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PUBLIC SPHERE, RATIONALITY AND THE LIMITS OF THE FEDERAL EXPERIMENT IN ETHIOPIA

In the multiethnic polity of Ethiopia, the practical realization of federalism in Ethiopia has been characterized by ethnic conflicts, manufacturing of difference and the abandoning of the grand narrative of Ethiopian unity. In this paper, using the notion of a public sphere as a space for public discourse and rationality from critical theory, I argue that the federal experiment in Ethiopia could only grow in the background of a public sphere that sustains a critical societal practice. Ethiopians could only engage in a common quest for societal progress and refinement, when they have a free and autonomous public sphere. This space serves as a platform for reflecting on the contradictions in Ethiopian modernity and also existential problems in the country. Such an effort to evolve a public sphere as a foundation for democracy could have foundations in the different precursors of Ethiopian modernity like Dekike Estifanos, hatata of Zera Yacob and writings of Negadras Gebrehiwot and Hiruy Woldeselassie. It could also be situated on new forms of public sphere like social media and their role in fostering democracy in Ethiopia.

Key words: Federal Experiment in Ethiopia; Ethnic Federalism; Public Sphere; Critique; Democratization.

Introduction

Based on the grand narrative that sees the political project of Ethiopian modernity as being founded on a process of assimilation and homogenization, the current FDRE government took the form of a federal state structure. Nevertheless, starting from its inception, there was a severe criticism towards the implementation of federalism in the Ethiopian context. Whereas proponents argued that federalism is the only system that recognizes the complex and enigmatic nature of the Ethiopian state, others argued that federalism destroys the common moral fabric that holds Ethiopians together. Particularly the application of ethnic identity as the organizing factor of Ethiopian federalism was said to lead to ethnic conflicts.

According to Donald N. Levine, there are two dominant ways of understanding Ethiopian history, each one having an implication for the organization of the Ethiopian state. The first one which is above all expressed by Carlo Conti Rossini sees Ethiopia as an exotic world of perfection that is home to different natural and cultural wonders. Against this, the second view sees Ethiopia "as a "prison house of nationalities" (*Levine, 2012: 35*). It is the second interpretation that sees the process of state building in modern Ethiopia as a process of homogenization and subsequently animated the need to incorporate ethnic identity as the major difference of the cultures that makeup the modern Ethiopian state. For Levine, both views of Ethiopian history are incorporated into the FDRE constitution that sees Ethiopia as a home to different ethnic identities. Rather than picturing Ethiopian history as a stage where different cultures developed in complete isolation with one another, Levine emphasizes interconnection, processes of learning and intimate relations among the different cultures.

The affirmation of cultural difference and existence of different modalities of existence is seen as the major factor behind the attempt to institute the federal state structure in many African nations. Once African states attained political independence, there was an attempt to realize economic development alongside introducing a state structure that recognizes cultural differences. As Kebede Kassa sees it, "in Africa, where ethnic and linguistic diversities are considerably high, there have been efforts to implement the project of ethnic federalism as in the case of Nigeria, South Africa, and Ethiopia" (*Kebede, 2016: 24*). What's special to the Ethiopian case is that whereas the cessations clause is being discarded in other African countries, it serves as a major cornerstone in the politics of identity in the Ethiopian context. Whereas other nations saw cessation as a possible consequence of ethnic politics that promotes disintegration, in Ethiopia it is seen as the recognition of the rights of each ethnic identity to stay in the polity so long as it consents with it.

In this paper, going beyond the mere attempt to identify the limitations of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia, I will argue for the introduction of an alternative foundation for accelerating processes of democratization in Ethiopia, through a discussion of the public sphere. The public sphere refers to a space in which free and open conversation is carried out among individuals in a democratic manner. In the Ethiopian context, I believe that the analysis of the public sphere must be founded in the analysis of modernity and development of a public civic culture that emphasizes equality among citizens. My analysis is organized around three major sections. In the first section, I will try to discuss the basic features of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia and its limitations. This is followed by the second section, where I try to discuss the notion of the public sphere and its relation to a democratic culture. Finally, in the third section, I will try to ask, is there an Ethiopian public sphere founded

in the Ethiopian discourse on modernity and is public culture in Ethiopia more prone towards a mere acceptance of authority or the exercise of discursive rationality.

Ethnic Federalism in Ethiopia and its Discontents

In Ethiopia instituting a federal state structure is seen as a solution to the questions of identity revolving around the formation of the modern Ethiopian state. It is assumed that without destroying our common identity, federalism mainly tries to capitalize on ethnic differences primarily expressed through different languages. In the FDRE government this shows that, "the regime's official rationalization maintained that adopting ethnicity in the political realms was a decisive precondition for preserving unity and political stability in the country" (*Aklilu, 2005: 90*). Roza Ismagilova sees ethnicity as being a pervasive force which manifest in different walks of life in Ethiopia. It manifests itself in the organization of political parties, struggle for resources and the conducting of the day to day functions of the state. This led Ismagilova to proclaim that "to most of the Ethiopians, their ethnic belonging is much more important than their Ethiopian identity" (*Ismagilova, 2004: 182*). If ethnicity is such an important category in the thinking of Ethiopians, then the question becomes how we could accommodate it in the process of state building.

