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Complementary and adversarial stances in state-civil society relationships and their implications for democratization and development: The case of Ethiopia

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Nations are not nourished by the men charged with governing them, but by the men of who nations are made.... In civil society, both moral and political Forces are on the side of those ... million men hardened to all kinds of labor, and possessing al kinds of knowledge, are unquestionably stronger than the few hundred who govern them (Adam Smith, quoted in Palmer, 1997:155-156).

... power is everywhere diffuse ... and, when we conceive of resistance to that power, it should not be as a centralized and univocal force, as if emanating from the subject. There is no power without resistance. Michel Foucault, 'Society Must be Defended': Lectures at the College of France, 1975-1976, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003).

...it is people who shape and determine the destiny of the contradiction of the good and the bad. Once the leadership of the state forgets ... that it is a servant of all those who comprise its population ... then no citizen has the obligation of obedience to such a regime (Maku wa Mutua in EHRCO, 1995: v – ix).

1. Introduction

The above three quotes capture the kernel issue in the controversial subject that looks at state society relations in less well off countries. The extent to which this relation between the two arms of society, civil society and the state, is amicable or not may likely determine the positive and/or negative processes that are put in place to either move society forward or roll back some of the gains it makes in terms of good governance and overall development. The state, by virtue of its command over resources and dubiously established legal right to protect public order and constitutional authority, in many instances, imposes its wills on the majority despite the existence of a good deal of opposition expressed in public and private meetings and in and outside forums.

Africa, the continent that is unusually trailing behind democratization and socio-economic development, is actively caught in this quagmire with a very slim chance of

getting out of the mess in the foreseeable future. This short paper, attempts to examine the place of civil society vis-a-vis the all-powerful position of the state in Ethiopia. It will first define the concepts of civil society and the state and some of the theories that are advanced to determine the place of each within the framework of society. It will then use the concepts of trust, partnership, complementarity and competition between the state and civil society in moving the institutional and material development of their nations. Finally, it will point out cases of opportunism that characterizes the illusive state that manipulates groups, institutions and material resources to consolidate power and exercise control.

Trust is an important facet in building civil society. There must be a degree of trust between the state and civil society. Both parties need to respect the national constitution, for instance. The state and civil society, two major institutions of society, should be partners in the expediting social progress and transformation as well as in the defense of their country. The amount of public money that the state apportions in order to “...offer the components for people to construct viable strategies of survival” (Migdal 1988: 281) accords trust on the state.

The two institutions do have responsibilities that are defined by law. But they are partners in progress – engagement in programs of development and national defense makes them so. Their partnership is an essential precondition for achieving substantive results.

Each of the two institutions cannot be apart from the other. There are complementarities in what they do. There are certain jobs that each does individually or ones that they should confront cooperatively. One such area is defense. In times of danger

the state mobilizes society and civil society should come together and respond to the national call, or in nationalistic jargon, defense of the motherland. So also is this complementary responsibility relevant to carrying out development programs and projects that cannot move forward without synchronizing the joint efforts of the two. This is an evidence of such a positive move.

A degree of competition between the two also produces beneficial results. It is only a healthy element that needs stressing. For instance, a civil societal group may take the initiative to promote education in an area where the state may have not ventured or areas it does not wish to be involved in. Such an initiative would prompt the state to engage in activities that are in the immediate need categories of activities of communities. This sets a precedent that may be copied.

Since civil society in particular uses the factor of social capital of interconnectedness, there must be a degree of trust between its members too in order to upgrade the level of achievement of the solidity. According to Fukuyama (1995: 7-14), trust, reciprocity and networking at the community level are seen as facilitating collective action in the broad sense of the term and even in economic performance. The communities in question may be relatively small, for example, voluntary associations or families. They may also involve entire societies.

In the first case, we speak of meso-sociological and in the second, macro-sociological analysis (that is, when social capital operates at the level of an entire society to facilitate the production of collective assets such as industrialization and democracy (cited in Forse, Michel, "Role and Rise of Social Capital", in Flap and Volker 2004: 255).

