

Political Discourses and the Securitization of Democracy in Post-1991 Ethiopia

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to interrogate post-1991-2015 political development in Ethiopia, focusing on the political discourses espoused by the government and opposition, using the discourse analysis method and securitization theory. Discursive narratives and counter-discourse narratives are used by the political elite as instruments for political mobilization to bolster their ideological claims, while negating those of their opponents.

The study draws two important linkages between the political discourses of the major political forces and the “speech act” in securitization theory, where the EPRDF Government used extraordinary measures to quell opponents’ criticism of its doctrine, which is based on revolutionary democracy, ethnic federalism and the developmental state as subversive and existential terrorist acts intended to undermine its system rule. Concomitantly, opposition political discourses portray the EPRDF Government as a threat to the emergence of competitive open democratic politics, which would eventually lead to undermining the existence of Ethiopia as a unitary state.

The thesis argues that government and opposition political discourses and the securitization of democracy have resulted in the emergence of “the politics of the extraordinary”, which closed the political space for the growth and development of normal politics. The cumulative effect of the politics of the extraordinary is that it stifles any opportunity for authentic democratization to emerge. In Ethiopia, it privileged the securitization of democracy and legitimized the use of violence as an extension of a centralist revolutionary democratic discourse.

Accordingly, this thesis explains the failure of post-1991 political development by unveiling the role of discursive narratives in shaping an entrenched nexus between politics and security. The thesis also examines the ruling party’s political discourses and its institutionalizations, and investigates the discourses of the opposition – the Pan-Ethiopianists and ethno-nationalists – and the interplay of these discourses.