

“Is the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front Rule Sustainable in Ethiopia?” A Critical Reflection

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Abstract

In this paper, the author attempts to answer the question: ‘Is the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front Rule Sustainable in Ethiopia?’ It is widely believed that the rise of Ethiopia has presented one of the most important challenges facing all major powers in the African continent and elsewhere this century. As the only ruling party, the sustainability of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front Party (EPRDF) can thus be legitimately questioned. Among many uncertainties about Ethiopia, the key is undoubtedly the EPRDF. Once deemed the vanguard of the Ethiopian state, the EPRDF’s failing ideological appeal, its equally unattractive and clumsy structure, and its disillusioned party cadres are now increasingly making the Party’s sustainability problematic. Moreover, the rapid globalization process has been and is generating an increasingly high pressure for the EPRDF leadership. So, therefore, to sustain its rule, the EPRDF now needs to review its continued relevance to the fast changing economic, social and political climate in Ethiopia and outside. Party reform appears to be the most logical and urgent choice, yet, there seems to be no clear direction given for the party’s structural transformation at the moment. Although there is a fast growing body of literature on Ethiopia’s development and its future, the issue of the EPRDF has been marginalized in the scholarly community. More often than not, when scholars attempt to examine the development and future of Ethiopia, they tend to focus on factors other than the EPRDF itself, even though they realize its importance. Most arguments have centered on Ethiopia’s economic development and the impact of that on other aspects of development, including the EPRDF. In recent years, though, there have been some efforts to bring the EPRDF back into the analysis. Nevertheless, it still remains understudied. In an attempt to answer the question of whether the EPRDF rule is sustainable, this paper then focuses on the party itself. It first discusses the nature of the EPRDF, and then examines how the EPRDF has transformed itself. It also places the EPRDF in the context of global capitalism. Finally, the paper assesses the sustainability of the EPRDF from all of these perspectives.

Keywords: EPRDF, sustainable rule, personalization, democratic centralism, institutionalization, economism, professionalism, globalization.

Introduction

The issue whether the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front Rule is sustainable has been one of the hotly debated issues in the Ethiopian body politic both by those in the academic and the policy circles. It has been at the center of debate particularly since the 2005 national election but has become even more so after the passing away of the late Prime mister Meles Zenawi- the party’s long stayed chairman till his death in 2012. From the debate, two contending lines of argument can be shifted out. While one line argues that the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front party (EPRDF) will not be able to sustain itself, the other line takes the opposite view. However, whilst plenty of evidence can be presented to support each case, none of them can claim monopoly of truth and hence can be absolutely convincing. One can thus reasonably argue that it will be a difficult enterprise to answer such a big question. But, then, exactly because it is a big question, both the scholarly community and those in the policy circles must devote much attention to it.

It is widely believed that the rise of Ethiopia has presented one of the most important challenges facing all major powers in the African continent and elsewhere this century. As the only ruling party, the sustainability of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front Party (EPRDF) can thus be legitimately questioned. Because, as Antonio Gramsci also rightly puts it in his Prison Notebooks, ‘Political party is the organism through which a complexelement of society recognizes its collective will and to some extent asserts it in action to take concrete form which then implies that the modern princecannot be a real person, aconcrete individual but only a part in that organism.’”

Among many uncertainties about Ethiopia, the key is undoubtedly the EPRDF. Once deemed the vanguard of the Ethiopian state, the EPRDF’s failing ideological appeal, its equally unattractive and clumsy structure, and its disillusioned party cadres are now increasingly making the Party’s sustainability problematic. Moreover, the rapid globalization process has been and is generating an increasingly high pressure for the EPRDF leadership. So, therefore, to sustain its rule, the EPRDF now needs to review its continued relevance to the fast changing

economic, social and political climate in Ethiopia and outside. Party reform appears to be the most logical and urgent choice, yet, there seems to be no clear direction given for the party's structural transformation at the moment. Although there is a fast growing body of literature on Ethiopia's development and its future, the issue of the EPRDF has been marginalized in the scholarly community. More often than not, when scholars attempt to examine the development and future of Ethiopia, they tend to focus on factors other than the EPRDF itself, even though they realize its importance. Most arguments have centered on Ethiopia's economic development and the impact of that on other aspects of development, including the EPRDF. In recent years, though, there have been some efforts to bring the EPRDF back into the analysis. Nevertheless, it still remains understudied.

