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Forging a nation: the Ethiopian millennium celebration and the multiethnic state

Izabela Orłowska

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Abstract

Due to a different calendric system, Ethiopia celebrated the turn of the millennium in September 2007. This paper investigates how Ethiopia's coalition government, associated by many Ethiopians with minority rule, set up and mobilised a year-long millennium project to propose new idioms of nationhood redefining Ethiopia's identity to deal with the challenges of ethnic federalism and to accommodate its multiethnic society. I argue that the millennium celebration sought to find a solution to the divisive effects of the politics of 'difference' derived from a policy of ethnic federalism, and to the existing outdated metaphors of nationhood rooted in Semitic culture and Orthodox Christianity. It proposed more suitable idioms of common identity based on the idea of 'unity in diversity'. This paper contributes to our better understanding of the role of symbolism, commemorative events and appropriation of the 'sites of memory' in the complex process of the transition of multiethnic societies into nation states.

Citing Literature

Number of times cited: 3

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