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The Ethiopian Second Republic and the Fragile “Social Contract”

Jon Abbink

Abstract: Eighteen years after the change of power and the ushering in of the second Ethiopian republic in 1991, the political process in Ethiopia has, according to most observers, rigidified and largely closed the space for representative democracy. This paper will look at the main organizing political ideas or ideology of the current Ethiopian republic and to the nature of its governance techniques in the face of domestic and international challenges with reference to the debate on “failing” or “fragile” states. The new “social contract” defined after 1991 and codified in the 1994 Constitution is precarious. Dissent and ethno-regional resistance to federal policies are dealt with mainly by coercion and discursive isolation. Oppositional forces voice the need for a rethinking of the organizing ideas and institutions of the second republic in order to enhance political consensus and a shared political arena, but get little response.

The paper will sketch an interpretation of governance in Ethiopia, focusing on the dilemma of reconciling local and modernist political practices, and will discuss the status of “republican” ideas, in name important in Ethiopia but mostly absent in practice. Explicit debate of these ideas is usually sidelined – also in academic commentaries – in favour of a focus on the ethno-federal ideology of the Ethiopian state.

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Keywords: Ethiopia; Republicanism; Democratisation; Ethnicity; Political culture; Fragile states

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Introduction: An Exercise in “Political Culture”¹

“While republicanism should be an ideology of governing African nation states as republics with an emphasis on liberty and ruled by people, the experience in Africa suggests that the very people who found a colonial dispensation abhorrent to democratic and republican values have ended up becoming the custodians of oligarchic and dictatorial regimes” (Mutumwa Mawere, *Africa: Republicanism or Dictatorship?*).²

Thus wrote Zimbabwean journalist Mawere recently in a rare and perceptive column on republicanism in Africa. Many African states are republics, but rarely is the meaning of the republican formula the issue of debate. In this paper I discuss Ethiopia, which is, however, not an ex-colonial state, but faces similar challenges to develop a sound republican tradition.

Ethiopia, a country with about 77m inhabitants, situated in a vulnerable natural setting and a persistent conflict zone, is unique in Africa with its federalist political system that gives explicit recognition to ethno-linguistic identities, of which there are about 80. The latter form the basis for citizenship and define regional and district borders, education policy, budget allocation etc. In the current “Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia”, which was avowedly an “experiment” when first proclaimed in 1991 by the political leaders of the former guerrilla movement taking over power (the Tigray People’s Liberation Front³), the relation between ethnicity and democracy has remained tense and problematic (cf. Aalen 2006, 2008). This has led many observers to say that the formula of multi-ethnic federalism does not work well and produces local and “ethnic”-based conflicts, for which the federal state authorities then “have” to act as neutral arbiters but appear not able to prevent. The differences between the various regional states in Ethiopia, ranging from the huge Oromiya region to the tiny city state of Harär, are also significant, and lead to imbalances in the federation.

It can be noted that studies and academic and policy analyses of the political dynamics in Ethiopia have predominantly focused on the “ethno-federal aspect”: the extent to which ethnicity in politics has worked out and

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- 1 For critical comments on earlier drafts of this paper I am grateful to the anonymous referees of this journal, and to the participants of the session “L’État failli en Afrique” at the 50th Anniversary Conference of the Centre d’Étude d’Afrique Noire (CEAN), Université Montesquieu-Bordeaux IV, Bordeaux, on 4 September 2008. I also thank my respondents as well as various government officials in Addis Ababa and in countryside locations for their often thoughtful and sincere reflections.
 - 2 See: <<http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/MAWERE53.15099.html>> (of 24 April 2008, accessed 20.09.2008).
 - 3 For a new history of the TPLF by a former insider, see Aregawi (2008).

has led to democratisation, equity, or socio-economic development.⁴ Much less attention has been paid to the other concept in the official name of Ethiopia: the (democratic-)republican aspect. Ethiopia is a republic and having declared itself to be such, it is worthwhile assessing how the republican experiment in Ethiopia has fared. As the following exploratory analysis will indicate, the results are not so positive. The Ethiopian case is important, because despite the country’s low performance on social and political indicators⁵ and its bad reputation among human rights organisations, it is a major recipient of western donor-country funds, is a major new bridgehead for Chinese investment in Africa, and has often received fairly complimentary reports from the World Bank and the IMF on the purely economic indicators. It also has instituted a political model that is a (risky) novelty, and which has some theoretical significance (cf. Turton 2006). In view of its problems, Ethiopia is also a relevant case regarding the debates on fragile or failed states in Africa, for which there is also a list and on which Ethiopia was placed 16th from a total of 177 in 2008 (its neighbours Somalia and Sudan are no. 1 and no. 2).⁶ Worrying indications are: persistent armed conflict and insecurity, lack of basic services for all, grinding poverty, non-sustainable population growth, communal tensions, growing corruption.⁷ Moreover, Ethiopia does not succeed in providing food security for its own people. Every year millions are in need – in mid-2008 the avowed number of malnourished or famished people was at least 4m.⁸ For the purpose of this paper it is important to note that indicators of democracy in Ethiopia – in the sense of representative, electable government and a competitive party system as well as an independent judiciary, a free press, the respect for human rights and *habeas corpus*, and a rule-of-law regime – are quite critical, at

4 There is now a voluminous amount of literature on “ethnic federalism” in Ethiopia, with hundreds of titles, many of them MA theses and PhD dissertations, and increasingly critical in tone. For some studies: Aalen (2006), Asnake (2006, 2009), Kidane (2002, 2007), Paulos (2007), Solomon (2006), Tronvoll (2008) and Turton (2006).

5 As evident from its low position on the UNDP Human Development Index: in 2007 it was in 169th place (overall HDI value) out of a total of 177, showing no noticeable climb despite 16 years of “development” under the new regime.

6 According to the journal *Foreign Policy*, see: <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=4350&page=1>, accessed 3 August 2008.

7 In 2007 Ethiopia was ranked 138th on the 179-country Corruption Perception Index, and it is moving down.

8 See R. Righter, *Ethiopia: another famine, another avoidable disaster*, *The Times*, 20 August 2008; R. Hampson, *Ethiopia’s new famine: a ticking time bomb*, *USA Today*, 17 August 2008. Also: Revised Humanitarian Requirements for 2008, *Government-Partners Joint Document* (12 June 2008, Addis Ababa), and *Ethiopia – Emergency beneficiaries increase to 6.4 million*, IRIN news message, 14 October 2008.

least in the view of most independent observers (Smith 2007; EHRCO 2008). African and Ethiopian aspirations on democracy are not fundamentally different from people elsewhere (see Afrobarometer 2002) and have roots in local societies, but are usually not met by state elites. There is a nicely worded Federal Constitution in Ethiopia, but the government has difficulty in adhering to it. Moreover, the specific model of “revolutionary democracy” officially espoused by the ruling EPRDF, the party built around the TPLF (see below), represents in many ways a contradiction to the proclaimed constitutional principles.