In an attempt to answer the question of whether the EPRDF rule is sustainable, this paper then focuses on the party itself. It is divided into three parts. The First one discusses the nature of the EPRDF. The Second examines how the EPRDF has transformed itself over time and the Third explores the relations between the EPRDF and global capitalism. Finally, the paper assesses the sustainability of the EPRDF from all of these perspectives.

1. The Nature of the EPRDF

To answer the question of whether the EPRDF rule is sustainable, it is important to look at the nature of the EPRDF. Strictly speaking, it is not a 'political party' by Western standards. The term 'political parties' has emerged in the nineteenth century with the development of representative institutions and the expansion of suffrage in Europe and the United States (Sartori, 1976) to refer to those 'organizations whose goal was the capture of public office in electoral competition with one or more other parties' (Schlesinger as cited in Sills D., 1968). Perceptions of what constituted a party also differed in the process of this development. In continental Europe, political party is often regarded as the instrument of its membership (especially its leaders) to achieve their ambitions for office. In the Anglo-Saxon tradition, on the other hand, political party is often perceived as primarily the instrument of the electorate. It seems also for this reason that in modern politics, it has become almost an absolute truth that where there are no elections, there is no democracy. Scholars have regarded the existence of competitive elections between parties as a necessary condition for democracy. This is also true in the case of Ethiopia. When scholars talk about democratization in Ethiopia, more often than not they refer to the birth of the multiparty system and the attendant competitive elections. In democratic settings, political parties are often narrowly defined as an interest articulating/ integrating and interest representing mechanism for social groups. Whilst there is nothing wrong with this definition, it is deficient in explaining the party system in Ethiopia (and also other African states for that matter). Political parties were the product of Western political development, which then spread to the rest of the world. When parties came to Africa, they began to play a role radically different from that played by parties in the West.

In developing countries, including Ethiopia, political parties are often dominant over states. But this is not the case in the advanced West, especially Western Europe and North America. Before the birth of modern political parties, modern states were already developed in the West. From the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, when the modern state began to form, to the nineteenth century, when it became mature, the state was under constant transformation (Poggi, 1978). The political party was a later product of this long genesis. Whilst the birth of the political party radically transformed the modern state, the political party *per se* is hardly relevant to its origin. It is thus reasonable to argue that parties were developed to rationalize the state by democratizing the political process in the West.

More succinctly, Max Weber (as cited in Gerth and Mills, 1958) divided the historical evolution of political parties into three stages: aristocratic cliques, small groups of notables, and plebiscitarian democracy. In the early stage, although political parties aimed at participating in the political process, they were actually 'clubs' and only a small portion of social elites were eligible to join. The first group of social 'elites' was comprised only of aristocrats; democracy then implied power sharing amongst this group exclusively, and had nothing to do with other types of social elites. With rising demands for political participation from other social groups, these clubs expanded their social bases to include a wide range of social elites in its membership. Political parties then became a mechanism for different types of social elites to share power. But only when parties reached the stage of plebiscitarian democracy and when competitive elections became widely accepted did modern parties reach maturity.

In modern democracies, democracy means partisan politics and is realized via elections, which are organized by political parties. Then, as Schumpeter (1975) also rightly pointed out, democracy needs to be regarded as a process in which political elites compete for political power via elections. The rationale of political parties is also accordingly embedded in elections. Thus, if effective elections were to materialize, there must be organizations and forums, and political parties are the primary ones to perform these functions. When examining the

development of political parties in Ethiopia and other African countries, it will be found to be necessary to go beyond the narrow definition of 'parties as electoral machines'. Simply speaking, while 'no political parties, no democracy' remains true in Ethiopia, the existence of political parties is not only, and merely, for the development of democracy, but also for state re-making and nation re-building projects. Though the evolution of political parties in the West went through different stages, parties mainly served as a mechanism for aggregation and articulation of interests. In Ethiopia (and also Africa), whilst political parties also perform such functions, they are not their main ones. Their most important role is rather to create a modern form of the state. Actually, in all developing countries, political parties not only serve as institutions for political participation and tools for political leaders to share power. More importantly, they are tools for state (re-) making, nation (re-) building, economic development and social transformation.