There are different ways of understanding the development of the modern Ethiopian state, ranging from the thesis of cultural assimilation to the argument that it was not a particular group but an elite group that was dominant in the modern Ethiopian state. Taking upon the thesis of cultural hegemony, Mesfin here argues that, "like other independent African countries, the centralisation of power and control of power and resources by one politically dominant ethnic group became a factor in the low levels of integration between the country's ethnic groups during the 20th century" (*Mesfin, 2011: 48*). What makes the Ethiopian state formation anomalous compared to the African one is the fact that the Ethiopian state traces its genesis not to the colonial era but classical Ethiopian history.

John Markakis sees a failure by the state to recognize the questions of ethnic groups throughout Ethiopian history. Such a deliberate act of neglecting questions of ethnicity is evident in the fact that, "the long wars waged throughout the 1960s were rarely mentioned publicly, and then only as operations against bandits" (*Markakis, 1989: 121*). Although politically it pursued the same process of centralization, Markakis believes that culturally the Derg presents a difference since "it departed from the policy of the ancien regime. From the beginning, it had promised cryptically to abolish 'certain traditional customs which may hamper the unity and progress of Ethiopia" (*Markakis, 1989: 123*). Strengthening such an assertion John Young contends that the Derg earlier on displayed an openness to entertain cultural difference within the state structure. Nevertheless, this didn't result in a process of democratization, since there was no transfer of power from the state to the masses. As such in reality, "the Derg fought to maintain a strong central state, refused to share power with either the politically conscious middle classes or the emerging regional and ethnic elites" (*Young, 1998: 193*). Also currently, rather than genuinely accommodating differences or negotiating with others who are also struggling for recognition "constitution-making under the EPRDF has little in common with the bargaining, trade-offs, and compromises that usually typify such processes" (*Young, 1998: 195*).

Ethiopia's system of federalism is unique in granting units the full right to leave the federation based on their consent. Whereas the government saw such a clause as a guarantee that all units within the state consented into the federal union, critics point out that "it invites ethnic conflict and risks state disintegration" (*Alem, 2005: 313*). What is more perplexing in the adoption of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia is the fact that whereas other Africa nations after the end of colonialism sought to transcend ethnic politics, Ethiopia on the contrary embraced ethnic federalism as the foundation of the constitution. One further observes that "the fact that Ethiopia was never colonized by Europeans oldest states in the world makes the Ethiopian experiment federalism all the more intriguing" (*Alem, 2005: 315*).

Semahegn Gashu believes that at the most fundamental level the Ethiopian system of federalism is dictated by "the Stalinist notion of 'the right to self determination of nationalities' and Marxist-Leninist organisational principles of the state" (*Semahegn, 2014: 2*). Such a secessionist clause was clearly expressed in the Ethiopian student movement and gradually resulted in the manufacturing of ethnic differences within the Ethiopian context. Within the Ethiopian system of federalism, Semahegn sees an inner contradiction between the decentralizing element found within the state structure and the homogenizing aspect found within the revolutionary democracy ideology that the ruling party endorsed. Whereas the former emphasizes the sharing of power, political will and legitimacy the latter "do not recognise popular sovereignty, independence of institutions and equality of citizens" (*Semahegn, 2014: 3*). For Tronvoll, there are three major factors behind the lagging nature of the federal state structure in Ethiopia. First of all, since there is no genuine political space in Ethiopia, the ruling party eliminated all political dissent and opposition. Secondly, one sees a continuing ethic conflict that leads to mass evictions and violation of human rights. One as such continually witnesses "local conflicts throughout the country between ethnic groups competing for local resources or political power within the ethnic-administrative system" (*Tronvoll, 2008: 73*). Thirdly, because of its Marxist-Leninist origins, the ruling party sees all political opposition as a threat to its political power. Beyond these criticisms it was also assumed that "such federalism would be too slow, complex and costly" (*Brietzke, 1995: 27*).

The secessionist clause under the FDRE constitution is highly contested under international law and leads into disintegration rather than promoting solidarity among citizens. One as such needs to recognize that "it is extremely difficult to change ethnic entitlements while coping with rapid changes in a developing country" (*Brietzke, 1995: 32*). Despite the fact that elections were conducted under the FDRE government founded on a system of federalism, still rather than broadening the political landscape they only resulted in consolidating the political power of the ruling party. Hand in hand with this, one also sees human right violations. This beyond anything else shows "how elections can be instruments of political control rather than devices of liberalization" (*Aalen and Tronvoll, 2009: 193*). Especially after the Ethio-Eritrean war one sees the emergence of an authoritarian state that crushes all political opposition and doesn't tolerate any political views that doesn't conform to its ideology.