Obviously all levels of analysis are interconnected. For example, one actor's social capitals benefit the actor personally, but will also be of benefit to other community members when they all set about producing a collective good.

The dividedness of civil societal groups, on the one hand, and the preoccupation of some of the groups to win the favor of the state, on the other, encumber the envisioned smooth processes of democratic development and halt the sprouting of fledgling governance and equitable distribution of resources and the satisfaction this engenders. Any measure that anchors on bending such a process is sure to embed the seeds of destruction in state and civil society relations, and ultimately, the continuing crises of life for a good number of people in any society.

The paper uses books, journal and newspaper articles on Ethiopia and others, web site materials and news items on the subject. Historical documents relating to Ethiopia's defensive and civil wars and statements by leaders are used in the writing of the paper. The paper also draws on the observations of some scholars and knowledgeable people who discussed some of the issues raised here at the time the author was in Ethiopia years ago. The personal observations of the writer who was in Ethiopia during those years when civil society members were abused and subdued by the then rulers is also used as an additional supportive data for the writing of the paper. This paper reflects the initial thoughts of the author on the subject. It is exploratory rather than analytical. It is in fact more of a descriptive study. Some of the rich data that could be gathered is impeded by access to sources of oralcy and primary sources in Ethiopia. The author intends to continue to further study the subject matter and produce a more robust written product at some future date.

2. Definition of terms

What is civil society? Generally put, civil society is an institution that “furnishes the fundamental conditions of liberty in the modern world”, as Robert Fine (in Fine and Rae (1997) put it so well. Also according to Rudolf, civil society purveys the idea of ‘associationalism’ that protects individuals who, if left on their own, would be singled out and might be subjected to a situation of abuse of rights. To use Randolph’s words: ‘Associations empower citizens who in isolation cannot confront the state as agent and participant, nor create consequences within society. It is by being part of the social collectivities that citizens can resist, escape or influence state and society.

Hegel’s sees it as an arena where every citizen’s interests meet, play out and benefit more people in society (quoted by Himmelfarb 1999: 55-56). As Himmelfarb rightly says, the concept of civil society was linked more with de Tocqueville who identified the term with association of the voluntary stripe and wrote a lot about in his seminal work, *Democracy in America* (1835 and 1840) (Ibid.).

John Keane, a British theorist, sees civil society as a means of achieving democracy. He has this to say about the current positive thinking relating to the concept of civil society.

The emerging consensus that civil society is a realm of freedom correctly highlights its basic value as a condition of democracy, where there is no civil society there cannot be citizens with capacities to choose their identities, entitlements and duties within the political legal framework (Keane 1998: 4).

Civil society then represents a segment of people who get organized within a supposedly free political space available for engaging in activities that promote the

interests of their members primarily. These interests may not necessarily be peculiar to one civil society or a group of them. The issues they support may in fact be supported and shared by many organizations created for similar purposes. And that is why such an interest may have a wider context and thus have policy and implementation implications that (non)organic and functional links with the state.

Structurally, many scholars see it (civil society) as a unit placed between the family and the state. Hegel, for instance, identifies it as an (independent) sphere where the interests of the family and the state are mediated. It is, in the words of Ginsborg (2003: 94, 97) a “form in which the values and interest of the family are counterpoised to the other principal moments of human association” (cited from ‘Familismo’, in Ginsborg, ed., *Stato dell Italia*, q. v., pp. 78-82). It encompasses all activities, institutions and relations that do not belong primarily to the private sphere or to that of the state (Ibid.). Seligman (1993) puts civil society, in the class of institutions ‘between the family and the state’ mediating between the family and the state. This important role helps to harmonize the conflicting demands of individual and social interests.

The above discussions see the family and the state as separate entities linked with one another by the mediating role of civil society that is viewed at as a unit on its own, separate from the family and the state. A definition of this relationship merits some discussion in the context of freer spaces where both civil society and the state work in tandem with each other and civil society is organically linked to the family, as there is an interface between the memberships of the two. We will elaborate on this interface later. A digression into the contexts in which the concept conveniently operates is in order. The

concept, as it were, becomes clearer when its operability is examined in light of the European democratic governance experiences.