This paper is an attempt to discuss the problems of Ethiopia’s political system against the background of historical and societal factors that have shaped political tradition and political attitudes in the country. In other words, to analyse “political culture” in the country,⁹ both on the level of elite functioning and evolving governance techniques as well as looking at the (often implicit) political attitudes, norms and expectations that the populace has of the political process (cf. Formisano 2001).¹⁰ Specifically, I intend to bring in the issue of republicanism into debates on the Ethiopian political system. The underlying thesis is that Ethiopia, while formally and constitutionally a republic, suffers from having no tradition of (civic) republicanism (nor of democracy, except on the local level) and has not realised or even addressed the democratic potential of this political tradition.

In order for the country to make progress towards a more deliberative and legitimate political system, this potential has to be developed. This would also make the Ethiopian experiment even more important in a comparative study of political reform in Africa and beyond. But whether this progress is likely to happen is a moot point, as engrained tendencies of top-down elite rule and clientelism in neo-patrimonialist fashion (see Paulos 2007; Hagmann 2005 for a study of one region) have reshaped the political

9 Interesting remarks on political culture in Ethiopia have also been made by Tronvoll & Vaughan (2003: 32f.), although it is erroneous to identify the authoritarian “political culture” only with the Amhara and the Tigray (“Abyssinians”). Ethiopian history shows, on the contrary, that *any* state formation (be it the Oromo Ghibe states, the Kāfa and Wālaitta kingdoms, etc.) developed an oppressive and authoritarian system of rule. Notably, on the *local* level most societies across the ethnic groups are in a sense democratic-republican, excepting the lesser role accorded to women and the young generations.

10 The empirical component of the data used for this paper is based on observations and interviews over the past 10 years in a variety of locations in Ethiopia, both Addis Ababa, the Southern Regional State and the Wālo region, with the most recent interviews held in November-December 2008 (Addis Ababa and Western Oromia region).

arena in a structural manner, inhibiting political equity, governance reform and the recovery of a civic-republican programme.

The lack of development of a democratic-republican system must initially be explained historically by analyzing the accumulated political attitudes, values and processes as evident in a country’s “political culture”, here defined loosely as a particular pattern of (value) orientations, ideas and customary practices relating to the political action of the leaders and the people, and that embeds the political system.¹¹ It is important to note that political culture is not a static pattern of behavioural values but adaptable and responsive to circumstances and to elite action.

Based on literature on the subject going back to the *Discorsi sopra la Prima Deca di Tito Livio* (1531), the pioneering work by political philosopher N. Machiavelli, I define republican core ideas as follows: liberty or sovereignty of the people/the citizens in a polity; non-domination and rejection of the claim of leaders to a “natural right” to rule (because of divine election or will, class position, or superior insight); no use of state power for personal gain or profit; and a recognition of the pluralism of the public cause, the discussion of which is to be open to the people, because from them ultimately power is derived (cf. Maynor 2003: 27, 56-57; Pettit 1997: 274, 276, 280).¹² In political science discussions, e.g. about the failed state, one often meets the Rousseauian republican concept of a “social contract” between citizens and their government as well. But it is often forgotten that this is a problematic concept – a metaphor, not a reality. Citizens in Africa, notably Ethiopia or any state created largely by conquest or conflict, are of course not aware of a contract which they entered voluntarily or were even asked about. The concept is thus normative and misleading as a guide to reality. Only if the political model or ideology governing a state or regime speaks of a contract and has participated in shaping it – in the form of a constitution or civic-republican institutions – can it be evaluated. But the constitution-making process is usually opaque and top-down – it certainly was in Ethiopia. The Constitution of 1994 (effective in late 1995) looks great but cannot count as the embodied social contract, because it is not sufficiently buttressed by practical institutional-republican mechanisms that can guarantee it, and it is also often in contradiction with the governing ideology (and practices) of the EPRDF regime, which is “revolutionary democracy” (see below). This relies often on non-constitutional techniques, such as, e.g., administrative appointments on the basis of political loyalty instead of qualification, non-transparent interference in the judicial process, political job

11 Based on G. Almond’s 1956 definition, cited in Formisano (2001: 396).

12 Cf. also the definition in the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/republicanism>>, accessed 30 January 2009).

demotions, and forced self-evaluation sessions (*gimgema*) on the basis of the party ideology and policy. In Ethiopia, where governance historically was “...based on the willingness of people to obey a ruler who was able to exercise effective power”,¹³ there is no visible effort (or perceived need) of the ruling government to uphold and ground a “social contract” with citizens, who often face arbitrary measures and insecurity; and the main objective seems to be to keep power, which is indivisible. Republican values in Ethiopian politics are thus seriously underdeveloped. As Kassahun noted in a study of party politics in Ethiopia (2003: 142):

“The autocratic mentality bequeathed by past rigid political culture (...) and the tendencies that uphold the politics of command (...) are very much alive today, as they were during imperial and revolutionary times.”

In the face of the faltering of democratisation and the perennial debates about its chances in Africa, attention should perhaps shift to the role of republicanism. Democracy – both in substance and procedures – will not develop if the foundations of a republic (based on the four core ideas cited above) are not well-established.¹⁴ And, following Castiglione’s remark (2005: 462), the continued relevance of republicanism in general, also in Africa, may be due to the fact that it is capable of “... projecting a positive vision of politics as the way of reconciling the natural differences traversing the social body”, be they economic, religious or ethnic.

The 2nd Ethiopian Republic: Origins in Ideology and Battle

Ethiopia is a former imperial monarchy, and in 1974, after the violent abolition of the monarch, Emperor Haile Selassie I, became a republic. But this turn was more by default, not by ideological conviction: not being a monarchy any longer made the country a republic, i.e., without a hereditary ruler, with no well founded legitimacy, and with “secular” authorities that would rule the country. The new regime would not only “serve” the national *res publica*, but *determine what it was*. After the demise of a monarchy, any republic

13 Cf. C. Clapham, *Notes on the Ethiopian crisis*, unpublished discussion paper, 7 November 2005 (At: <www.fettan.com/Documents/C_clapham_Ethiopian_Crisis.pdf>, accessed on 8 April 2008).

14 For the research agenda it is interesting to evaluate the presence of republican ideas in the indigenous political traditions of a country. In Ethiopia these were found among, e.g., the Oromo, the Gamo, the Afar and the Somali.

has the task of filling the ideological vacuum and devising a new rhetoric of sovereignty and legitimacy; and so it was in Ethiopia as well.