For Edmond J. Keller, the challenges that Ethiopia is facing as a nation in realizing a democratic form of governance are caused by several factors. First of all, even though Ethiopia is not colonized still the same questions of asymmetrical power relations are also found. Secondly, it was brute force rather than mature style governance that dominated Ethiopian political culture. Thirdly, one also

sees that, "in spite of the dominance of a feudal mode of production, by the mid-20th century, Ethiopia was integrated into the world capitalist system" (*Keller, 1981: 523*). Adding on such host of factors, Alemseged Abbay believes that Ethiopia's long history and unique status as a nation that was never colonized presents both prospects and challenges. While such historical past can boost the morale of Ethiopians and serve as a foundation of Ethiopia's glory, at the same time " the rich past has been a burden for the country, because its political entrepreneurs have been vying to claim it for their own manipulative purposes" (*Alemseged, 2004: 596*).

Another significant challenge to Ethiopia's federalism is the status of the Southern region in the federal structure. Compared to other regions in Ethiopia, the south for Jon Abbink has historically shown a tendency to mingle with other cultures. Whereas other regions are organized around ethnic lines, the southern region is primarily meant to serve administrative functions. Recognizing the quest for constitutional recognition in such a region Abbink believes that "the South (SNNPRS) is a region vital to the redefinition and survival of the Ethiopian federation and of Ethiopian nationhood" (*Abbink, 1998: 75*). One sees in Ethiopia that the regional governments have inhabitants from other ethnic groups although it is proclaimed that the regions are established along ethnic lines. Walle remarks, "When a Kilel is designated as Amhara or Oromo, other population groups who live in such regions but are known by names different from Amhara or Oromo are likely to be frozen out from geographic identification and ethnic definition" (*Walle, 1993: 38*). Added to this is the fact that ethnic federalism is more prone to conflicts arising from diverging political interests and the struggle for political supremacy.

Tekeste Negash believes that beyond the challenges of attaining economic development, there are serious challenges that plague Ethiopia's progress. First of all, there is a need to evolve a system of justice that is grounded in Ethiopia's past while at the same time answering the quest of different ethnic identities for authenticity. This is a crucial task since it, "would necessarily bring forth pride and self-confidence-immaterial values of crucial importance-in confronting and resolving challenges of all sorts" (*Tekeste, 2008: 18*). Secondly, there is a need to introduce a system of education grounded on Ethiopian values and serves as a source of national consensus and pride. Even though ethnic federalism is seen as a solution to the quest of diverse ethnic groups in Ethiopia for political recognition, still it is not able to alleviate the multifaceted problems challenging the nation. This is most evident in the different ethnic conflicts that occurred in different parts of the country in the past decades. Here, "the major post 1991 inter-ethnic conflicts observed in Ethiopia are: the Silte-Gurage conflict, the Wagagoda language conflict, the Sheko-Megengir conflict, the Anuak-Nuer conflict, the Berta-Gumuz conflict, and the Gedeo-Guji conflict, the Oromo-Amhara conflict, the Borana-Gerri conflict, the Afar-Issa conflict, and the Oromo-Somali conflict" (*Lubo, 2012: 66*).

Svensson and Brounéus, argue that besides instituting a government that is inclusive, the major solution for avoiding conflicts in a multi-ethnic nation like Ethiopia is building a culture of trust among the members of a society. The cultivation of trust among the members of a community destroys grounds for dispute and conflict. This demonstrates that, "trust and dialogue are essential aspects of group relationships in the contexts of group based-tension" (*Svensson and Brounéus: 563*). Alongside building a culture of trust, Habtamu Wondimu emphasizes the role

key virtues in solving ethnic conflicts. There is also a need to the "use of preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peaceful settlement of emerging conflict, mediation and arbitration" (*Habtamu, 2013: 14*). Other requirements that must be met for the realization of a more inclusive democratic culture include practically implementing the constitutional principle that every identity has a voice in the Ethiopian state and critique of ethnocentric attitudes. So far within this paper, I have discussed the politics of ethnic difference that animates ethnic federalism and its discontents. Within the coming sections I will try to show how the values of democracy must be rooted in a public sphere where all citizens having an equal voice are able to contest different conceptions of trust.

