

The new issue of The Dissident Blog focus on the newly won freedom of expression in Ethiopia

#29 The Unsung Heroes of Ethiopia | www.dissidentblog.org

In less than a year Ethiopia has gone from being one of the world's most repressive countries to being an open and more democratic one. Since April 2018 when Abiy Ahmed became the new prime minister the country has rapidly moved in a democratic direction. It is no exaggeration to say that the changes within the country during this past year constitute a historical leap in favour of democracy and the freedom of expression in Ethiopia.

Here we have collected voices, thoughts, and narratives about what is happening in Ethiopia at present, texts by some of the writers, poets, and journalists who for years have been silenced by the regime. What do these overwhelming changes entail for the writers and journalists in the country? What does this newly won freedom of expression actually mean? What are the challenges now? How does one skirt the censorship that has informed the country for so long?

Elnaz Baghlanian, editor-in-chief for The Dissident Blog, writes in her editorial:

“In The Dissident Blog we usually publish texts that, due to censorship, threat, a risk of imprisonment, or at worst death cannot be published within a country. In this current issue we instead want to provide a space for writers whose professional life has been shaped by resistance and severe infringement on their rights of expression, but who now have been given this freedom again. To follow up, to take part in, to monitor the freedom of expression, and to never take it for granted is another role and function of The Dissident Blog.”

A selection of texts:

Liyou Libsekal | Salt and metal | Ethiopia

The metallic taste of clotted blood, like the salt from a cold sweat, seems ubiquitous. Ineradicable. Liyou Libsekal was born in 1990 in Ethiopia and currently lives in Addis Ababa. She is an award-winning author and poet and received, for instance, the 2014 Brunel University African Poetry Prize. Her poetry explores themes such as identity, origins and rootlessness. In this issue, Liyou Libsekal writes of fear and suspicion that has branded her to both body and soul, and the taste and scents of which remain constant reminders.

Lena Bezawork Grönlund | There is hope now | Sweden/Ethiopia

Lena Bezawork Grönlund was born in 1975 in Addis Abeba and was raised in Northernmost Sweden. She is a librarian, and her first novel, *Slag*, was published in 2017. This issue contains a text in which she portrays newly-rekindled hope that has been latent for decades—hope ignited by students in Ethiopia in the 1970s with their dreams of a just society. Now, more than 40 years later, these dreams are slowly but surely coming back to life.

Chaalaa Hailu Abata | Let me hear your truth | Sweden/Ethiopia

Chaalaa Hailu Abata, an Ethiopian poet who was imprisoned and tortured in his country of origin for writing poetry critical of the regime, lives in safety in Sweden today. But his thoughts remain back in Ethiopia with the oppressed Oromo people. In this poem he inquires into their narrative—the narrative of the long-silenced people who lit and bore the torch of freedom during decades of oppression.

Solomon Hailemariam | Open letter to the Prime Minister of Ethiopia | Canada/Ethiopia

Solomon Hailemariam, author and founder of PEN Ethiopia, had to leave his homeland Ethiopia in 2015, after repeated attacks on himself and the organization. He now lives in exile in Canada, and serves as chairman of PEN Ethiopia. In an open letter to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed he expresses his hopes concerning the development of freedom of the press and of expression in his native country, and points out some of the challenges the coming years will hold.

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Read the latest issue [here](#).

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