Existing republics are not by definition “democratic”, as we know from literature and from historical experience, and can easily evolve into autocracy or despotism. But the civic republican label conjures up people’s participation, deliberative political process, and consent among partners in the furthering of public causes via effective and shared political decision-making. The republican idea is also strongly anti-corruption and anti private profit-making in politics (this goes back to Machiavelli’s demands in *Il Principe*). The contemporary political philosophy of “civic republicanism” is a largely Western offshoot of the republican tradition and not well-developed outside Western democracies. In Ethiopia, the republican idea was primarily defined through the prism of an anti-monarchy attitude. In the early 1970s in Ethiopia, in the spirit of the era, shaped by the massive influence of socialist and Marxist ideas especially among the politically articulate student movement of the 1970s and 1980s (cf. Fentahun 1990; Balsvik 1985), Marxist-communist ideas, such as “anti-feudal” class struggle and nationalisation of all land, held sway and came to dominate the polity. They would prove to have a nefarious impact.

The ruling military council, the *Derg*, thus officially adopted Marxist socialism as its ideology in 1975 and proceeded to create the “Popular Democratic Republic of Ethiopia”, with a due constitution in 1984. The *Derg*, under the upstart army officer Lt.-col. Mengistu Haile-Mariam as president, thus strived to become a regular Communist “peoples’ republic” in the name of the toiling masses, and aimed at a classless society. It nationalised all land, created a state economy, allied with the Soviet camp, was ruled with military force, and did not allow political freedoms or an independent civil society. It instituted a discourse of ethno-regional rights for minorities (“nationalities” in Stalinist vein) but accorded them little autonomy. The economy soon faltered, agricultural policies were a disaster, democratic practices non-existent, and armed resistance movements were a plague until the demise of the *Derg* in May 1991, leading to the ushering in of the second (this time federal) republic of Ethiopia. As to the republic ideals mentioned above (liberty and popular sovereignty, non-domination, non-corruption, and institutional recognition of pluralism) the *Derg*’s political practises in the name of “Socialist” republican values that became self-contradictory worked against it.

The Tigray Peoples’ Liberation Front (TPLF) took over in Addis Ababa in May 1991, after its victory in the armed struggle.¹⁵ As the ticket of

15 Similarly, its one-time ally the Eritrean Peoples’ Liberation Front (EPLF) almost simultaneously took power in Asmara, proceeding to declare the independence of Eritrea in 1993. As a former colony of Italy (until 1941), Eritrea was let go of with-

the TPLF was ethno-nationalism, having its origins in an ideology to realize greater autonomy for the region of Tigray in a reformed Ethiopia (cf. Aregawi 2008), it went on to institute an ethnic-based political system that came to be known as “ethnic federalism” and in name a republic. It was presented at the Transitional National Conference in July 1991¹⁶ and designed to meet the presumed ethno-regional grievances of the various groups (especially their elites) in Ethiopia, from the Oromo to the Sidama and the Afar to the Anyuaa, and as the leader of the TPLF declared in 1991, to create a voluntary union of all the nationalities in the country. They should not be forced into a union but choose to be part of it, was the idea. Here the core elements of republicanism were “ethnicised”, again yielding a highly contradictory process. The concept of democracy was defined *by means of* the right of ethnic or linguistic groups to more autonomy, recognition, economic equality etc., and was not taken as the central concern of the new regime. For instance, representative democracy based on “one (wo)man, one vote” was not in the cards, only a nested regional-ethnic voting system, whereby ethnic, not national, parties could gain a foothold in the various regions of the country but hardly at all in the national parliament. It was also a model excellent for pursuing a divide-and rule-policy, “balancing” groups under the aegis of the centre (the ruling party). Ethiopian nationalism or national identity, in other words the shared public cause, was de-emphasised in the process. In the view of the EPRDF (the umbrella party uniting the TPLF with three other main ethnic-based satellite parties¹⁷), in Ethiopia there was not one sphere of the *res publica*, but many ethnically defined ones. In addition, the organisational model and the socio-economic ideas of the TPLF/EPRDF party remained strongly influenced by Marxism-Leninism, as evident in the activities of the *Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray*, founded in 1985 as an ideological core within the TPLF and remaining active at least until 2001. Its ideological tenets are still visible in current policy, e.g. state ownership of land (inhibiting agrarian development and usable as a political control mechanism), strong control of the political process and of civil society, the judiciary and the civil service, and in general a model of “democratic centralism” with the party as sole arbiter and power factor. A 2001 ideological document by the EPRDF confirmed the view of the party elite that “lib-

out much consultation and debate and seen as having won the right to independence through struggle, although this implied giving up Ethiopia’s coastline, a still deeply controversial, because ill-negotiated move in Ethiopia. The problem came bouncing back in 1998, when the devastating new “border” war started between the two countries. The tension is still high and has no foreseeable solution.

16 Resulting in the *Transitional Period Charter for Ethiopia* (22 July 1991).

17 ANDM, OPDO and SEPDU.

eral democracy” was unfit for Ethiopia (see EPRDF 2001). Instead, the model of what was called “revolutionary democracy” (derived from the Leninist tradition) was followed.¹⁸

The post-1991 reform agenda was promising, with party formation and elections allowed, more press freedom, programs for economic development, fiscal reform, decentralisation and judicial reform. Progress was made on all fronts in the first ten years. At no point, however, was the leading role of the vanguard party, the EPRDF (i.e., TPLF and the three parallel parties), put at risk. The relevant political process occurred within the TPLF, and decisions made there were subsequently implemented. A few opposition groups who were part of the first transitional government in 1991 (like OLF and COEDF) were removed after disagreements. Some observers (Nord 1991) already spoke in 1999 of a “blocked democracy”. Elections did not give the opposition a chance; that is, until 2005, the most free round ever seen, but which was spoiled by deep controversy and rigging. The 2005 elections saw remarkable opposition gains and opened up the prospect of a coalition government and thus of real democracy (i.e., whereby a party could be voted out of office – an unthinkable idea for the EPRDF). But the results were deeply contested and quickly “revised”, and EPRDF and its prime minister declared themselves the sole winners. This was a turning point, away from the path of democracy, and full-blown monopolistic power was reinstated by the ruling party. The opposition parties in parliament have had no impact, their members and supporters often under attack.¹⁹ The April 2008 elections for local councils also saw a serious setback in democratic practice, as ruling party cadres took no risk and pressurized the electorate to vote again, after the “mistake” of May 2005, for the EPRDF.²⁰ The number

18 For an important manual on this ideology of rule, see the revealing position paper *Our Revolutionary Democratic Goals and the Next Steps* (1993), and the *Guideline for EPRDF's Organizational Structure and Operation* (1997), produced by the party's *Dirigitawi Ma'ekel* (Organisational Centre). Extracts were published in the magazine *Ethiopian Register*, issues of June 1996 and September 1997. Striking is the quite violent language and the dogmatic-socialist, “anti-bourgeois”, i.e., anti-middle-class, position in these documents. On this ideology, see also Vaughan and Tronvoll (2003, 116-117).