Public Sphere as a Foundation of Democracy

Currently drawing on the European enlightenment tradition, there is an attempt to posit the public sphere as the ultimate foundation of democracy. Such an insistence operates within a distinction between the religious and public sphere, as well as private and public spheres. Whereas the religious sphere refers to the world of spirituality and religious life of the individual, the public sphere on the other hand refers to a space that is dictated by the force of the better argument. Furthermore, the private sphere of egoistic individual motivations is sharply contrasted to the public sphere and the exercise of public rationality. It is argued that such a public sphere will serve as a foundation of democracy since it entails the values of symmetry, dialogue and mutual benefit among individual actors in a public space. By discussing the trajectory of the public sphere in modern Europe and currently its significance in the world of social media, I will try to show how it harbors the elements of democracy.

John A. Guidry and Mark Q. Sawyer contend that there are two ways of understanding the nature of the public sphere. On one hand, it refers to a space in which symmetrical relations are envisioned among partners in dialogue. On the other side, public sphere could also refer into specific bourgeois culture developed around an exaggerated notion of the importance of individual freedom. Based on the second reading "many people- including the poor, women, nonwhites, youths, immigrants, and homosexuals-found little room to enter public politics on their own" (*Guidry and Sawyer, 2003: 275*). Whereas the dominant view sees the public sphere as the elevation of individual search for the truth raised to a public space, others argue that the public sphere is an attempt to transcend the individual world of egoistic motivations with an ethos of intersubjective validation. This shows that the public sphere "should display a different logic, for it is a different order with different rules of ordering and a productivity of its own" (*Visker, 2014: 287*).

Conceptions of the public sphere for Ku focus on a distinction between the sphere of private life on one hand and that of public opinion on the other. In such a distinction a public sphere, "has to do with the issue of publicness, openness, and visibility as opposed to privacy, secrecy, and invisibility" (*Ku, 1998: 172*). The public sphere is also separated from the domain of politics since it is not a form of political participation but world of individual opinions. Critical modernists like Habermas celebrate the public sphere as a stage for communicative rationality, whereas postmodernists like Foucault witness the rise of a repressive discourse and "the perfection of disciplinary power during the same historical period" (*Johnson, Villa, 1994: 428*). For John L. Brooke, Habermas' public sphere is an attempt to find a realm of rational discourse that goes beyond the confines of the private sphere of individual

pursuits as well as the state and its instrumental rationality. Furthermore, rather than idealizing the potentials found within the public sphere, Brooke believes that the public sphere "had a chronology running from the l680s with coffeehouses, lodges, and theaters of late Restoration London to sometime in the mid- to late nineteenth century with the rise of corporate power in the marketplace" (*Brooke, 2005: 93*).

For Habermas, in the premodern world of custom and tradition, it was ascribed status and relations of asymmetry that dictated public life. This changed in the wake of modernity where the usage of dialogical reason and a communication that is equally open to all came to be the basic feature of the public sphere. Accordingly, "under feudalism, Habermas reports, the 'public realm' existed not as a sphere of interaction and debate but merely of representation" (*Goode, 2005: 4*). The public sphere is a stage where individuals deliberate on the most important issues of the day. The origins of such a discourse ultimately reside in the individual participants and their willingness to enter the public arena. Habermas maintains "the bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public" (*Habermas, 1991: 27*).

For Habermas the mere formation of a public as collection of individuals and the fact that they are able to freely debate issue that are of importance to them is the spirit of the public sphere. In separating the nature of the discursive activity carried out in the public sphere from other domains of technical rationality, Habermas contends, "they then behave neither like business or professional people transacting private affairs, nor like members of a constitutional order subject to the legal constraints of a state bureaucracy" (*Habermas, 1974: 49*). Abandoning the exclusive focus on individual rationality and the value of the intersubjective horizon in the development of public rationality, Habermas later goes on to recognize the value of advocacy groups and campaigns in expressing and struggling for the needs of the public. Jim McGuigan here argues, Habermas' "latter-day 'sluice-gate' model of the public sphere awards primacy to social movements and campaigning organizations in forcing issues onto the public agenda that otherwise might not be there at all" (*McGuigan, 2005: 428*).

Public discourse for Nancy Fraser primarily signifies the power of language in structuring and coordinating everyday human relations. The public sphere as such, "designates a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk" (*Fraser, 1990: 57*). Some difficulties within Habermasian public sphere include the fact that it is not sufficiently rooted in everyday material relations and also that it doesn't attempt to utilize resources for public discourse and rationality from other traditions. As such, "he fails to examine these other public spheres that he ends up idealizing the liberal public sphere" (*Fraser, 1990: 60*). For Dahlberg the analysis of the public sphere excludes the affective and aesthetic aspect of life. Only focusing on everyday validity claims and a discourse that is regulated by validity claims, the role of subjectivity and aesthetic forms of creation are marginalized in the study of the public sphere. Dahlberg argues, "this devaluing of aesthetic-affective modes of communication not only marginalizes or excludes those groups who express them, ---, but limits the resources available for achieving greater understanding" (*Dahlberg, 2005: 115*).