However, that the state was created by political parties does not mean that the state did not exist in Ethiopia before the coming of the concept of political parties from the West. Ethiopia's dynastic states existed for thousands of years. Nevertheless, the traditional state was radically different from modern states developed in the West. Hence, the Ethiopian traditional state had to be also replaced with the Western forms of state. As a result, whilst political elites of different times in Ethiopia decided to give up their traditional forms of state, they had to do so because Western forms of state were more advanced and effective.

The idea of modern political parties was thus alien to the Ethiopians. It was spread to Ethiopia during the long process of the breakdown of the imperial system. Of course, factions or cliques existed in all the state's dynasties. Yet, factions or cliques did not have any ideological legitimacy and were not developed into political parties in a modern sense. Modern political parties were then introduced only in the country's later history. During the process, Ethiopian political elites also found that the issue was not whether Ethiopia should 'import' modern party systems, but what model it should follow. Then, political leaders of post-revolution Ethiopia realized that without strong political institutions, any type of democratic regime would not be stable and Ethiopia would not become a strong state. Then, the EPRDF as a political party turned to the organizational side of state re-making and nation re-building by adopting the strategy of 'state building through party organization', which it learned from the Russian revolution.

The history of the Russian revolution clearly shows that the Russians placed the party above the state. In view of EPRDF, the Russian model was thus more appropriate to Ethiopia's modernization and state building project than the Western European and American models. Ethiopia, therefore, should follow the strategy of 'governing the state through the party'; because the argument goes, only after a strong and highly organized party had been built could Ethiopia begin to make a strong state and only a strong state could lead to a working democracy. As a result of this, the EPRDF has thus been (though often subtly) in continuous maintenance of the Leninist Russia's principle of 'Party dominance of the state' even after it established its own version of the state – the Federal Democratic Republic. Here, although the FDRE constitution has a state-party separation clause, the subtlety of the principle of party dominance over the state is found implied when one does a close diagnosis on the nature of the Ethiopian government system- i.e a parliamentarian form that necessitates the party which wins the election to automatically form the executive government and assign a prime minister in an electoral system that functions based on the principle of "first past the post or simple majority voting" (Articles 45, 56, 73(2), 87(5) and 90(2) of the FDRE constitution, 1995).

At another angle, at least in principle, political leaders in Ethiopia had dual historical mandates: they were expected to create a viable state, and to ensure economic development. To create a viable and orderly state, they had to, at least, establish effective control over a territory and, at best, establish a legitimate state perceived to be both sovereign and responsive to its citizens' needs. Further, to achieve economic development, they had to, at least, initiate economic growth and, at best, reconcile growth with distributive concerns. To achieve all these goals, party leaders had to depend on political parties, and in this sense, the EPRDF has become the most effective tool that political leaders could employ to achieve their goals.

The role of parties in creating the new state and promoting socioeconomic transformation thus primarily differentiates political parties in Ethiopia from those in the West. Whilst parties came after the state in the West, the order is reversed in Ethiopia. This reversal changes the nature of parties and party systems. In the West, political parties are mere institutions of the state. But in Ethiopia, the EPRDF is considered as separate from the state itself. Whilst the EPRDF created the state, it was able to stand above it and exercise total control over the state and society. Furthermore, when individual leaders create the party, they are able to stand above the party machinery. In other words, individual leaders tend to use political parties as a tool to maximize their power and interests. The personalization of power strengthens political leaders' personal power, but often weakens the

capacity of political parties in leading or coping with democratic transition. The following simple formula outlines the relationship between party capacity, institutionalization, and personalization:

Party Capacity = Institutionalization/Personalization.

Here, ‘personalization’ refers to the rule of man, meaning that the party is governed by individual leaders (their charisma, personality, etc.), while ‘institutionalization’ refers to the rule of law, meaning that it is governed by established rules. ‘Party capacity’ refers to a given ruling party’s ability to sustain itself while engaging in socioeconomic transformation. The formula attempts to show that there is a positive linkage between institutionalization and party capacity, while the linkage between personalization and party capacity is a negative one. The personalization of the ruling party leads to many consequences. Amongst others, three are notable. First, strong leaders are often associated with a weak EPRDF. The personalization of the political party thus results not only in highly centralized political power, but also renders it difficult for the party to institutionalize itself. While party leaders are strong, the party itself is quite weak. To a great degree, the party is often a personal tool for individual leaders to organize and perpetuate personal power. When individual leaders fall, the party is then necessarily weakened.

