

Diaspora: A one-day conference on a travelling concept

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Ethiopian Diasporic Community Networks and Practice of Homemaking in Sweden

Introduction

Ethiopian diasporic communities in Sweden are said to have divided along political, ethnic and religious lines. But even though Pan-Ethiopian community organizations are rare in Sweden there are several interest groups and community organizations built around Christian churches, profession, political opinion, cultural self-help institutions known as Iqqub (a semiformal rotating saving and credit association) and Iddir (a kind of burial service and grief management association) (see Dejene Aredo, 1993 for details) so as to fulfill the community social and economic needs in Sweden and maintain connections to Ethiopia. Based on Rogers Brubaker's notion of diaspora as a category of practice (Brubaker, 2005) and using the broader perspective on the concept of home as a place where one is emotionally attached and practically engaged in continuous political, social, familial and economic projects; I will explore community "homemaking" activities in relation to countries of destination and origin as well as other dispersed national communities elsewhere. Ashcroft et al (1995: 425) stated: "...scattering leads to a splitting in the sense of home. A fundamental ambivalence is embedded in the term diaspora: a dual ontology in which the diasporic subject is seen to look in two directions—towards a historical cultural identity on one hand, and the society of relocation on the other."

Diasporic practice of homemaking is manifested when community networks are mobilized for economic and social opportunities by way of overcoming structural challenges such as access to labor market, welfare systems and permanent residence/citizenship rights in destination country (Fredlund-Blomst, 2013). In other words money, information, knowledge and other resources are generated via networks to confront socio-economic and political/jurisdictional barriers and establish life and livelihood in Sweden. Networks are also mobilized to build churches; practice the religion and cultural norms in the new land. Community organizations and interest groups are also frequently mobilized to support social and political changes in the country of origin, in collaboration with diasporic groups in other national spaces. Even though there are internal political rifts, envies or competitions and at times exploitations in the community based ethnic enclaves, people engage in networks instrumentally by contracting and expanding one's identity frameworks for a particular purpose at particular moments. Hence I will argue that one dimension of the diasporic practice of homemaking (Brah, 1996;

Alinia et al., 2014) is a dynamic process of negotiating one's connections and disconnections as well as exclusions and inclusions in both the country of origin and that of destination, via a solidarity generated through a particular form of shared experiences consolidated during the process of migration.

The paper of this presentation has six short sections: In the first section I will elaborate on the notion of diaspora and home. In the second section the process of Ethiopians emigration to Sweden and community formation will be discussed briefly. The third section traces the establishment and role of Ethiopian Christian church organizations in everyday homemaking activities in Sweden, and through practices of transnational engagement. The fourth section discusses the organizational role of the Ethiopian Sport and Culture Federation and the Ethiopian Radio in Sweden in facilitating socioeconomic and cultural needs of the community in Sweden and facilitating cross border solidarity with Ethiopians in diaspora. Section five explores the purpose and role of cultural self-help associations (Iqqub and Iddir) in settling community day-to-day social and economic challenges. The sixth section discusses the association of Ethiopian Health professionals in Sweden and its members' individual and collective engagement in community related development projects in Sweden and Ethiopia. The last part offers concluding remarks by elaborating how homemaking in the diasporic setting is an ongoing process of extending solidarity and establishing connections in spaces of destination and origin, where both locations can be read as 'home'.