Trying to elevate the emancipatory potentials of the public sphere into a global discourse, Habermas believes that the global public sphere could be seen as an arena for a process of democratization at a universal level. Such an insistence for Amy Allen doesn't take into a consideration the fact that asymmetrical power relations exist in the world of globalization and the fact that the public sphere being grounded within the western soil necessarily upholds the values of the west. To this extent, "the structure of transnational and global public spheres favors elites who have the material and symbolic resources needed for global public communication, and who possess the requisite linguistic skills, including the ability to communicate in English" (*Allen, 2012: 826*). Even though different conceptions of democracy exist in today's world, still the attempt to extract a democratic culture out of everyday public discourse continues to fascinate different thinkers. As such one sees that" The public is a phantom that will not go away: even after the many funeral rites and orations it has been subjected to, it comes back to haunt conscience and memory" (*Benhabib, 1997: 1*).

Currently there is an attempt to characterize the internet and social media as a new form of public sphere. This is predicated on the assumption that it's not technical knowledge but individual opinion and not institutions but virtual subjects that are important in such a world. As such, "the Internet might again serve as a space where non-specialists and the general public can interpret a vast array of cultural artifacts for themselves because of its potential for reproducing and distributing virtual versions of them" (*Ward, 1997: 372*). This also entails the emergence of the new world of social media that made possible new human relations and interconnections across boundaries. Social media created a space where horizontal relations were instituted among individuals as opposed to forms of media like the television whose access was regulated by institutional actors on one hand, and other mediums like the telephone which primarily facilitated conversations amongst two individuals. One sees that, the social media is heavily contrasted with, "public broadcast media such as television, radio and newspapers [and] media that facilitated private communication between two people as one- to- one conversations, for example a telephone conversation" (*Ward, 1997: 372*). One sees forms of media that are more interactive and dictated by the intentions of users here.

In Africa, the study of the public sphere is associated to attempts to usher in an era of democratization within the continent. Despite this serious efforts have not been made to implant the values of public sphere in Africa as well as to probe whether African cultures are suitable enough for the cultivation of public rationality. This testifies to the fact that "scholars and activists alike have not paid sufficient attention to the public sphere as the important background for both re-democratisation and civil society" (*Mustapha, 2012: 28*). For Mustapha rather than utilizing the intersubjective horizon of the public sphere introduced by Habermasian public sphere, it is the Weberian instrumental rationality being manifested in structural adjustment programs that is dominant in Africa. Having discussed the relation between public sphere and democracy, in the following section I will try to explore the possibility of developing a discourse on democracy in Ethiopia that is founded on the Ethiopian public sphere. Such a public sphere in Ethiopia as I see it must be founded on the Ethiopian discourse on modernity and its emancipatory potentials.

Public Sphere and Democracy in Ethiopia

These days there is a huge awareness that Ethiopia's ethnic federalism is in a state of crisis. I believe that the

attempt to instill the values of democracy within the Ethiopian context must be founded on the exercise of a public discourse and rationality that is crystallized by the values of the public sphere. I believe that there are three tasks that need to be carried out in such an attempt to evolve a mature conception of Ethiopian democracy founded on public rationality that is open and accessible to all individual citizens. First of all, there is a need to deconstruct Ethiopian history and to see how it shapes our troubled present. This helps to dispel certain narratives that cause conflicts among the members of the society. Secondly, we need to probe, is there a public sphere in the Ethiopian context that can easily furnish the values of democracy or is it antithetical to democracy. This requires a deep investigation into the very notion of a public sphere within the Ethiopian context. Thirdly, our conception of the public sphere must be founded on societal modernity. Such modernity has different foundations and we should explore the different precursors and foundations of Ethiopian modernity.

The first task that needs to be carried out in the attempt to reposition the Ethiopian discussion of democracy on the public sphere is the deconstruction of our historical past. We need to engage in the analysis of the process of state making and cultural communication as it is pictured in Ethiopian historiography. One area here is to identify the relations of interdependency among different cultures in Ethiopia's historical past. This serves as a refutation of the thesis that Ethiopian cultures are completely alien to one another. Maimire Mennasemay argues that it is the spirit of interconnection and the pursuit of common goals that characterizes our common past. This leads him to proclaim that "from the Axumite period onwards, the construction of Ethiopia took place through complex disintegrative integrative processes, triggered by the various interactions of social forces ethnies" (*Maimire, 2005: 4*). Maimire calls as surplus history the hitherto unexplored wealth of Ethiopian history that emerged as a result of the relations of interdependence among different cultures in Ethiopia throughout the ages. Such aspect of history serves as a foundation to the attempts to identify parallel modalities of existence among different cultures in Ethiopia.