19 Cf. a telling story in the newspaper *Globe and Mail* of 27 July 2007: *Ethiopia turns its critics into untouchables*. Cf. also an earlier *Human Rights Watch* report, *Ethiopia: hidden crackdown in rural areas* (13 January 2006). These rural crackdowns occur regularly. Important opposition figures, such as Ms. Birtukan Mideqsa (UDJ party), are regularly pursued and put in jail on evidence that would likely not stand in any normal court of law; see Howden (2009).

20 Cf. the *Oxford Analytica* report of 21 April 2008, *Polls conduct reflects government pressures*, online: <www.oxan.com/display.aspx?StoryDate=20080421&ProductCode=MEAFDB&StoryNumber=2&StoryType=DB>. See also Aalen & Tronvoll (2008).

of contested seats was also very limited, as most opposition candidates were forced to withdraw, citing intimidation and threat. Democracy in the EPRDF model is understood as “participation of the Ethiopian people at the grass roots level”, via the party and the government organs which “mobilize the people”, not for debating and voting, but for executing policies and measures decided elsewhere. In today’s Ethiopia, people perceived as being pro-opposition (e.g., simply having voted for the opposition parties in 2005 and supporting them) are often pursued, intimidated, and disadvantaged in the use of state services. Dominant party action thus punishes those not in line, and, as R. Lefort stated in a perceptive paper (2007), many in 2005 deeply regretted having voted for the opposition because it unleashed the wrath of the ruling party and brought them nothing. In the post-2005 years, traditional authoritarian political culture was confirmed, the government easily tuning into it.

In the past years, the Ethiopian republic has been further shaped as a “revolutionary-democratic” republic under PM Meles Zenawi (TPLF leader), who is now in his 18th year in power. Reforms have been proceeding and have yielded a new political dispensation and economic growth (in 2008 8% according to the IMF), although the latter is mainly of the aggregate type and not of the distributive, inclusive type. Interesting is that the political power of the EPRDF as a party was buttressed by solid economic power, with much of the Ethiopian economy controlled by party-affiliated enterprises, endowments and business conglomerates. A new, tremendously wealthy, party-associated elite has meanwhile arisen in the wake of this appropriation of the national economy.²¹

The Federal Republic and the Ethnicity Factor

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia became a state with the 1994 federal Constitution which emanated a strong democratic character and reflected Ethiopia as a party to all major international treaties on human rights and public law. It was secular, separating state and religion, but allowed religious courts for personal and family matters (e.g. *shari‘a* courts). Two houses of parliament were instituted, the first, the elected House of People’s Representatives (HPR), the second being the House of the Federation, a chamber based on the eleven new ethno-regions, which contains a number of elected and assigned delegates. It reflects the new ethnic-federal

21 See for one illustration: *Ruling Party’s Business Conglomerate Grosses 4 Million USD*, in the Ethiopian magazine *Capital*, August 2008, online: <http://www.capitalethiopia.com/archive/2008/august/local_news.htm#5>, 04-09-2008.

character of the political system and has few powers, mainly arbitration on constitutional matters regarding the ethnic federation, supervising laws from the HPR, and advisory roles. The 1994 Constitution, as said, is a nicely worded charter containing all the rights for citizens possible, but vests sovereignty in the “nations, nationalities and peoples” of Ethiopia, a shady and ambiguous clause, innovative but much criticized, notably in relation to article 39 on their right to secession from the federation – a very unrepublican notion. The role of the Executive (i.e., the government/dominant party) is also assigned a very strong position in the Constitution.

The Ethiopian justice system was also overhauled, with virtually all personnel replaced or reshuffled. While various donor-country programs to professionalise it have been undertaken,²² reforms have been delayed or diverted. The Ethiopian public consistently complains about the courts’ lack of independence, their corruptibility, and their very time-consuming procedures. There are enough indications that government pressure regularly leads to interference with and abrogation of the judicial process.

The new system of “regional states”, roughly based on majority ethnicity, led to a formally more autonomous political structure. Numerous studies have, however, indicated that these regional administrations have a dual structure, remaining under the tutelage of the federal government and the ruling party. Behind the visible office holders who come from the states themselves (i.e., being of the “right ethnic background”) stand advisors and policy makers linked directly to the federal EPRDF offices. In this way, policy coherence, organisational unity and executive control are thought to be best guaranteed. It means that informal political channels remain very important, if not decisive (cf. Paulos 2007).

In post-1991 Ethiopia ethnic identities, mainly in the form of linguistic-cultural background and based on Stalin’s conception of “nationalities” (originally in his work *The National Question and Marxism*, 1914) were recognized politically and made the basis of regional and local administrations, to be filled by local people (often to the exclusion of so-called “non-natives” despite their job qualifications). As such this was a new answer to the problems of multi-ethnic Ethiopia, but the tensions between population groups on the national and local level were far from solved by it. Ethno-political competition emerged, also exclusionist discriminatory practices, and conflicts on power and budgets. Indeed, in looking at the number of local-level communal clashes – many violent – and the changing popular conceptions

22 See World Bank, *Ethiopia: Legal and Judicial Sector Assessment*, Washington, DC, 2004, and the report *Ethiopia – Comprehensive Justice System Reform Program, Baseline Study Report*, Addis Ababa: Ministry of Capacity Building – Leiden: Center for International Legal Cooperation, 2005, 531 p.

of the “causes” of conflict, it can be said that a conflict-generating dynamic was perpetuated. New conflicts appeared between groups previously not known for having problems (cf. the case of the Yem and the Oromo, discussed in Solomon 2006: 85). In 1994 political scientist M. Ottaway already warned of the approach taken in Ethiopia towards the “national question”, saying “... it was the least promising” (Ottaway 1994: 50), and that it offered a lesson on “... how ethnic conflict should *not* be managed by countries pursuing democratisation” (ibid. 3). Her expectation that the country headed for more conflict and repression, not for democracy (ibid. 51) can unfortunately only be confirmed 14 years later. Both in the domestic political sphere and in relations with several neighbours (the Ethio-Eritrean war of 1998-2000; Ethiopian presence in the war in Somalia since 2006), conflict is serious, costly, and hindering political and developmental progress.

As to ethnic relations, C. Barnes stated in a survey of Ethiopian developments in 2006 that:

“A combination of environmental stress and poverty, combined with competitive ethnic politics in response to the system of ethnic federalism favoured by the current government, has seen a rise in violent and deadly ethnic clashes. Deep-rooted political problems have not been solved by ethnic federalism ...” (Barnes 2006: 7).

