

# Ethnicity, democratisation and decentralization in Ethiopia: The case of Oromia.

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## Ethnicity, Democratisation and Decentralization in Ethiopia: The Case of Oromia

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### Abstract

The 20th century has been shaped by class and national struggles intended to end the asymmetrical relations that arose in the historical process of the creation of the multi-ethnic polity of Ethiopia. This study explores and assesses the democratization and decentralization experiment in Ethiopia. It focuses on the Oromia region, which is the country's largest region as well as housing its single largest ethnic group. It describes the demand of the Oromo people for self-rule and democratic governance on the one hand, and the promises made on paper by the government in power, on the other. It concludes that the Oromia region is a classical case in terms of the degree of failure of the regime's policies on the national question and the

## ETHNICITY, DEMOCRATISATION AND DECENTRALIZATION IN ETHIOPIA: THE CASE OF OROMIA

*Mercia Gudina\**

**Abstract:** The 20<sup>th</sup> century has been shaped by class and national struggles intended to end the asymmetrical relations that arose in the historical process of the creation of the multi-ethnic polity of Ethiopia. This study explores and assesses the democratization and decentralization experiment in Ethiopia. It focuses on the Oromia region, which is the country's largest region as well as housing its single largest ethnic group. It describes the demand of the Oromo people for self-rule and democratic governance on the one hand, and the promises made on paper by the government in power, on the other. It concludes that the Oromia region is a classical case in terms of the degree of failure of the regime's policies on the national question and the continued struggle for real autonomy and democracy on the part of the local population.

**Keywords:** ethnicity, Oromia, decentralisation, democratisation, autonomy

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the historical continuum that informs the 'making and remaking' of modern Ethiopia, the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was shaped by the wars of incorporation and state formation on unequal terms. In many major ways, class and national struggles, intended to end the asymmetrical relations, have shaped the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In other words, while the wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were for the 'making' of modern Ethiopia, the struggles of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were for the reversal of the same historical process that created the multi-ethnic polity of Ethiopia. The class and national struggles of the 1960s and 1970s that precipitated the revolution of 1974, the struggles that led to the change of regime in 1991, and the ongoing struggles for self-rule and democracy were and are all part of the 'remaking' of Ethiopia.

A closer look at the nature of the perennial struggles for the 'remaking' of Ethiopia clearly shows the centrality of the competing ethnic nationalists'

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