



Allegations of Systemic Sexualized Violence as War Strategy in Ethiopia

A guest lecture by Dr. Sonja John

Wednesday, 19 January 2022

18:30 via WebEx

Abstract

In 2018, the Ethiopian people have freed themselves of the authoritarian and oppressive government led by the Tigrayan People Liberation Front (TPLF) which was accused of numerous crimes against humanity, in addition to looting the country for 27 years. The new Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and his administration set out to resolve the country's deep ethnic and political divide. It implemented democratic reforms and signing a peace agreement with Eritrea. The following year, Abiy Ahmed received the Nobel Peace Prize. The TPLF, however, refused subjecting itself to rule of law and to all mediation attempts. In November 2020, it attacked the Ethiopian military – a confrontation it can only win with external support. A domestic conflict between new democratic reformists on the one side and the old divisive elite on the other turned into an armed conflict – with the West univocally siding with the latter. Why does the West – USA and the EU – actively support the aggressor and sanction the legitimate, democratically elected government of Ethiopia?

It will be argued that the TPLF succeeded in securing continued Western support by advancing its propaganda tools. The resounding allegation of systemic sexualized violence has garnered sympathy and support for the TPLF in the Western international community by activating the collective imperialist phantasy of 'White men are saving brown women from brown men' (Spivak 1988). With a focus on the interplay of local and global dynamics, interconnections and asymmetries the dominant narrative of the "Tigray conflict" will be questioned. The accusations of systemic sexualized violence reiterated in NGO reports and Western media will be analyzed along subsequent declarations of sanctions by the US and EU. Responses by the Ethiopian government and official inquiries by human rights organizations will be included. By contextualizing these reports within modern Ethiopian history, it becomes manifest that the TPLF succeeded in introducing rape allegations as war strategy to secure material and logistic resources from the West.

Guest Lecturer

Dr. Sonja John holds degrees in Lakota Leadership and Management from Oglala Lakota College, USA, and in Political Science at Free University Berlin. She lectured in American Studies, Peace Studies and International Relations in Berlin, Dresden, Klagenfurt, Vienna and Kleve. From 2015 to 2019, Dr. Sonja John was assistant professor for Political Science at University of Gondar and then, Bahir Dar University in Ethiopia. Her research focuses on Indigeneity, incarceration, and intersectionality. Currently she is researching police accountability at the Berlin School of Economics and Law.

www.afk-web.de
afk-gf@afk-web.de