Indeed, the federal structure has rarely effectively dealt with them. Some of these conflicts deflect attention from the issues in the national arena, embroiling the so-called ethnic groups in petty fights about boundaries, land, state subsidies and other material interests, as well as prestige battles about which group has the primordial rights, is “the best”, etc. This perhaps fits the national government just fine, taking away pressure from the national level, but the ideal of a voluntary federal union of equal and recognized “ethnic” or ethno-regional groups in a common federation (as the declared aim was in 1991) has been much hindered by it. Opponents of the government talk of persistent ethnic discrimination, preferential politics, economic favouritism and cronyism via unequal resource allocation and business opportunities, and party (EPRDF) dominance of the economy.²³ This message and critique are too serious to ignore or to be regarded fictitious. In a way, the Ethiopian population, while aware of ethno-regional difference, conflicts and inequities in the past (in the wake of the imperial conquest of the late 1800s), has now itself fallen into the trap of ethnicizing social and community relations, thus often blighting daily relations and creating new opposi-

23 A 2007 World Bank report estimated that ca. 50-55% of the national economy is controlled by party-affiliated business and conglomerates. Virtually all state organs and (civic) institutions are led by party members.

tions. E.g., when there is contestation over a piece of land or pasture, the dispute is now declared to be between two ethnic groups/nationalities (in Amharic: *bebéresebotch*), and not between farmers and pastoralists, or highlanders and lowlanders. This process undermines the democratic and issue-directed solution of concrete problems, and flouts the principles of the republic. A notable feature in these conflicts is that more and more of these groups are demanding a special administrative statute for “their” territory. In the logic derived from the principle embodied in article 39 of the Constitution, about the right of every group “to self-determination up to secession” (*sic*), the Ethiopian federal state has devised the possibility for groups to obtain a “special *woreda*” (= district) status for their unit. E.g., in the case of the Dirashe and Gauwwada conflict in April-May 2008, the latter group claimed such a status, which the Dirashe already had. There is thus great pressure from groups (or rather from their aspiring elites) who so want to claim such mini-autonomy within the larger whole, thereby rendering it more difficult to co-operate and focus on common issues.²⁴ This “logic of fragmentation” is worrying and will weaken the federal structure, not to speak of its subverting republican-democratic principles. To illustrate the extent of the ongoing problems in this sphere: in 2008, apart from the Dirashe-Gauwwada, there were lethal clashes between the Borana and the Somali, the Konso and the Borana, the Guji and the Burji, and the Gumuz and the Oromo, and law enforcement usually came too late and offered no structural solutions. The largest domestic conflict is in the Ogaden (Region 5, Somali), which has been going on since May 2007, where the government engaged in a massive counter-insurgency campaign against the rebel Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF),²⁵ which claims autonomy or self-determination for the Somali region. Unwisely the group followed a very violent tactic to force the issue. It is a conflict away from world media attention, but characterized by massive abuse also against civilians, and decisively undermines state legitimacy.²⁶

This problem, coupled with the economic, financial and food insecurity issues, the tension with Eritrea, the war in Somalia and the unresolved (bor-

24 It can also lead to the successful formation of new “ethnic” groups, such as the predominantly Muslim Silt’i people. First seen as a part of the Gurage-speaking peoples, they voted in a 2001 referendum for and were allowed to form their own ethnic zone, thus gaining more local power and more federal budget allocations.

25 After an ONLF terrorist attack on an oil exploration site in April 2007 when 65 people (Ethiopians and Chinese) were killed in cold blood.

26 See: *A forgotten war draining a forgotten people*, *The Guardian*, 24 March 2008; also: *Images back Ethiopia abuse claim*, BBC News message, 12 June 2008 (online at: <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7450533.stm>>).

der) issues with Sudan, puts the Ethiopian regime in a difficult position and limits its range of options. In fact, in many measures taken in the last few years – and the elections of May 2005 are a turning point here – a kind of “despair”, as some observers called it, is noticeable. This is combated with a firm authoritarian hand trying to intimidate critical voices and dissidents and to reinforce power from above. Democratic consultation with the population, with civil society organisations or with opposition groups is thereby not needed. Political practice and governance techniques in today’s Ethiopia still reveal a vanguard party model of an unquestioned political elite which “is always right”. This happens under a “revolutionary-democratic” ideology adhered to by the ruling party (see the EPRDF 2001 document). It is a modern variant of Leninism and keeps in place a party model of democratic centralism and a cadre structure that is not very responsive to discontent and legitimate concerns from below as expressed by the citizens. An example are the goings-on in the Ethiopian Parliament, where MPs show no initiative, often doze through sessions, usually follow all that the government party says, and where the opposition, which has virtually no resources – no working budget, no offices – can raise its voice but has no impact. After another round of arrests among the political opposition, Prof. Beyene Petros, a prominent opposition party member, said in December 2008: “The government is totally reducing us to nothing ...” (Chebsi 2009). In September 2008, an interesting change in the political system occurred when the House of People’s Representatives (the parliament) voted to pass a bill called the “Definition of Powers and Duties of the Executive Organs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Proclamation” (No. 471/2005), authorizing the Council of Ministers (i.e. the Executive) to establish, reorganise, divide or close down federal executive organs (such as Ministries) when deemed necessary.²⁷ The law also gives the Council power to decide on procedures to establish any executive organ’s accountability. The Executive thus claimed unlimited legislative powers to reorganise the federal executive organs without the parliament exerting supervision or approval.

Another sign of democratic decay is the growing suppression of the local independent media: most free-press newspapers have disappeared and their editors jailed, charged in court, or urged to leave the country. A further example is the new NGO law (submitted to parliament in October 2008 and approved in January 2009²⁸), one of the most restrictive in the world, and

27 See: B. Shewareged, *Government unlimited. Lawmakers cede power to the executive*, in *Reporter* (Addis Ababa news magazine), 11 October 2008.