One major obstacle to the adequate understanding of Ethiopian history is the application of the colonial thesis to understand Ethiopian politics. This has different ramifications since it engenders a false understanding of Ethiopian history and the complex processes of unification that gave birth to present Ethiopian society. It easily engenders the view that the modern Ethiopian state resulted as a process of assimilation and that there is necessarily a struggle between the oppressors and oppressed, when in fact it was the elites that subsumed all political will and legitimacy. Such a colonial thesis in its practical application "under the Derg, this led to the imposition of communism, and, under the EPRDF, to a conception of Ethiopia as a colonial power, which led to the separation of Eritrea and to the right of ethnic secession based on the premise that each ethnie is a colonized group that must be liberated" (*Maimire, 2005: 8*). Based on such observations, Maimire finally concludes that the failure to extract surplus history leads to centrism in picturing cultures as being radically separated from one another, and to a politics of hate that is founded on an exaggerated view of cultural difference (*Maimire, 2005: 9*).

Alongside unearthing our complex history, secondly, we need to understand the public sphere within the Ethiopian context is conducive enough to host a democratic culture. For Donald N. Levine, the attempt to reground democratic culture in Ethiopia not simply in the celebration of difference but public reason and rationality could be made possible through exploring the usage of such a domain for Ethiopians. He believes that one first needs to ask, "Does Ethiopia need an informed national public? Do its citizens find common cause in wanting to address such issues as: growing rates of poverty and malnutrition; epidemics of AIDS and other diseases; massive deforestation; threatening population growth; land tenure; undereducation of females; electoral reform; addiction to foreign aid; and the like?" (*Levine, 2008: 105*). The Ethiopian public sphere needs to challenge Ethiopian traditional values that promote a blind acceptance of authority.

For Bahru Zewde, the highly traditional nature of the society in Ethiopia was certainly antithetical to the emergence of a culture founded on public reason and individual freedom. This led Bahru to assert that, "innovations and initiatives have therefore tended to come from above rather than to emanate from below" (*Bahru, 1994: 5*). We need a proper understanding of Ethiopian history and identify which conceptual resources are conducive enough for the development of a democratic culture and which ones are against the exercise of public decision making. This is further complicated by the fact that, the Haileselassie regime and its hierarchical order of relations and the Derg's philosophy which tends to subsume individual will for the greatest cause are against the exercise of dialogical and public rationality. As a solution he believes that, we need to extract "the brighter aspects of the Ethiopian past while consciously fighting the darker ones" (*Bahru, 1994: 25*).

Although emperor Hailesellasie introduced several measures that are meant to modernize the nation, ultimately resistance arose especially from the educated calling for more justice and equality among citizens. As such, "the intellectuals and activists associated Ethiopian backwardness with the regime's religious commitments and as a result began to campaign against the hegemony of the Solomonic dynasty" (*Adejumobi, 2007: 131*). What succeeded the imperial regime was the Derg that sought to distill the agrarian economy and tried to realize the emancipation of Ethiopians through the radical philosophy of socialism. The Derg's rule came to an end by the pressure of insurgent movements internally and "the erosion of international patronage, especially from the old Eastern Bloc" (*Adejumobi, 2007: 133*). The current FDRE government is founded on the ideal of federalism being a solution to the quest of nations, people and nationalities in Ethiopia for recognition. Still critics from the onset of the introduction of federalism in Ethiopia argued that it will lead to disintegration whereas the government contends that "ethnicity would become less of an issue as the economy grew and an organic process of assimilation into the Ethiopian body politic ensued" (*Adejumobi, 2007: 135*).

For Maimire Mennasemay, beginning from the students' movements, the need to institute a democratic government has dictated the mindset of Ethiopian intellectuals. Nevertheless, such a quest for democracy is not properly situated in the understanding of Ethiopia's complex history and culture. Maimire argues, "if democracy is the way for extricating Ethiopians from the present abyss, then one must take democracy seriously-which means going beyond the ritual of elections and tackling the political, social, and economic totality of the Ethiopian experience of destitution" (*Maimire, 2008: 4*). Rather than identifying the basic defect of different regimes in Ethiopia and identifying their incompatibility with the values and principles of democracy, attempts are made to accommodate the

existing government within the democratic framework by using empty and antidemocratic ideals like ""limited democracy," "restricted democracy," "protected democracy," "tutelary democracy," and "virtual democracy" (*Maimire, 2008: 6*). Maimire further sees difficulties in adopting the western concept of a nation to the process of state formation in Ethiopia. Also he believes that the attempt to found democracy in a public discourse in Ethiopia is inhibited by the fact that the very existence of civil society in Ethiopia consolidates the status quo rather than trying to evolve a space that is open to all members of a community. To this extent, "civil society" in Ethiopia is not antithetical to authoritarianism" (*Maimire, 2008: 10*).