3. Civil society and the state in the context of Western European democracies

Civil society in Western democracies is generally looked at as having two forms (Ginsborg 2003). The first form exhibits itself in “broad, spatial and relatively value-free” environment from where all those ‘activities, institutions that do not belong primarily to the private sphere or to that of the state’ manifest themselves (Ginsborg 2003: 94). For Ginsborg, churches, political parties, firms, associations and interest groups of all kinds fill this vast intermediate area where civil society plays the mediator’s role in society.

The second form, Ginsborg argues, manifests itself in a much narrower way. In this type also civil society plays an intermediary role between the family and the state. But then, he sees that there are two sub types of political spaces where civil societies of different capabilities rear their heads. These two types are defined as ‘civil’ and ‘uncivil’ societies. They express themselves in the socioeconomic and political spaces that either give grounds for entities that come out in the form of associations. These spaces allow the exercise of democracy and pluralism or curtail them. In the ‘civil’ form, power of varying nature is exercised at various nodal points. According to Ginsborg, “horizontal solidarities, healthy debate and autonomy of judgment, conformity and obedience” are the specific features that take centrality in this particular type. He quotes Michael Walzer to specify the definitions of the terms he uses.

In any democratic society individuals are viewed as weak entities and hence incapable of being self-sufficient. The way Walzer sees it:

The citizens of a democratic state are not, in this view self-sufficient creatures. They must be members elsewhere,

in smaller, more accessible, less demanding, less dangerous place than the modern state. For only in such places can they acquire political competence, learn to win and lose, learn to compromise, make friends and allies, explore oppositional ideas (Ginsborg 2003: 95)

Ginsborg chooses to use the term civil society in the context of the second definition in his discussion of the role of civil societal groups in the Italian politico-social structures that he penned in his work titled: “Italy and its Discontents: Family, Civil Society, State: 1980 – 2001”. He warns though that the idealization of civil society to a point where it is seen as a substitute to the state is incorrect.

Ginsborg’s definitions of the concept are quite perceptive. But rather than capturing the whole politico-social and economic spectrums of societal life in which civil society is involved, it limits this involvement to the political as his operationalization of the concept above amply demonstrates. The definition used in this paper is more encompassing and covers key aspects of socio-economic and political lives where civil society intermingles and interfaces in more activities than the above definitions capture.

The family and civil society cannot be seen as different entities as Ginsborg and other writers argue. There are times when the two are fused with one another. At other times also the two show distinctive characteristics. When family members limit their activities to the sole promotion of their private interests, they will not have much to do with civil society, near and far. But when their interests have some affinity with those of other families and these interests can be articulated along with those of the other families, then they can do this better by associating with those other families who have similar interests.

Civil society then is an association of people who are interconnected with one another and work to promote their immediate and long-term interests. Their immediate interests revolve around the accomplishment of the missions and objectives of their specific organization, whether they are social, economic or political. They also need to chart ways of interacting and/or protruding into activities that have wider implications with regard to the broader national policies and legal issues that would have further implications for their smooth growth and development.

As much as families and civil societal groups are connected with one another, so are families and the state in some cases. In fact, in less developed country contexts state power is constructed around a power base of a few or more families. In traditional Ethiopia, for instance, the imperial family conveniently spread its tentacles in an effort to reach out to other families in order to expand its power and legitimacy bases through the mechanism of marriage or God-fatherly or –motherly relations.

The same kinds of relationships were continued in post-imperial Ethiopia. Many families within the power structure of the Derg, the military-socialist junta that was one of the motors behind the removal of the imperial political order, was rife with such relationships of families to the state. The tradition has continued even today. The current regime is also viewed as one in which groups of families have constructed core groups around which power and wealth is consolidated.

The family then interfaces with both civil society and state activities at various nodal points in the social, economic and political spheres. While the three entities, as conceptually categorized into three different groups, show distinctive characteristics, the observable interfaces between them demonstrate the contexts in which power is diffused

and interests are promoted and maintained at certain critical points within the whole system. On this count, the interlinked families, civil societal groups and the state become a unity where more benefits accrue to rather smaller groups of cunning persons.