28 See: *Ethiopia imposes aid agency curbs*, *BBC news* item (online: <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7814145.stm>, accessed 30.01.2009>).

even criticised by Ethiopia’s foremost ally the US.²⁹ It would submit all NGOs to close government scrutiny, and proposed to reduce foreign financial support for each local NGO to a maximum of 10% of their total budget and would also impose strict penalties for minor administrative irregularities.³⁰ This will mean closing shop for most of them, since due to limited resources among the public and massive inflation since 2007 (50-70% on basic commodities), financial stress in Ethiopia is serious, making it impossible to raise the funds domestically. Advertised as a measure to increase “transparency”, etc. this seems to be a top-down control tactic aimed at disabling NGOs, many of whom in the past decade had a significant role in enlightening and empowering people in civic action and encouraging the democratisation agenda. As a last example, I would like to mention a recent EPRDF document (June 2008) on the party’s performance and plans which proposes a new higher education policy whereby the EPRDF would select students for MA and PhD programs, with c. 70% to be in science and technology and 30% in the social sciences (the latter being a serious reduction of their previous share). This would mean screening not by the universities but by the party and the evaluation of candidates would thus be not only based on academic but also on “political” qualifications.³¹

On the basis of the objective facts one cannot but conclude that the democratic-republican potential of the 1991 regime change has not been realised. There is a creeping but systematic reinforcement of the executive branch going on, leading to an even further disempowerment of the parliament and of civil society. Chances for political reform and a broadening of the political basis of the regime are still there, in line with the promises made in 1991, but they cannot be realised without major changes in the ruling party’s policies or without a move towards institutional democratisation and civic republican values. These seem for systemic reasons unlikely to materialise soon.³²

29 See: P. Heinlein, *US says draft Ethiopian NGO law would ‘close political space’*, VOA, online: <<http://www.voanews.com/english/2008-10-21-voa68.cfm?rss=human%20rights%20and%20law>>, accessed 25.10.08.

30 See: Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia: government prepares assault on civil society*, online: <<http://www.hrw.org/pub/2008/africa/HRW.NGO.Law.Analysis.pdf>>, accessed 30.08.2008, and *ibid.*, *Ethiopia: draft law threatens civil society*, 13 October 2008, online: <<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2008/10/13/ethiop19947.htm>>, accessed 20.10.2008.

31 Cited in Ethiopian news weekly *Addis Neger* (19 August 2008). This proposal has since been accepted and put into practice. It seems to be an academically unacceptable return to a kind of state-dirigist policy for education, akin to that of Eritrea or North Korea. Students commonly complain that after graduating they can hardly find a job in public service or party-affiliated companies if they are not a member of the ruling party.

32 Even a hard-core foreign supporter of the EPRDF, the American academic and diplomat Paul Henze, has voiced serious doubts over the party’s approach and has

The International Perspective

As a sizeable country with potential, a strategic position, and a more or less stable regime in the volatile Horn of Africa, Ethiopia is a major recipient of Western donor money. Although often engaged in domestic repression and closure of democratic and civil society space, having conducted a war in Somalia in 2006-2008, a violent campaign in the Ogaden, and having a bad press on human rights and media freedoms, it is not the subject of sanctions by the international community, like Sudan or Zimbabwe. It has growth figures in GDP, exports, in infrastructure and foreign investments, although there are signs of stagnation and financial difficulty, evidenced by widespread food shortages and run-away inflation since mid-2007. The Western donors have expressed dismay over the dubious 2005 elections, over the government forces killing some 190 demonstrators in 2005, and over the general repression that followed. While the Western Donor Countries Group had committed itself to furthering democracy before the 2005 elections, had encouraged opposition parties to compete and the government to allow them, they dropped the process like a stone after the wave of repression, and did not assist the opposition parties and their leaders when it was most needed. Declarations of disapproval were issued and some development funding was stopped or delayed. But they did not take serious action, in fact kept supporting the regime in power. While donor countries cannot prescribe the political system in other countries but only ask for accountability regarding the funds spent in line with agreements made, donor country and IMF-World Bank policies do have the effect of reinforcing the powers-that-be, notably the Executive, and have not contributed directly to the furthering of democratic structures or the shared *res publica*. In terms of the four republican values mentioned above, the contribution of the donor community can only be seen as very modest.

For some observers, core donors like the USA and the UK, and hesitantly other EU countries, even seem to be the “enemy of change” here – despite the recurring political crises, the repression of opposition, and faltering agrarian and other policies, they are usually prepared to accept new promises from the astute Ethiopian leadership. The international community primarily sees Ethiopia as a rather powerful state in an important geopolitical niche (cf. the global anti-terrorism campaigns) that has not descended into chaos, like Somalia, is not insular and inaccessible, like Eritrea, and not negatively anti-Western and defiant, like Sudan. Ethiopia – also in

proposed changes. See his unpublished paper *Seizing the Future* (2007). See also <<http://smgebru.blogspot.com/2008/06/ethiopia-henzes-views-on-eprdf.html>>, accessed 02.08.2008.

view of its previously prudent fiscal policies and its developed bureaucracy – is a projection of hope. Indeed, one regularly hears EU diplomats saying something like:

“If things do not succeed in Ethiopia [political reform, democratization, state stability, economic growth, realization of at least a good number of the MDCs, JA], then it will not work anywhere. The perception is that they *must* be a success and be supported, however cautiously ...”

But meanwhile developments on the ground do not seem to be conducive to such a process. Apart from the political insecurities in Ethiopia and the constant arguments about rights violations and repression, there is also the question of what exactly happened with the c. U\$ 24 billion in development aid that the country has received since the ascent of the EPRDF 17 years ago: where did it go and what did it yield? Economist observers ask what the balance sheet says, why there still is no food security, no take-off in small-holder peasant agriculture, no balancing of imports and exports, no sustained growth in commodity production, no decline in (the dramatic) urban unemployment,³³ etc.

The Ethiopian government has in fact two trains running: tacit and material support in the form of aid (funds, projects) from the West (notably the US and EU), requiring skilful rhetoric and support for anti-terrorism campaigns in the wider region; and secondly, the Chinese connection: for investments, cheaper tenders for infrastructural works, ICT work, business deals, and also for the political model (dominant party, no political pluralism or dissent, non-interference in “internal affairs”), with no questions asked. This strategy allows the government to immunise itself more and more from critique and from calls for accountability, and pursue its own course.

Conflict and the Federal-Republican Structure: a “Fragile State”?

Is Ethiopia a fragile, failing or failed state? “Failed state” is obviously a relative term, not an absolute one. Definitions of the phenomenon vary, but it

33 Cf. the World Bank report *Urban Labour Markets in Ethiopia: Challenges and Prospects*, vol. 1, Washington, DC, 2007; also the quite critical but well-researched report *The Ethiopian Economy* (52 p.) made available online: <www.ethiomed.com/access/ethiopia_in_the_global_economy.pdf>, accessed 15.04.2008). See also D. A. Ali, S. Dercon & M. Gautam, *Property rights in a very poor country: tenure insecurity and investment in Ethiopia*, Washington, DC: World Bank policy research working paper no. 4363, 2007.

can be said to refer to a state that lacks control over its own territory, threatens its own citizens, or does not fulfil essential functions such as maintaining the state monopoly on violence, provision of basic services and protection of legal rights for people, and lacks efficient and fair taxation.³⁴ Prime examples are Sierra Leone, DR Congo or Liberia during the civil wars, and nowadays Somalia, Chad, or Sudan.³⁵ The “international community” is concerned with failed or failing states because of the security risks they pose to a wider region (cf. Batt & Lynch 2004).

