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Reminiscing through words and things: Asmara as life stories, rumor, proverb, objects and photographs

Drawing on oral-life story reminiscing of Asmara from 2014-16 Ethiopia, this talk illustrates the intertwined use of oral-life story reminiscing with memorabilia-household objects and photographs from Asmara. Based on recollections of those who lived in Asmara between 1950- mid 1970s, I demonstrate how their home environment combined with oral-life story reminiscing is mobilised to represent the past of Asmara through objects and photographs. In their acts of recounting, informants turned home-domestic interview environment to spaces of producing their homes as site of both reminiscing and exhibiting objects. Hence, this paper argues that oral-life reminiscing in home environment uses diversity of sources to both represent and exhibit Asmara in the past. Oral life story reminiscing does not only represent the past from the vantage point of informants' life narratives in the past but it is also equally embedded in practices of exhibiting the past from objects and photographs as the practice of the present. As such, oral-life story reminiscing refers to historical sensibilities of representing the past through individual life stories who mobilize different mechanisms of reminiscing that which is also embedded with practice of circulating the past through objects, photographs, rumors, proverbs- as a form of social practice. Reminiscing is therefore not only about recovering that which is recoverable but is intertwined with recreating and circulating the past in the present.