Families and civil societal groups are then intimately connected with the state, an entity that is 'empowered,' or better still empowers itself by sheer power, to provide services such as the protection of the rights of individuals and associational rights of citizens as well as the maintenance of order and preservation of peace to the larger society. The parentheses used show that governments brought to power go beyond the parameters intended to install them in the political saddle. The state then maneuvers to influence both the family and civil societal groups. It has more latitude to establish closer relations with both groups by virtue of its command over resources.

In this paper, I see the family, as a sub set of civil society, unlike theorists and analysts like Ginsborg, Hegel and Alexis De Tocqueville who consider civil society as an entity that is apart from the family whose interests are in part mediated by civil society in relation to the state. The family is in many ways the source of the members that constitute civil society itself as well as those of the state.

Unlike the theorists and analysts like Ginsborg, Hegel, Montesquieu and others, I like to see civil society in a broader context. Civil society is an all-encompassing concept that also embodies the family. There are two reasons for this categorization.

First, civil society can be represented by small or big organizations. The source of the membership can be the family. Members of one family and/or many more that band together create a coalition to promote their common interests and those of others beyond

the family. As both an entity apart from civil society and as a member of it, the family, for all intents and purposes, can be a mediator in the relations between 'it and the state'.

This dual role makes it a key institution for its own sake. Civil society is then an institution that does the job of mediation on its behalf or one that joins hands with other collectivities or solidities at one and the same time to undertake enumerable tasks and attain some desired goal. They also go beyond the immediate need loop and facilitate the emergence of structures and processes that could lay the groundwork for the future.

Secondly, individuals on their own or as family members come together to create blocks to vote in or out political parties, members of the judiciary and other public officials during elections. Here also they could pick a candidate(s) or party that would speak(s) to the issues that matter most to them – including ones that somehow positively affect their interests.

Civil society is thus an important institution the roles of which are essential to all members of society. Unlike an administration or broadly a specific state at a point in time that benefits members of its own party and supporters, civil society plays a freer role when it comes to the distribution of benefits to infinitely more members that it represents.

That is why the state should listen to what civil society has to say and support the activities that it engages itself in. That is why civil society has to play a more fundamental role of counseling and demanding the state to behave properly and provide equally to all members or groups of the society without any partiality.

Although this is an ideal approach to organize the relationships between the family and civil society as well as the state, the tendency is to uphold the power of the state and minimize the role of civil society in assuming a stronger position in the styles of

decision-making processes society chooses to put in place for itself. This is done more by the state itself than civil societal groups that more or less hold similar views on the roles of good governance as a means of building a fair social system.

The state engages in manipulative practices with the support of individuals and civil societal groups that ally with it to assure its dominance over society. It becomes an all too powerful entity that tramples on the rights of citizens and imposes its will on the people. The net outcome of this is an unabated foray into the realm of civil society where it freely bestows privileges and rights to its members and retainers at the helm of the political system at any one time. Disfranchisement of civil societies and other groups is the inevitable result of this partisan distribution of rights and access to all kinds of resources. This is a major source of poverty, abuse and ‘desecration’ of the rights of other members of society who are out of the loops of power that the state conveniently constructs in order to dominate life in the society.

4. Civil society and views about the place of the state in Ethiopia

The relationship between civil societies and the state in Ethiopia as in many underdeveloped democracies has been one of subordination of the first by the second. This culturally determined and politically imposed value had been tacitly supported by large number of families and civil societal groups. It is also this factor that elevated the state and minimized the creative and constructive roles civil society should play at all levels of the social system.

The all-powerful position of the sovereign and the place/station of civil society groups and indeed the general population are expressed in a segment of the oral history of

the people. The following Amharic couplets, for instance, purvey the roots and the essence of such power imbalance between the state and civil society.

Original	Semay Aytates, Negus aykeses,
Trans:	The sky cannot be plowed, And the 'negus' (the embodiment of the state) cannot be taken to court.

Another Tigrigna couplet stamps this relationship by the forlorn view that people (the potential electors) often express.