Thirdly, the attempt to explore the inputs of the public sphere for Ethiopian democracy must be founded on a proper understanding of Ethiopian modernity. Here I identify four such sources of Ethiopian modernity found within the philosophy of ZeraYacob, the modernization program of Gebre-Heywat Baykedagn and Blata Geta Hiruy W/Selassie and finally the Dekike Estifanos. Besides this, the role of social media as a new form of public sphere and its role in accelerating democracy in Ethiopia need to be probed as well. For Bahru Zewde (*2008*) attempts to celebrate Ethiopia's modernity and must be coupled with an analysis of the contradictions of the past and opening up of a space for equal participation. As such, "what has been sorely lacking amidst all these festivities is a sober and balanced assessment of the past millennium" (*Bahru, 2008: 34*).

For Teodros Kiros, any analysis of the role of philosophy on the Ethiopian soil must underscore the contributions of the Canadian philosopher Claude Sumner's contribution to Ethiopian philosophy. Sumner introduced a large philosophical scheme which managed to analyze the indigenous, traditional, oral, written and modern philosophical approaches on the Ethiopian soil (*Teodros, 1996: 41*). Particularly belonging into the written Ethiopian philosophical traditions, ZeraYacob's hatata constituted a philosophical biography that sought a rational analysis for religious disputes through a rational model, having implications for social and political philosophy and serving as a model of religious pluralism. ZeraYacob's hatata introduced the need to question custom and tradition and also develop a local response to the Eurocentric project of modernity. Therefore, "at the same time, in the mountains of Ethiopia, ZeraYacob was busily sharpening his radical method of the Hatatas, with which he was methodically dismantling, layer by layer, piece by piece, the dominant prejudices of backward Ethiopia, specifically its religious practices and old customs" (*Sumner, 1976: 50*). The hatata signified the need to interrogate what is given and thereby interrogate conventional wisdom and authority. The questioning of accepted realities and the need to introduce a platform for Ethiopia's modernity also finds expression in the critique of political economy developed by Negadras Gebre-Heyawt Baykedagn.

According to Messay Kebede, Gebre-Heyawt Baykedagn tried to develop a scheme of modernization aimed at coping with the latest advancements of the western world and an attempt to stir the modernization of Ethiopia through instrumental rationalization. Gebre-Heywat's amusement with the once greatness and subsequent decline of the Ethiopian civilization, led him to ask, "how did such deterioration come about? Such is Baykedagn's disturbing question" (*Messay, 2006: 817*). Salvadore here argues that Gebre-Heywat sought to develop a unique conception of Ethiopian modernity that focused on cultural preservation, political modernity and uncoupling Western modernity from capitalism. Gebre-Heywat's unique program of Ethiopian modernization focused on economic development, exposing the exploitation of peasants in feudalism, equal distribution of wealth amongst the provinces and avoiding the exploitation of the masses. The realization of such initiatives finally depended on a uniquely Ethiopian system of education (*Salvadore, 2007: 568*). The solution that Gebre-Heywat sought to propose was pragmatic and practical and suited to indigenous modernization rather than a program of Westernization.

Further developing the idea of an Ethiopian modernity founded on indigenous realities, Blata Geta Hiruy W/Selassie contends that even though the Europeans have a more profound and developed material civilization still it is founded on the exploitation of non-Europeans. As such Ethiopians should only learn about the greatest scientific and technological achievements of Europeans by preserving their own indigenous cultural values. For him modernity is a sophisticated process where we try to accommodate our cultural values to existential challenges. Ethiopians have a unique culture and way of life, and history. For Hiruy, if we assume that Ethiopian civilization is in a comparable stature to modern Europe, then we must demonstrate that we have a well refined intellectual project compared to the western world (*Hiruy, 2017: 36*). Hiruy further argues that education is the foundation of development and that Ethiopians should go to Europe not to imitate western culture but to grasp the wisdom that is needed to accelerate our development and goals of modernization.

Maimire contends that there is a difference between introducing western schemes of modernization in Ethiopia and grounding the project of modernity in the Ethiopian soil. What has been carried out so far in Ethiopia is trying to modernize Ethiopia taking western modernity as the ultimate standard (*Maimire, 2011: 1*). One critical foundation for Ethiopian modernity is the Dekike Estifanos. The Dekike Estifanos could serve as a foundation of Ethiopian critical theory since what the Dekike Estifanos introduced was not just the questioning of religious teaching but also an envisioning of a future that is driven by a rational discourse. The heresy of the Dekike Estifanos here "could be read as bearing within itself a utopian, rational and political critique of Ethiopian society mediated through a religious discourse" (*Maimire, 2011: 4*). The Dekike Estifanos emerged out of the people rather than form the church hierarchy. All these factors lead Maimire to argue that, "behind these seemingly theological conflicts gestate new ideas about power, law, institutions, and knowledge" (*Maimire, 2011: 6*). Besides investigating the critical foundations of Ethiopian modernity, our study of the public sphere must also try to explore the viability of social media as an agent of democratization within the Ethiopian context.