Ethiopia’s rating on the FS index of *Foreign Policy* (see note 6) says it is not doing so well. But seeing the (comparative) strength and extent of the state apparatus, its developed civil service (regardless of its effectiveness and skills), its armed forces active on several fronts, the limited impact of insurgent movements, and the great strides made in institution-building (never mind their skewed and often weak character), as well as growth in GDP and infrastructure, one would say no, certainly as compared to the examples mentioned above, where whole areas of the national territory are not under effective control and people have no access to state services at all. In Ethiopia, apart from the Ogaden, where a massive counter-insurgency campaign is going on, most Ethiopian territory is under control and under the surveillance of the government. There is a spread of (enforced) party structures in the countryside, and the security services are alert in most places. So the fragility of the Ethiopian state is a moot point. The donor community, notably the US, does not think either that Ethiopia is “fragile” and in fact has bet on its continuity (“it must succeed”). As evident in Somalia, the Ogaden and in the 1998-2000 Eritrean war, the state has firm control over the security forces and largely maintains its monopoly on the means of violence. Also the national taxation regime is steadily expanding. But in some respects Ethiopia might still be called a “failed state”, because it targets civilians in insurgent areas (Ogaden, Oromiya), cannot offer millions of people basic food security (every year), fails on basic services, cannot guarantee basic rule of law for all, follows arbitrary practices whereby citizens cannot be secure of life and property,³⁶ where due judicial process is not guaranteed and peo-

34 An effort at operationalisation is found in Stewart & Brown (2008).

35 There are also some, what one might call, “successful failed states”, e.g. Nigeria or the CAR or Gabon, which lack control of their entire state territory, are embroiled in conflict and have very bad state services, but are resilient and manage to survive and even flourish in selected domains. They are perhaps failing, but not in danger of total collapse.

36 See the reports of the EHRCO, the US Dept. of State, Human Rights Watch, etc. Ethiopians also lack well-defined property rights, which can be revoked and reshuffled at will by the government, especially in the countryside. Cf. Ali, *et al.* 2007, cited in note 33 above.

ple are often deeply humiliated by government agencies. Compensation after conflict is non-existent; unjust job dismissal or expropriation frequent.

While it is debatable that Ethiopia’s state is failing, it can at least be said that the state’s “functionality” is weak (cf. Clapham 2006: 17): it does not work well for all citizens, as revealed in the constant insecurity and the unpredictability of state action *vis-à-vis* the populace. The “social contract” idea, if seen in the constitutional-republican sense, and which in Ethiopia was closely tied up with a vision of the nation and of “unity among diversity”, is very tenuous. The legitimacy of the state is fragile. There is no more imagined community; indeed it was for years actively discouraged by the ruling government because for ideological reasons (anti-Amhara domination) they proclaimed Ethiopian unity as fictitious and a product of imposition since the 1880s (the decades of imperial conquest). Many ordinary people are committed to the country but see the social fabric of society crumble. A Gallup poll of 2007³⁷ indicated that the confidence of Ethiopians in their institutions and in their government was extremely low, even as compared with other countries in the African region: only 28% had trust in the government, only 13% in the health care system, and only 24% in the judicial system and the courts. From a survey on livelihood activities and social and political opinions that I made in 2007 among 73 ordinary citizens in Addis Ababa and in the South (SNNPRS) these figure were confirmed.³⁸ Trust is a scarce commodity in the political system. Stories about government performance and cadre activity show irritation and veiled, or scathing, critical remarks, the bottom line of which is:

“... they can’t let us decide on our own, they bother us unduly, they are a costly lot interfering with our lives and getting little results. But that is government in this country.”³⁹

In addition, rural people see themselves as more vulnerable to livelihood shocks resulting from natural conditions *and* the policy uncertainties (e.g., related to rights to land, affordable inputs like fertilizer, or market access), and as losing “social capital”.

While the government claims not to heed such findings, it sees the need for continued control and monitoring (called in Amharic *kitittil*). The above figures and statements, among other things, go to show the fragility of the

37 See: <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/104029/Few-Ethiopians-Confident-Their-Institutions.aspx>> (accessed 4 February 2008).

38 This survey was made among a group of people that I have been interviewing on various issues for the past 10 years, as well as among new respondents in several urban and rural locations.

39 Group interview in Shone, southern Ethiopia, 7 December 2007.

republican-democratic basis of the regime, engendering opposition from ethnic, regional and increasingly religion-based groupings. This opposition can be kept at bay by force, as the regime now often does, but this is eroding its basis and legitimacy and is getting quite costly. Coupled with growing cracks in economic-financial policy, as evident from the skyrocketing inflation in 2008, stagnating production, food deficiencies, rising imports, and budget deficits due to war, counter-insurgency and an expensive cadre party system,⁴⁰ the tensions may increase the fragility of governance and state mal-functioning. That the government is sensitive to this is shown by the sudden institution in 2008 of “Flag Day” – publicly staged flag-raising ceremonies across the country, presumably to display an idea of unity or national identity, but viewed with scepticism and ironic humour by the ordinary public.

The Republican Experiment: in Need of Adjustment?

Republicanism is an ideology developed mainly in Europe and the USA (cf. Maynor 2003; Pettit 1997), and other examples in countries with a quite different political and economic trajectory cannot be judged on the basis of that. Nevertheless, the ideology has travelled rapidly across the globe and was explicitly taken as a model of governance in many post-colonial and developing countries, including Ethiopia. While the democratic potential has been inherent in republican thinking already since Cicero, one might ask whether democratic structures can be developed in the *absence* of any republican traditions. There are, of course, several such examples – the U.K., the Netherlands, or Thailand – but they issued from the growth of countervailing forces such as parties, economic players such as labour unions, and a powerful middle class *vis-à-vis* the monarchy, and under pressure from strong republican ideas. In most developing countries, where the state is a relatively new and coveted resource machine in conditions of scarcity, the odds are not in favour of this. In Ethiopia there was one effort from above in 1974 when in the insecure revolutionary transition phase a new constitution was prepared which would have made the country into a constitutional monarchy with parliamentary control. But it was rejected by the then Military Council, which aimed to retain full control from above.

