

**Cartographic Discourse and Intra-State Border Disputes:  
~~The~~ The Question of Wolkait-Tsegede in Contemporary Abyssinia/Ethiopia**

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One of the sticky issues at the center of the bloody war in Northern Ethiopia is a contestation between the Tigray and Amhara regions over Wolkait-Tsegede. The horrific conflict has been mainly over territory, but it is also tied with history, memory, and identity. The fierce war on the ground has been preceded and accompanied by equally fierce, bitter, and partisan battles on the realm of historical memory and archive. Cartographic discourse has been a particularly potent arsenal employed in the battle of narratives. Western maps of Ethiopia, itineraries, and travel narratives dating to the sixteenth century have been invoked as incontrovertible historical evidence to buttress the veracity of claims and counterclaims over the territories of Wolkait-Tsegede. Premodern and modern Western maps of Ethiopia are summoned to conclusively and irrefutably show that the contested territories have been historically an integral part of a geographically discrete and bounded Amhara or Tigrayan ethnic homelands. For example, Achameleh Tamiru (who is he? And why is he important?) refers to the existence of a “mountain” of historical “documents and maps dated from about 1434 to 1991” that depict Wolkait-Tsegede as part of the “Gondar province of Amhara.” In the same vein, but from the opposite side of the cartographic debate, Jan Nyssen ? claims that to have consulted over one hundred historic European maps the majority of which accurately place Wolkait in Tigray. European maps of Ethiopia are arrayed in a linear timescale to create the impression of historical depth, general immutability/fixity, and incontrovertible objectivity to the substantiate present the territorial claims made by both Amharas and Tigrayans.

Maps are not only used as supposedly effective and objective tools of staking claim-making ~~s~~ to contested territories in debates conducted among the elites. There has been a proliferation of maps, or logo-maps, are often used by ordinary people in myriad quotidian ways to declare identification with and situate their affective investment in belong to different ethno-national territories spaces. What In this paper. I intend to do is to interrogate the various problematic assumptions underpinning the cartographic discourses, especially with regard to ~~regarding~~ the putative objectivity of maps as mirror reflections of geographical, territorial, political, and cultural realities. Instead of treating maps as objective reflections of geographic and political realities, I offer an alternative reading of maps:

a) as visual and textual artifacts whose productions are informed by the ideological persuasions and motivations of European mapmakers, technical and epistemic advances and constraints within which mapmakers operate,

b) ~~as~~ the relatively recent ~~historical by-products~~ ~~historical production~~ of territorialized, bounded, and mapped ethnic ~~homelands as by products of~~ imaginaries of the bureaucratic and administrative ~~powers involved in measures taken by a~~ centralizing and modernizing the Ethiopian state. And

~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ c) ~~how historic maps a map~~ discourse that has seeped s-out on the general into a general spatial understanding of land and ethnicity ~~-among map mindedness among the population more broadly~~ ordinary people ~~(in this case,~~ Tigrayans and Amharas) ~~in the form of~~ which channel and reinforce their affinities for and allegiance to their respective ethno-nationalist identities ~~and~~ toward specific territories.

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