Original	Zewetsa tsehay, tsahyna, The negese negus negusna
Trans:	A sun that rises any day/time is our sun and Any king that is anointed or rises to power is our king.

The couplets above show that society, civil society, in particular, considered the ruler as the be all and end all persona whose power could not be contested. Civil society under these circumstances has given up or relinquished its power to the sovereign unquestioningly.

The state's and society's roles in the execution of national duties and responsibilities do not show complementarity in this sense. The state has been there to dictate and civil society to carry out the will of the sovereign, be this one person or a group manipulated by him, at all times.

An institution that was of significant importance in Ethiopian political life was also the 'mehal Sefari' (an Amharic word) or the 'constituent assembly' of kingmakers. This group was the one that selected Ras Teferi as the Regent and/crown prince of Ethiopia during the reign of Empress Zewditu. It was a strong civil societal group that played the role of a consultative body in the selection of an/the appropriate national leader. This particular body was used most effectively by Fitawrari Habet Giorgis, one of

the few and sagacious war generals, the Emperor Menilik produced during his reign. He presided over the election of the regent and/or crown prince of Ethiopia.

This constituent/consultative body met on the request of Habte Giorgis in order to select one person from among those born into the Solomonic Dynasty. The body initially met at Jan Meda, the grand/giant field located in Addis Ababa. They were asked to consult with one another and select the best of the royal family members as the crown prince of Ethiopia.

The *mehal sefari* members were themselves important personalities/citizens of Addis Ababa. They were unable to come up with the right person for the position. Habte Giorgis added three more days so the group may be able to find the right person for the vacant position of the regent. The additional three days passed by, but the electors came empty handed again. Habte Giorgis was determined to extend the consultation time of the body by another set of three days so they would search and pick the appropriate regent. This time, however, they were able to show up with one name. The *mehal sefari*-elected personality, unlike the elect of God, which was widely used by many and constantly made reference to later on many occasions by the leader himself, was Ras Teferi or, later, Haile Selassie Selassie I. The full reference of the selection was, nevertheless, attributed to God instead of the *mehal sefari*.

The *mehal sefari* was a unique institution that was mandated to search for and elect the right person for the position of the regency and/or the crown prince from among the members of the royal family or those with some affinity to them. This was an assembly that was an important institution in the political structure of the country at that point in time. Although, the *mehal safari* included members of the military, it could be

considered a civil society (notable persons and civilian members that the *Zikre Neger* (that was given the responsibility of a 'say' in the selection of the next leader of Ethiopia.

The need for the selection of a leader arose because Lij Iyasu, the de facto emperor who was anointed leader upon the death of Emperor Menilik, was totally in disagreement with the nobility and Menilik's generals who saw that he went against the traditions of the country's governance system. He moved from place to place in the country, established relations with religious groups that were not mainstream by the standards then and desecrated the throne by marrying into other religious, particularly Muslims, groups and involving himself in widespread concubine relations.

The nobility found out that he was not ruling the country in the best interest of Ethiopia and sought to remove him. That was why the election body was established, perhaps for the first time in Ethiopian history. The usual practice was to follow a strong man who builds his power base from scratch, such as Emperor Tewodros or win battles against arch foes and proceed to the Gibi or the Imperial Palace. But this time around, important personalities connected with one another and set up the first election body in the country.

Civil society, therefore, reared its head and took its rightful place at this point in time in Ethiopia's history. This should serve as a benchmark for the institution of such a practice in order to resolve some of the claims that election procedures that marred society in recent years. In this context, a parallel can be drawn between Mehal Sefari and the electoral college of the United States. It can be revived and remodeled for electing a segment of the public officials for the country.

5. Wars and dangers to the loss of national sovereignty and compatible relations between the state and civil society

One major instance where amity between the two – civil society and the state -- takes center stage is when the power of the ruler is challenged by particularly foreign forces. The emperors who ruled Ethiopia before the accession of the heads of state after them (Mengistu and Melese) used the forces of civil society to maintain the sovereignty of their country. All appealed to the people to follow them and pin down the intruders.