For Ibrahim al Marashi and Nicole A. Stremlau, the role of media in fostering the values of peace and democracy in countries like Ethiopia and Iraq ultimately depends in its ability to interrogate the relation between the government and other actors in the state. Such a necessity could be expressed in questions like "1) Do the media facilitate a process of dialogue between government and insurgents or between opposition groups or political parties, or a process of power-sharing? 2) Do the media help define the question "what is the nation"? 3) Does their functioning contribute to a viable state capable of governing? And (reflected in the above three) 4). At a minimum, are the media restrained from encouraging violent outcomes?" (*Al Marashi and Stremlau, 2009: 2*). Here, Tezera Tazebew maintains that the dawn of the internet age in Ethiopia is

characterized by the enlarging of the public space. The government in Ethiopia tried to infuse the usage of the internet with its own political programs and visions. Accordingly, "this statist usage of the internet manifested itself in the development of several ICT initiatives in e-government and e-democracy" (*Tezera, 2017: 134*). For Tezera, partly the usage of the social media in Ethiopia led to misinformation and fake news, social polarization and also destroyed the possibility of national consensus among citizens. Ultimately the usage of the internet and social media for democratization in Ethiopia is dictated by the internet access to citizens and the willingness of the government to respect the freedom of expression.

Conclusion

Historically the quest for democracy in Ethiopia is seen as a way of answering the quest of ethnic identities for equal recognition and status within the Ethiopian state. The current system of federalism was predicated on the assumption that the process of state formation in modern Ethiopia was one which was founded in subsuming minorities into larger identities and ways of life. This animated ethnic federalism that sees ethnicity as an organizing category behind the system of federalism. Being a bitter source of contention from the onset, such ethnic federalism led into the destruction of centuries old values that hold Ethiopians together in return manufacturing radical difference among Ethiopian cultures. It also led into ethnic conflicts among different groups struggling for political recognition. As an alternative, one could unearth the emancipatory potentials found within the public sphere and the idea of public rationality which dictates societal coexistence.

The value of the public sphere is found on a form of rationality that is equally free to all and embodies symmetry among partners in dialogue. In the Ethiopian context, there is a need to liberate the public space from authority and custom. Recognizing that the public domain serves the status quo and tradition, there is a need to introduce rational tools of communication in the public domain in Ethiopia. Here, attempts to liberate the mind of the individual from authority and public life from established authority could be taken as critical foundations of the public sphere.

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ПУБЛІЧНА СФЕРА, РАЦІОНАЛЬНІСТЬ І МЕЖІ ФЕДЕРАЛЬНОГО ЕКСПЕРИМЕНТУ В ЕФІОПІЇ

Актуальність роздумів автора про впроваджуваний вже 27 років в Ефіопії експеримент щодо встановлення етнічного федерального устрою обумовлена перманентними міжетнічними конфліктами, які ускладнюються невирішеністю соціально-економічних проблем, боротьбою еліт за владу і ресурси, прорахунками і помилками влади всіх рівнів. Використовуючи поняття публічної сфери як простору для публічного дискурсу та раціональності, автор проводить думку, що федеральний експеримент в Ефіопії може розвиватися тільки на умовах публічності та відкритості, підтримуваних критичними громадськими дискусіями. Представлений у статті аналіз складається з трьох основних розділів. Перший розділ присвячений основним рисам етнічного федералізму в Ефіопії і його обмеженням. Другий - різним інтерпретаціям поняття "публічна сфера" в її відношенні до демократичної культури. Третій розділ статті містить міркування автора про ефіопську суспільну сферу, ефіопський дискурс про сучасність і перспективи публічної політичної культури в Ефіопії. У результаті цих міркувань автор приходить до висновку, що альтернативою насаджуваній урядом ідеї етнічного федералізму може бути публічна сфера і громадська раціональність, які звільняють суспільний простір від влади і звичаїв. Така спроба розвинути публічну сферу в якості основи для демократії базується на різних попередніх ефіопській сучасності рухах і ідеях, таких як Dekike Estifanos, хатата Zera Yacob, а також творах Negadras Gebrehiwot і Hiruy Woldeselassie. Перспективними формами публічної сфери, які дозволять посилити демократичні тренди в країні, автор вважає соціальні мережі та інші нові форми суспільної комунікації.

Ключові слова: федеральний експеримент в Ефіопії; етнічний федералізм; громадська сфера; критика; демократизація.