

Oberseminar

VORTRAGSREIHE DES INSTITUTS FÜR ETHNOLOGIE

Leitung: Martin Sökefeld

13.07.2026

Gemechu Bekele Lemu, MA (LMU)

Speaking for Nagaa: Navigating free expression in Oromo linguistic and cultural spaces

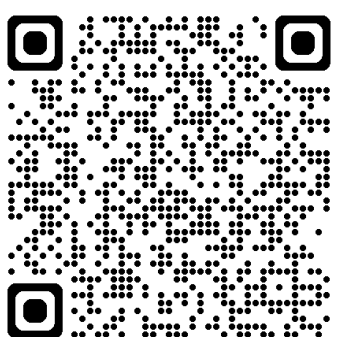
Abstract

Anthropology has traditionally overlooked freedom of expression as a subject of study. Recent pioneering studies propose a comparative lens to reposition freedom of expression within broader historical and cross-cultural frameworks. However, such studies often retain the Western liberal conception of freedom of speech as their primary reference point, perpetuating an ethnocentric view that marginalizes non-Western democratic cultures. Consequently, alternative views within African indigenous democracies like the Oromo Gada system remain unexplored.

This ongoing work examines how freedom of expression is lived, practiced and conceptualized among the Oromo by situating it within the Gada system. It explores their linguistic and socio-cultural world through Oromo proverbs and insights from sages, using techniques of ethnography of speaking and anthropological-philosophical approach based on qualitative in-depth interviews. Preliminary findings of this ongoing study indicate that free expression is realized among the Oromo through speech (dubbii), poetry (weed-duu) and symbolic acts, serving as an instrument to protect peace (Nagaa) and harmony with oneself, others, nature and the Creator (Uumaa).

This study adopts a decolonial perspective to challenge the coloniality of power that marginalizes indigenous knowledge system and practices regarding free expressions. By centering Oromo proverbs and the insights of Oromo sages, the study is expected to enrich the comparative anthropological analysis of freedom of expression with new epistemic and ethical insights.

OBERSEMINAR



Institut für Ethnologie, LMU München
montags,
16-18 Uhr
Raum L-155
Oettingenstr. 67, 80538 München

www.ethnologie.uni-muenchen.de