Their appeals to members of civil society were also framed in the form of requests to the people unlike periods of peace in which life goes on with relatively little challenge if any to the power base of the rulers. These are manifested in the ‘civil’ ways they treated their subjects and aroused their patriotism to defend their country – their wife, land and their religion, the interests that were basic to the individual.

Emperor Yohannes IV’s war proclamation carried the following appeal to the people to defend their country:

Oh, ye children of Ethiopia, pay attention!
Ethiopia is your mother,
Ethiopia is your crown,
Ethiopia is your wife,
Ethiopia is you child,
Ethiopia is your tomb,
So, therefore, love of mother,
Honor of the crown,
Kindness of the wife,
Joy of children
Respect for the tomb, are central values/
important principles that should be
embedded in your/Ethiopian self.

He called upon the people to fight the enemy that threatened to destroy these critical Ethiopian values/principles in his general mobilization order for the war (Deutsche Welle, German Radio, Evening Show, June 28, 2007).

Emperor Menilik likewise appealed to his people to defend their country in the late 1880s when Italian imperialists were preparing to colonize his country. His appeals to the defense and civilian populations were couched in patriotic terms. The words of the proclamation he issued for the general mobilization were expressed in the following way:

Those of you who are capable adults need to go to the war Front and help me fight the enemy. Those of you who are disabled and incapable of going to the front, pray for me. You all must fight in defense of your religion, your flag (the emblem of your sovereignty), your land and your wife. If you fail to fight for your country, you will be condemned by the almighty and future generations of your countrymen. (See Meheteme Selassie, Zikra Nagar, 1942).

Emperor Haile Selassie's general mobilization decree also appealed to the people in no less fervent manner. It read:

My fellow Ethiopians! You know that Ethiopian sovereignty had not been violated since the time of Menilik I. A people that is colonized is dispossessed of their lands and are turned into tenants who become victims and on-lookers of those foreigners who exclusively use the resources of the country for their own good. A people who are so enslaved pass their defeat to their offspring. Join me in the defense of our country and defeat the enemy that is intent on enslaving us. (Declaration of War, issued by Emperor Haile Selassie, Meskerem (September) 1928 E. C.: 276-79, translated from the Amharic version by the author of this paper).

Mengistu also saw the fight against secessionists as a problem rooted in foreign interests over Ethiopian resources. In his speech, *Adis Zemen*, April 17, 1976, he indicated that the fight was against:

“imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism ... (waged) by the masses of the Ethiopian people. The masses are engaged in actions that liberate them from the grips of feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic

capitalism.

Meles, the current leader of Ethiopia, also underlined the fact that the people of Ethiopia made a difference in defeating Eritrea which he said appeared to believe that it was only the government that was informed about the aggression that that country (Eritrea) perpetrated. The highlights of the statements he made read as follows:

Looking back at the outbreak of the war, it is very possible that Mr. Issayias never expected this type of response (repulsion of the aggressors) from the Ethiopian people. He felt that the first information about the incursion into Badme, Irob, Zalanbesa, Bure and Bada would have been limited to the government of Ethiopia. It was not surprising to Mr. Issayias to have expected that the Ethiopian people would have limited access to the information about the invasion. (Refer to <http://www.ethiopia first.com/news/2000/new613/html>).

The emperors and the subsequent two leaders, who occupied the ‘throne’ in Ethiopia during the past few decades, gave prominence to the importance of the people and their participation in saving their country’s sovereignty and its independence. The celebration and high value given to the peoples’ cooperation is lauded as the declarations and statements made by the leaders indicate. In fact, each of these leaders literally begged the people to go to the war fronts and stop the aggressors.

6. Reversion to state dominance of civil society after dangers to sovereignty are over

Once the wars ended, however, the leaders reverted to their usual practices of subduing the same people – civil society members, in other words, once again. They considered the people as a mass that needed to be led rather than partnered with in the fight against processes that conspire against their best interests, interests that entailed an improvement in their livelihoods.