Second, a strong party is often associated with a weak state. If the party is weak amidst of strong individual leaders, the state is even weaker than the party. Political parties were actually the creators of the new states. After the new state was established, it would be very difficult to separate parties from the state. The ruling party is often not only in charge of policy formation, but also policy administration and implementation. The party actually serves as the first level of government, and the state becomes the second level of government. Although the party and state are two separate organizations constitutionally, the latter is actually subordinate to the former practically. The situation even worsens if the strength of the party is the result of the power of individual leaders, as their fall often results in the weakening, or even the downfall, of the party, which in turn leads to the weakening of the state.

Third, and also ironically, while the party attempts to perform as creator of a modern Ethiopian state, the dominance of the party would actually slow down state modernization in Ethiopia, which is far from being accomplished, despite many attempts at it since the EPRDF has been the most important pillar supporting a seemingly modern state. In fact, currently, the state is weakly performing even the regulatory function entrusted to it. Ethiopia largely lacks the defining characteristic of a modern state: the rule of law. And, without the rule of law, the Ethiopian state can hardly become a modern regulatory state and more generally a modern state without modern institutions. The dominance of the party over the state is thus the one critical factor building all such insurmountable difficulties in the country.

2. The EPRDF in Transformation

In the above section, the nature and historic role of the EPRDF party is discussed in some detail by specifically addressing why it cannot simply be regarded as a political party in a western sense. Yet, to answer the question of whether EPRDF rule is sustainable also needs to involve looking at what actions the EPRDF is taking in order to ensure its own sustainability amidst rapid socio-economic and political transformations in Ethiopia and the strengths and weaknesses of the party thereof. Rapid economic development in the past decade has created a new socio-economic environment for Ethiopian politics. With its economy growing at an annual rate of more than 10%, Ethiopia’s per capita GDP in 2014 has reached nearly US\$ 500. This is then gradually but surely creating conducive conditions for the development of a politically more active society in the country. To survive this new environment, the EPRDF has to reorder its relations with various actors in society. In the subsequent section, therefore, this issue of how the EPRDF has made efforts to sustain itself by adjusting to the ever changing socio-economic and political environment is discussed.

2.1 Becoming a catch all party?

Whilst the EPRDF remains dominant and enjoys a monopoly of politics in the country, it has been gradually transforming itself into a ‘catchall’ party in the past decade. To a certain degree, the EPRDF can even be considered as a political party recently opening up – slowly and gradually – to accommodate different social actors. Such a process is particularly reflected in changes in the composition of the EPRDF. The EPRDF today is one of the largest political parties in Africa with over 6 million members in the year 2014. The party has also been undergoing a drastic transformation from a peasantry and workers based party to a ‘catchall’ one. During the national liberation armed struggle era (1975-1991), the EPRDF was a revolutionary party that was largely dominated by workers and peasants. Yet, after the party undertook what is called “the renaissance movement” following a party split in the year 2000, technocrats, business people and professionals began to massively join

the party as members. Given that the contributions of these sections of the society were not officially recognized by the party during the armed struggle, this change of faith to allow them into the party thus represents a quantum leap in the EPRDF's internal transformation. Another most important recent dynamics in this regard is also the ever mounting number of current students joining the party membership and cadre-ship.

It is worth noting, however, that the shift to accommodating the newly rising social classes, professionals and students does not necessarily mean that the EPRDF will become a party for any of the social groups uniquely and selectively.

As argued earlier, the EPRDF is likely to become a party for all, not for some, as a matter of self-preservation. The EPRDF has learnt important lessons from the fall of other parties in the world because they happened to be parties for only some, namely, bureaucrats, capitalists, and bureaucratic capitalists. In those parties, the interests of the majority of the people, mainly workers and peasants, were not represented in the political process. It is also exactly this same lesson that provided the EPRDF itself with an opportunity to engage in a revolution from below by mobilizing underprivileged social classes. Furthermore, the party has also learned from its own experience. As mentioned above, the EPRDF in its history of armed struggle was also a party for only some, namely, workers and peasants. Capitalists, professionals and others were largely under attack. The party has then learnt from its almost two decades of economic reform that it has to depend on capitalists and other entrepreneurial social groups to promote economic development and hence it has to accommodate these newly rising social groups. Nevertheless, to accommodate the newly rising social classes does not mean that the interests of workers and peasants can be ignored or even seriously compromised-hence the EPRDF dilemma in the process of self-transformation.

