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Publication experiences from the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* and exploration of possible gaps for ITYOPIS

by SEMENEH Ayalew¹

ITYOPIS, a welcome addition

ITYOPIS is a welcome addition to the world of publication in research on the Horn of Africa. There are only a few journals all over the world which focus on inter regional themes of research that cut across borders in the Horn of Africa. One example is the *Journal of Northeast African Studies* whose publication has been resuscitated recently after a few years of absence in the market. But few bring up research themes that cut across national political boundaries in the region and it is strongly hoped that ITYOPIS will achieve this, among other things, by publishing materials with regional focus such as language contact, migration, cross border conflict and others.

Moreover, ITYOPIS is also hoped to serve as a publication forum where numerous original research outputs produced in the region in general and Ethiopia in particular. It may create opportunity for young researchers and scholars to publish their research outputs. This is hoped to facilitate for new areas of research and scholarship to make headway in Ethiopian studies as well as themes of a regional character.

¹ Researcher at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies
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Possible lessons and experiences that can be drawn from the Journal of Ethiopian Studies and other journals

ITYOPIS can draw lessons that have been on print for a long time in the country such as the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* (JES), SINET and others. The JES is one of the longstanding journals in publications of themes similar to what ITYOPIS is envisioning to cover: themes on the humanities, the Social Sciences and other related fields such as Cultural Studies. It has a database of reviewers from both within and outside of the country. It has established over the years a reputation of a high order among Ethiopianists all over the world even if there have been problems it has been facing in terms of its regularity especially in the past few years.

It has also attracted high profile scholars from all over the world even if it should work more towards encouraging young scholars in different fields and new areas of specialization and new themes of scholarship.

It has currently mounted on a scheme to diversify its issues to include thematic and special issues to allow interdisciplinary research and publication and with a view to cover themes hitherto uncovered. Very recently attempts are being made to integrate the research unit of the IES with the publications of the journal so that the journal serves as an outlet for the research activities of this unit.

Challenges to be expected

- Sustaining a journal is usually a difficult undertaking for many reasons: one is the difficulty of publishing journal issues regularly for subsequent years after the first issue
- Keeping the quality of articles and ensuring the sustained flow of manuscripts coming to the journal is a serious challenge in running a journal
- The challenge of getting a sustained funding of the journal over subsequent years to guarantee the regularity as well as reputability of the journal especially because journals are not usually self sustaining and usually can not cover their own production cost
- The challenge of getting the journal widely distributed both domestically and internationally

Suggestions of how to deal with these challenges

- Collecting a backlog of manuscripts (papers) before going to print in order to guarantee the regularity of journal issues
- Keeping regularity of journal issues by doing review work ahead of time
- Soliciting manuscripts from known sources both to guarantee better quality manuscripts as well as to ensure regularity

- Using the contact and expertise of members of the Editorial Board (as this ideally constitute people with ample research experience and/or with elaborate connections) to solicit as well as get manuscripts reviewed in a relatively short period of time to avoid the usual procrastination that characterize the review process
- Using networks of regional universities, contacts from both within the country and abroad to get the journal widely distributed
- Using networks to solicit good quality manuscripts and manuscripts that go in line with the themes that are of interest to the journal
- Working with colleges and departments within the university to encourage research themes that are pertinent to the interests of the journal
- Planning the ways in which the journal is funded for a set period of time and securing the allocation of an annual budget for subsequent years to cover the production costs of the journal.

Gaps and possible areas of focus for ITYOPIS

As mentioned above already the regional focus of ITYOPIS can provide the chance for researchers and scholars to undertake themes of regional and cross boundary nature. By identifying themes of regional significance for research the journal could encourage research on cross border issues. In addition, the journal could identify themes that are rarely covered by journals like JES to attract scholars and researchers pursuing such subject matters both from within and outside MU. Aligning the research plan of the College of Social Sciences and Humanities with the research themes of the journal could also create research outlet for the research activities of the college.

Traditional reserves of JES had along been the following subjects / disciplines (with little interdisciplinary research at work): History, Linguistics, Anthropology and Literature. ITYOPIS while still keeping interest in these traditional reserves could also work towards expanding the frontiers of research to include more marginal themes within these disciplines. It should also attract and encourage the publication of research of more interdisciplinary content. It is in this line that the following areas are suggested to locate the gaps available for the journal.

- Archaeological research that had been an important component of research in old issues of the JES has become less and less a subject of publication in the journal in the past decade. Cultural heritage management, which is sometimes taken as a sub-theme to Archaeology, is rarely a subject that attracted JES publications over the years. Along with museology and visual representation such as photography, Cultural heritage management could be one important area of focus for ITYOPIS.

- Systematic collection and documentation of oral histories, proverbs, oral traditions to inform a better understanding of the social, cultural and historical context of the region with a view to give voice to non-literate past societies in the region as well as fill the gaps that written sources have not been able to bridge. Such collection and documentation works could be published in the journal in the form of research reports and by using more analytical methods to make them more suitable for the form of the journal.
- Given the richness of the Tigray region in old manuscripts and documents, philological works and the publication and documentation of old manuscripts is one area that the journal could focus on.
- Research on agrarian systems and modes of life is another theme that ITYOPIS could work towards attracting for publication
- Cultural studies such as research on poetry and creative works in non-Amharic languages (including those non-Semitic ones) and traditional modes of performance (traditional rituals of religious or secular nature, musical performances and so on) are subjects virtually absent in JES or most other journals published in Ethiopia and therefore could qualify as important themes that can be covered by ITYOPIS
- The journal should also encourage not only research materials with cross border content but also interdisciplinary research that disrespect artificial disciplinary lines
- The periphery could also be a possible area of focus for the journal. The periphery includes both the periphery to the center but also the local periphery (peripheral peoples and regions within a certain regional state)
- Population movements, migration, language contact, inter- ethnic relations across national boundaries could also form another important component of research that attract the journal given the regional focus of ITYOPIS
- Gender issues which are still marginal to JES and other journals in the country should also attract the journal's publication interest
- Local narratives of war and memories of war is another important research theme that could be encouraged by ITYOPIS given the fact that especially the Northern and Eastern parts of the country saw enduring conflict and warfare in the past many decades.
- Study of local architecture and construction especially in respect to the Tigray region could also be an area that could be worth promoting for the journal.