Civil societal groups were active in a limited set of social and economic activities like 'equb' (kitty), 'idir' (burial associations) and 'debo' (exchange of labor in rural contexts) activities that constituted the foundations of their livelihood. There were no significant politically motivated civil societal groups that emerged to create a niche for themselves and act to influence the political process in Ethiopia's history. If there were, they were certainly the exception than the rule. These were the domain of disgruntled 'conspirators' who were either wronged by the sovereign or a governor/state official somewhere in the political and social hierarchy and these were summarily dealt with (a) blow. What were known as 'shiftas' or outlaws did sometimes influence decisions. The outlaws were either appointed or compensated for the losses they sustained following also the wrong decisions made by political structures somewhere in the hierarchy and possibly hurt them. They, in many cases, were thus effectively integrated back into the system which was assumedly made functional once again.

The Ethiopian state and civil society also communicated indirectly with one another. A case in point was the unofficial relationship Emperor Menilik established with the public. He is said to have frequently posed the question: "What does the shepherd sing' at this point of time?" Shepherds were then thought of as agents of the people, who expressed the injustices perpetrated by officials and the corruptions that they were embroiled in. The Emperor Menilik used the songs as sounding boards for gathering public opinion that he employed for remedial outputs/decisions.

Emperor Haile Selassie used a different format. He gave direct access, though unofficial, to citizens asking for remedial decisions. People, personally or in groups, submitted papers relating to the wrongs they were subjected to wherever they found the

emperor — at the church, while taking a walk or slowly driving in the streets. There have been instances where aggrieved people who lay their ‘shemas’ (overalls or dungarees) or white clothes in the middle of the street and appealed for justice. Whether or not all or only some of the remedial decisions were accorded or justice was served through this appeal format would not be easily ascertained. But this narration gives a birds eye view of one of the styles Emperor Haile Selassie used to publicly communicate with individuals or groups among his people who were aggrieved by his officials.

During the time of the student protests in the 1960s, the Emperor addressed parents and other residents that he invited to this palace and asked them to talk to their children so they can stop their public ‘disturbances’. The crowds of parents and residents who met with him were meant to serve as representatives of civil society and the assumption was that others who were not physically there would do likewise, meaning advise their children to let peace prevail.

Menilk’s public mood measurement and data gathering through the expressed songs of the shepherd and Haile Selassie’s relaying of the state’s wishes through groups of parents and residents were smart methods of communication with the public or civil society. But these approaches were replaced with totally different ones that went in unexpected directions after the departure of the monarchy. The governments that sequentially replaced the emperors knew of no conciliatory discourses involving peaceful dialogues with aggrieved parties or other interest groups.

The ‘Derg’, the military junta and the EPRDF, the rebel junta, knew no ‘civil’ communication with civil society. Yes, initially they approached civil societal groups and talked to them ‘civilly’ as far as it went. The idea behind their meetings with civil societal

groups was, however, to convince them to accept the governments' lines of thinking or their ideologies. The meetings, in both cases were public relation stunts to convince the public and to satisfy their (the rulers') egos involving self-adulation of the rulers and the maintenance of their power by all means.

In actual fact, the end results of such meetings were decided in advance. After the meetings, the states hatched eggs of destroying civil societal groups. Both the Derg and the EPRDF imprisoned their so-called enemies or eliminated them. The governments' actions could be summarized with the following powerful words that involved defiance, 'my way or the highway.'

In the case of the Derg, for instance, the 'doyen' labor union, the Confederation of Ethiopian Labor Unions (CELU) that posed an imminent danger to the power of the military government was sidetracked and marginalized. Smaller associations of workers including homemaker servants or service givers were aggressively organized to counter the powers of CELU. Urban dwellers associations and farmers associations were quickly set up to further marginalize CELU. This seemed to work for the Derg. But soon after all the fanfare, the need to interact with civil society was totally abandoned when the realization that the state assured itself of its domination of the political sphere seemed to be in place or established firmly.

The space civil society held was later taken over by oppositional groups, which penetrated the same institutions seeking the support of the members. Those individuals and groups that responded to the call were involved in bitter oppositional politicking and large numbers of them were consumed by the revolution. Among those who were eliminated by the red terror were some of the brightest sons and daughters of the country.