2.2 Organizational and Ideological Changes

The EPRDF's most powerful instrument is a system called 'the party [EPRDF] management of cadres' also more commonly known as the "democratic centralism party discipline"(EPRDF Party rules and regulations, 2003). It is the most important organizational principle, giving the EPRDF a dominant say over personnel decisions. The current practice is such that the EPRDF party structure (i.e the politbureau, central committee and congress) widely assume the responsibility of making appointments to positions while state institutions outside the party structure like the national parliament simply perform the task of window dressing (i.e only approving nominees). While state administrations often assume part of this power in certain respects due to the logic of federalism, the party still controls the most important personnel appointments even here.

Ideally, the 'party management of cadres' system is also the most effective means for the EPRDF to control 'localism' in the country- i.e to prevent officials from becoming deeply rooted in locally- vested interests through a system of "cadre exchange system" in which the EPRDF attempts to curtail localism by making regular exchanges in appointments between key cadres of different localities. The party also uses the system to retire or even forcefully remove those who resist certain policy reforms or even shifts in ideology in the party and select the 'right types' of cadres and government officials in their place.

Besides cadre management, the EPRDF also helps the state administration to mobilize the resources required for the country's transition. This then presents a typified 'weak state/strong party' phenomenon, and is a dilemma for Ethiopia. On the one hand, continuing dominant party rule stifles the development of strong state mechanisms – a prerequisite for a modern state and on the other hand, without that kind of party and its apparatus, the state administration would be too weak to move ahead in any sensible manner. Hence, for the moment at least, the EPRDF would be indispensable to Ethiopia's modernization efforts.

At another angle, given that the party still retains its Leninist party structure and discipline principles, intra-democracy is increasingly under erosion despite the party's loud rhetoric about democratic reforms. More democratic and transparent nomination and selection systems are not being encouraged at all levels of governance. Even in the election of party leaders and committees to different levels, it is now becoming increasingly common to see democratic ethos and principles are lacking. Overall, therefore, the attempt to install and institutionalize a system that checks the trend of putting the party "outside or above" the state and its institutions is generally missing. And, as a result, the EPRDF's party structure is making its members and leaders highly susceptible to rent seeking political economy behavior and corruption.

Corresponding changes have also happened in the ideological dimension. The EPRDF's dogmatic stance, associated with its Marxist-Leninist roots, took an abrupt turn in the 1990's when its leadership embarked on building 'free market based capitalist economy'. Where ideology was applied as a means for class struggle

during the armed liberation struggle era, EPRDF transformed the whole meaning of ideology to become something that can be applied as a means for development. Since then, the party has thus been operating under the principle of ‘get-rich-first’ rationalizing it based on the logic of “poverty is our number one enemy as a nation and hence to get rich in itself is glorious” (FDRE Government’s ‘Foreign policy and National security policy document’, 2002, and EPRDF’s ‘Ethiopian renaissance and Democratic Developmentalism paradigm policy blue print, 2010). When the party began to push such directive to certain extreme point, the Ethiopian state then evolved to become what the scholarly community called a ‘developmental state’- a state that plays a key role in pushing economic development. This way then ‘economism’ has become the prevailing ideology of the Ethiopian state since it also seems in the interest of EPRDF to reduce people’s interest by encouraging them to turn their attention to economic development-i.e to transform the people from an ideology-based society to an interest- based one.

