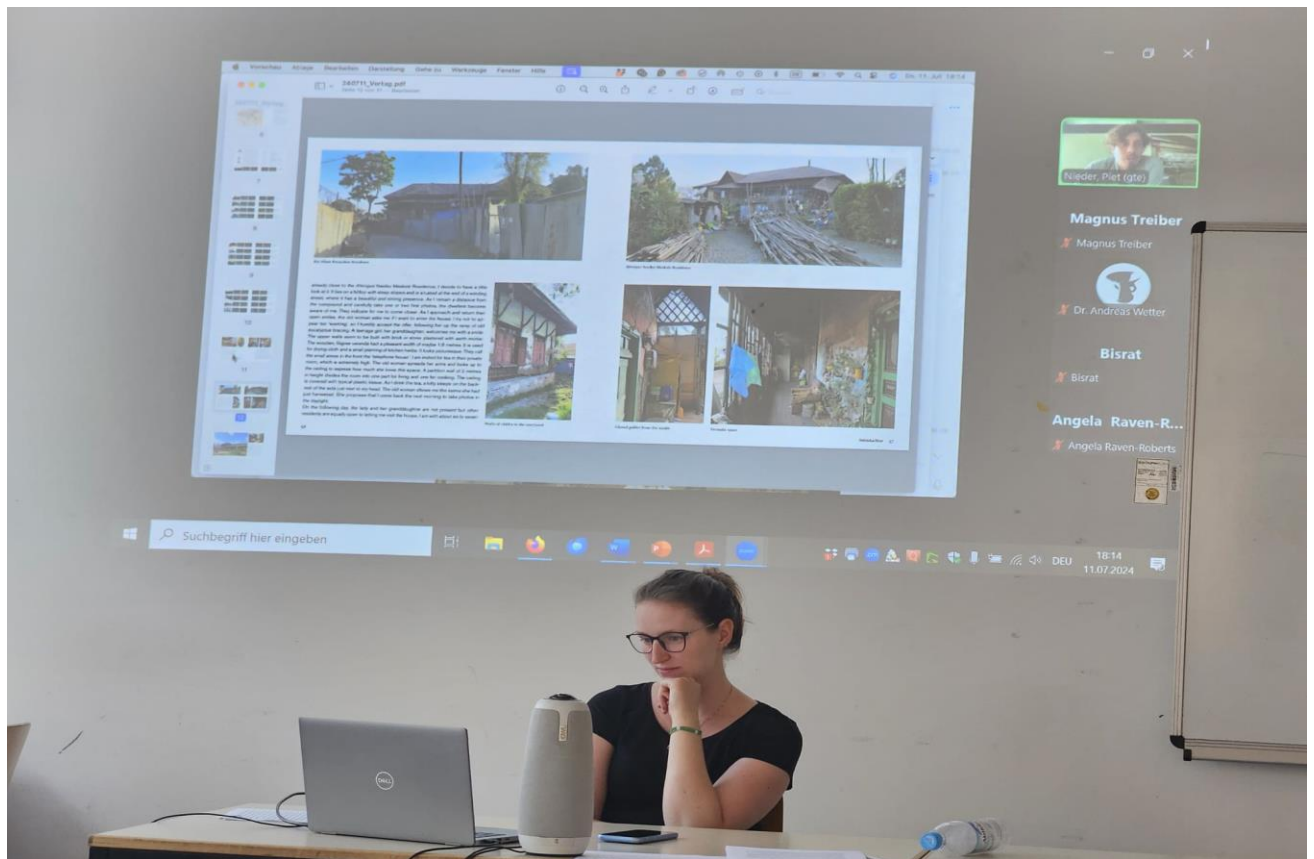
Bio: Piet Nieder is a practicing architect and researcher at Technical University Berlin, focusing on the use of traditional building techniques in transforming urban spaces in Ethiopia. He holds a Master of Science in Architecture from ETH Zurich and taught architectural design at the Ethiopian Institute for Architecture (EiABC) from 2012–2013.

Dr Hagos presenting his research work

Q &A: Discussion after the presentation

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Carolina moderating presentation by Piet Nieder about the Fragility of Addis Ababa's Urban Heritage

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