Governance in Ethiopia is still marked by an overall fixation on control: control of political space (no elections can be lost), control of economic

40 There are tens of thousands of cadres active across Ethiopia, economically non-productive but of course receiving salaries and resources.

space (the dominant ruling party as the chief economic player), control over the judiciary, and control of civic space – no grass roots associations, no independent trade unions or media or teachers’ unions, and no independent NGOs can operate, in short no autonomous, independent socio-political dynamics can develop. A new middle class, which is inevitable in emerging, and newly self-conscious farming populations, part of which start or want to start entrepreneurial activities, are closely checked and are not allowed to demand representation as such, in their own organisations independent of the ruling party. As we saw, on the contrary, the EPRDF is continuing to organise and co-opt the rural population in party structures so that they can be surveyed and used to help execute the top-down policies drawn up in the towers of power, the party offices in Addis Ababa. Whether rightly so or not, the EPRDF as a vanguard party – a unique creature as a party of *cadres*, not of elected, representative members from a voluntary constituency – is seen as on the “correct course”, and will not be questioned. The only “democratic” practice within the party is debate and exchange of ideas on the proposals put forward by the party executive and duly amended on minor points. If major friction occurs, as in 2001 – the wake of the Ethio-Eritrean war of 1998-2000 – the party dissidents are expelled (“purged”) and sent into the wilderness, dismissed and put under surveillance (cf. the case of former top leader Siyye Abraha, who fell from grace in 2001). This is an interesting, hundred-year old party model (from the time of Lenin’s Bolshevik party), but increasingly rare in the world, and with big drawbacks. A republican model would recognize the fact of pluralism and allow a shared political arena where various groups and parties would contest and co-operate to make policy, and where the state is not seen as a patrimony of which one elite or party – however well-organised or “well-informed” they might be – is the sole custodian. The ruling party in Ethiopia has wrought indeed tremendous socio-political change and created a new economic dynamic which can have major positive effects, but the benefits have not yet been reaped (cf. Lefort 2007 for some peasant responses). The party has replaced the previous autocracies – on the basis of divine (imperial) right and Marxist class solidarity and “sovereignty of the workers” – with a new rhetorical model of centralist, post-Marxist vanguardism based on successful armed struggle (concluded in 1991) and the so-called sovereignty of “peoples, nations, and nationalities”, of which it, as a neo-Leninist vanguard, is the sole standard bearer. It is a questionable claim to exclusionist (Kassahun 2003: 143) if not absolutist rule, reminiscent of the former regimes, and undermining a republican system. The classic point made already by Machiavelli in

his *Discourses on Livy* (1531),⁴¹ that a republic, in forging the shared public cause, is served by harbouring and tolerating dissent or friction (cf. Maynor 2003: 30), and not by criminalising and suppressing it, is forgotten.

Whether Ethiopia's hierarchical-authoritarian political culture is susceptible to or "ripe" for change in this respect stands to be seen (cf. Lyons 2008; Vaughan & Tronvoll 2003: 34). The odds are slim, because like in many other African countries, a democratic-republican culture is not evolving and not furthered in Ethiopia, and fundamental public debates about the republican tradition are discouraged. Hierarchy, obedience and forceful authority, inherited from the old imperial system and reinforced by the Marxist-military regime until 1991, are still dominant. The pluralism of ethno-cultural groups is not well-integrated into the national system either. This has often inhibited the productive articulation of local political traditions with the national level of administration. It is for the dominant party (EPRDF), which has set the agenda in the past 18 years, to make a dent in that political culture with new legal measures and inclusive socio-economic policies. Elite action impacts on political culture.⁴² Gradual social and economic change creating a broader middle class – visible in some domains – will also contribute its part, against state repression, but the process is slow, especially when thwarted from above and when slowed down by economic crisis and the growth of poverty (as seen in Ethiopia since early 2006, with skyrocketing inflation and budget deficits due to, among others, a war effort to assist the Transitional Federal Government in Somalia). The expectations among observers, academics, Western donors and the vocal Ethiopia diaspora of the coming of democracy to Ethiopia have to be tempered: if the country has not even been able to establish the basics of a republican state, the institutionalisation of a democracy will even be more problematic.

Finally, researching African cases of republicanism and republican politics, or of the efforts thereto, is a challenge for the comparative study of political thought and governance, both for theoretical and practical reasons. In Europe and America the growing attraction of republicanism in the last few decades may be due to the general rejection of "... teleology of ideology-based narratives of political thought" (Castiglione 2005: 453). Because republican ideas take a middle ground between liberalism and collectivist ideologies to forge a shared procedural agenda for pluralist countries, they may have an important role to play in future politics, as elites, intellectuals,

41 This unsurpassed work, more than his treatise *The Prince*, expounds Machiavelli's real political philosophy.

42 This factor of *elite agency* in the study of political culture is also theoretically of great importance.

political rebels and local leaders in Africa strive to redefine the political order in Africa.

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Die 2. Republik in Äthiopien und der “fragile Gesellschaftsvertrag“

Zusammenfassung: Das Jahr 1991 sah die Inauguration der 2. Republik in Äthiopien, diesmal als föderal-demokratische statt wie bisher als Volksrepublik. Achtzehn Jahre nach dem Machtwechsel besteht bei den meisten Beobachtern Konsens über die Probleme im politischen Prozess des Landes. Konstatiert wird die Rückkehr zu einem stark autoritären Regime, das eine repräsentative parlamentarische Demokratie so gut wie unmöglich macht. Der Artikel präsentiert eine Analyse der wichtigsten allgemeinen ideologischen Grundsätze der heutigen äthiopischen Republik und ihrer führenden Partei. Unter Einbeziehung der wachsenden Kritik im In- und Ausland (Gebergemeinschaft) und der Diskussion über „fragile“ oder „scheiternde Staaten“ wird die Herrschaftspraxis in Äthiopien untersucht. Der neue „Gesellschaftsvertrag“ von 1991, kodifiziert in der neuen Verfassung von Dezember 1994, ist prekär und wird nicht mehr akzeptiert. Parteipolitische und ethno-regionale Opposition der föderalen Politik gegenüber wird aber standardmäßig beantwortet mit Repression, diskursiver Isolation und Marginali-

sierung. Eine öffentliche Debatte über die ethno-föderale republikanische Formel und den Staatsaufbau wird kaum toleriert, vielleicht weil die Machthaber selbst keine Alternative sehen (wollen).

Der Artikel legt eine Interpretation des ethno-föderalen Verwaltungssystems in Äthiopien vor, die auf das noch immer nicht gelöste Problem der Harmonisierung von lokalen und modernen Elementen der politischen Praxis in einem Entwicklungsland rekurriert, und macht einen konzeptionellen Vorschlag über den Status der nominell für wichtig gehaltenen, aber in der politischen Praxis abwesenden „republikanischen“ Prinzipien des äthiopischen Staates. Dabei empfiehlt sich im allgemeinen eine explizitere Debatte dieser Prinzipien und Ideen statt der, heute auch in der akademischen Diskussion ziemlich „überforschten“, ethno-föderalen Aspekte des Staates.

Schlagwörter: Äthiopien; Republikanismus; Demokratisierung; Ethnizität; Politische Kultur; Fragile Staaten