Today, ideology will have to play yet another role on the part of the EPRDF. In particular, the party’s old guard members and leaders now seem to have been playing the ideological card to justify policies towards building a ‘harmonious society’ based on principle of social justice, which they want it to become a new core of the EPRDF ideology. It calls for a drastic reorientation from the ‘development-first strategies’ being implemented by the current batch of EPRDF leadership to a return towards ‘people-centered policies’ that aim at addressing the mounting social problems that Ethiopia faces today. After more than a decade of almost single minded pursuit of GDP growth, the Ethiopian leadership must now find it necessary to step back from its previous mode of economic development. Undesirable consequences, such as income disparities, rent seeking, corruption, zero-sum political game and ethnic and class tensions are today affecting not only economic growth itself, but also social stability in the country. The trend towards upholding the value of ‘building a harmonious society’ then raises the importance of social justice in the pursuit of Ethiopia’s sustainable development, in terms of more even distribution of economic, legal and political rights between different regions and social groups. To this end, the EPRDF will have to progressively move from its ‘economism’ ideological root to one that marries free market principles with certain socialist values- i.e probably towards building ‘social democracy’.

2.3 The EPRDF and Party-State relations dynamics

The country’s successful transition to modern, effective governance is still very much dependent on significant changes in party-state relations. Since the EPRDF-state relations together form the single most important political-institutional infrastructure in Ethiopia, they are central to all political activities. Yet, in this regard, the outlook at the moment appears to be not favorable for further political liberalization and democratization despite that both the EPRDF and the state now have broader social bases and are accommodating more participatory elements.

The drastic socio-economic transition has also created a new environment for the EPRDF and the state. Such a new environment requires the EPRDF to adjust its relations with the state so that effective and sustainable governance is possible. In recent years, however, the EPRDF leadership seems to have been demonstrating lack of capacity to govern an increasingly complex society as manifested by the party’s failure to introduce bold initiatives and reforms to strengthen state institutions- a prerequisite for the sustainability of a rule. To make things worse, there is also now a trend to resurface a heated debate on whether or not it merits to keep the party separate from the state. It means that even at theoretical level, consensus on the issue is not yet forged. Given this, then, the party will continue to be all-pervasive in Ethiopia’s political and administrative life even to the extent that party organizations will at times displace state organizations.

Another important aspect of party-state relations is the issue of professionalism. As discussed above, the EPRDF’s current ideological reliability is slowly giving way. Besides, its party nature and structure is slowly becoming unattractive. So, therefore, to boost effective governance the EPRDF will need to give more space to professionalism. In other words, it will need to loosen its current grip on personnel appointments to give professionals more autonomy in the running of the country. In fact, the rise of professionalism in the country in itself largely reflects its increasing need for special expertise in dealing with the complexities of new social and economic issues. Despite this, however, the current practice is such that professionalism has not been injected in to both the party organizations and state institutions at all levels. That professionalization has not massively stepped in and altered the role of the national parliament and regional councils from a “rubber stamp’ bodies to one that are capable of strongly overseeing governmental operations is a good case in point in this regard.

Overall, therefore, under Ethiopia’s dominant party system, it seems unrealistic to expect a clear cut separation of the EPRDF from the state. Thus, the issue should be not whether, but how, the EPRDF will exercise control over the state. In this regard, then, the EPRDF seems to have not been devoting a great deal of its reform efforts

to adjust – through institutionalization and rationalization—its relations with the state. In fact, conversely, there is a recently developing tendency on the part of the party to operate behind the scenes even under circumstances where the separation issue is found to be clear.

3 The EPRDF and Globalization

An important factor – which is often ignored – in sustaining the EPRDF rule in Ethiopia is global capitalism. The free market system based export -oriented economic policy of the country has created an increasingly high degree of interdependence between Ethiopia and global capitalism especially in the trade and investment sectors. Ethiopia's development has also been driven by rapid globalization. The country has now become one of Africa's most favored destinations for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Not surprisingly, many big companies and firms from different corner of the world have also now begun to set up businesses in Ethiopia.

Against all odds, however, the significance of global capitalism for the sustainability and transformation of the EPRDF has yet to be explored. Put simply, the EPRDF is indispensable for international investors in Ethiopia, and thus for the functioning of global capitalism. Particularly since recent years, the EPRDF has been providing necessary conditions and supports for global investment to be profitable in Ethiopia, such as land and tax facilitations. For this reason, there is even a growing competition among different levels of governments in Ethiopia which encourages the EPRDF cadres to provide cheaper land to foreign investors. The central government has even established what it calls them “Special Economic Zones (SEZs) or development corridors” in which it invites foreign investors and offers them at least cheap land. Moreover, given that investment naturally needs cheap labor, labor rights will also be a major issue in the relationship between Ethiopia/the EPRDF and foreign investors. Although Ethiopia has a comprehensive labor law, its enforcement is not that much almost at all levels. Moreover, Ethiopia has no viable labor unions as tools for workers to protect their rights. In such a situation, party or government officials might even tend to cooperate with foreign investors to violate labor rights and consequently when cheap labor contributes to high economic performance and high economic performance helps the promotion of party or government officials, officials then have a high political incentive to play a helpful role in dealing with labor rights violations in foreign-invested firms in Ethiopia.

Another factor attracting foreign investment in Ethiopia is the issue of property rights. As a state that emerged from socialist military rule, for many years now Ethiopia has been suspected for the non-existence of a legal system to ensure the protection of property rights for foreign investment. To attract foreign investment requires a minimum enforcement of property rights. Needless to say, for global capitalists, the most effective protection of property rights must be a sound legal system. However, the current practice in Ethiopia, it is argued, is such that property rights are, more often than not, dealt with administratively and politically. Even the EPRDF and the state themselves are often accused of their tendency to easily violate property rights despite that over the past two decades, the EPRDF has begun to make increasingly greater efforts to build a system to protect property rights, be they foreign or domestic by, among others, having in place sound constitutional and legal systems. Yet, overall, without a set of well-established regulatory institutions, property rights issues cannot be solved by Ethiopia's legal system alone. This also seems to be partly the rationale behind the enormous efforts to help Ethiopia build an effective legal system which are being made on the part of the West, especially the European Union and the United States. But, most importantly, the voices in the West in this regard also reflect the concerns of those associated with global capitalism, regarding the EPRDF's ability to protect increasingly significant interests in Ethiopia.

Concluding remarks

For the foreseeable future, the EPRDF is unlikely to give up the dominant party system as long as there are sources supporting it. This then implies that the EPRDF is likely to sustain its rule. In this paper, various sources legitimating and thus sustaining the EPRDF rule are discussed. There are cultural roots of authoritarianism in Ethiopia, and more than anything else, the EPRDF has inherited the culture of party personification by individual leaders and party dominance over state institutions. In fact, unlike traditional emperors, this modern form of personification is relatively highly centralized. Moreover, the EPRDF's engagement in socioeconomic transformation of the country justifies the legitimacy of its rule as it would help it to search feasible solutions to the problem of rationalizing its relations with the state and with different social actors. In this regard, 'rigid flexibility' seems to best describe the overall evolution of the EPRDF thusfar. While the overall party structure remains intact, its content has consistently undergone changes. It is thus important to see the sustainability of the EPRDF in the light of these content changes, despite a seemingly unchanged dominant party structure in the country.

Global capitalism also provides the EPRDF with another helpful hand for its transformation. Global capitalism

has two faces in Ethiopia. On the one hand, it relies on the EPRDF to provide necessary conditions and support for its functioning. Hence, in this sense, global capitalism and the EPRDF have common interests in sustaining the EPRDF rule. Yet, on the other hand, global capitalism is concerned about the long term sustainability of the EPRDF. What this implies is thus authoritarianism and coercive measures, be them with in the EPRDF itself or other actors in Ethiopia, will not certainly be sustainable and effective in the long run. Then, with growing foreign interests, global capitalism has an increasingly large incentive to push the transformation of the EPRDF and to lead the EPRDF in a 'right direction'. Put this differently, a new system which can guarantee rule of law will be more sustainable and effective.

Then, in a nutshell, Ethiopia's experience in the past two decades shows that the EPRDF has survived rapid socioeconomic development. Yet, whether the EPRDF rule is sustainable depends on whether it can transform itself and how it is transformed. It is still an open question not only for the EPRDF and for Ethiopia itself, but also for the international community. Judged by all the above backgrounds, however, this conclusion can be put in place. A rigid EPRDF is not sustainable, but a changing EPRDF is. And, by logical extension, if the EPRDF does not make rigorous internal transformations (nature, role, organizational and ideology wise) vis-à-vis the external transformation of globalization and sustain itself, then the Ethiopian state (which in essence is its own re-made) could not also be sustained keeping its 'modernity'. This in turn also could push the state in to a worst case scenario of rolling back to its 'traditionality' or even to an anatomy of collapse as there are no vibrant modern 'above the party' state institutions currently in place to prevent it from such eventuality.

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