Soon after the white terror (opposition) and red terror (that of the Derg) that fully engaged the two political enemies (the state and opposition groups), civil societal activities were reduced to their minimum in their intensity. The marginal independence civil society enjoyed from time to time was reduced to the dustbins of history. A relatively quiet and unhealthy period of silence befell the country.

Civil societal activity picked a few threads here and there to help the all-powerful dictatorial government (state), the Derg, that hoisted the banner of reasserting the sovereignty of a united Ethiopia whose dismemberment was imminent from the attacks of forces of dissention in the South East and the North of the country during the 1970s and 1980s. Civil societal groups like the 'edirs' (burial societies) were compelled to provide items such as tents, they used for their daily routine services. These items/were forcibly shipped to military training camps. Urban and rural residents were asked to contribute material and human services (recruits) toward the defense of the motherland. Civil servants were required to contribute a tenth of their salaries and wages to combat the secessionist wars and Somalian aggression. Women's groups organized '*yenat ager teri*' or 'motherland's calls' festivals at which funds for the war effort were raised.

All this effort ended up bearing some fruit in the eyes of the military government for a while. A semblance of unity as it was known was restored for the country amid fights that alternated challenges and dangers of divisibility and unity. But forces of division in the parlance of 'unitarists' got the upper hand and were soon replaced by forces that proclaimed an Ethiopia that entertained the 'nominal' idea of unity in diversity.

The Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Party (EPRDF) attained the mantra of power in this topsy-turvy situation. Like its predecessor, EPRDF also attempted to entice civil society into the ideological loop that it planted for the society. When civil societal groups like the University Teachers Association that refused to pull itself into the EPRDF loop came into the picture, they were harshly dealt with. A large number of association members were summarily dismissed from their jobs and/or were retired.

In other cases, parallel organizations such as those of the Ethiopian Teachers Association and the Ethiopian Journalists Association were created. The state thus set one civil society against another to diffuse the power of the one that posed a threat to its rule. Civil society, divided against itself, thus benefited the state by its own actions in favor of division. The beneficiary of all this contrived division inevitably was the state. Incidentally, it is this very state that did not want to see any opposition worthy of the name to work for its membership and other aggrieved groups in society.

In this situation, segments of civil societal units supported the state and other units joined hands with the state to tip the balance in favor of the dominant state. An ‘unfree’ society was thus immersed in a political struggle that involved ‘uncivil’ modalities. Temporarily, the beneficiary of the outcomes of such a struggle is obviously the state, the EPRDF at this point in time.

But this is not a win-win situation for the state. It is a ‘win now’ and eventually a ‘lose-lose’ situation for the state later. In such an electrified political struggle no one group wins unless reconciliatory measures of sorts are taken. All such strenuous exertions channel the crown jewel of all the parties into unproductive processes and outcomes.

This unwise choice has led to a further impoverishment of the country. Official figures speak of a healthy growth for the country in economic terms. But social conditions measured against the indices of growth tell the tale of economic pulverization. The cost of living index is rising at an astronomic rate. This is no good news to both civil society and the state that perforce need to work in harmony with some sense of wisdom. In the end a healthy cooperation and complementary effort by both helps frontline membership of political and civil societies and the larger society, and if you will, the silent majority.

8. Optional routes that can harmonize the relationships between civil society and the state.

The relationship between the state and civil society in Ethiopia needs a more serious rethinking. The confrontational stance exhibited by both should be loosened. The state is the pariah organization behind this unhealthy struggle. Its declared intention of subduing civil society is fraught with ill will the motto of which is the disfranchisement of this critical arm of society – civil society. The idea behind the use of arsenals of suppression of civil society by the state is to enfeeble the sprouting of democracy in Ethiopia

The power of civil society, whether this is actual or potential, is its members' number. Number (of people) may not mean much when the struggle of civil society is at the beginning stages. But any civil society can empower itself better over time if the struggle is handled in a systematic manner. This can be achieved through unity in diversity and persistence, which has been the hallmark of the struggle that Ethiopian teachers, journalists, Ethiopian bank employees as well as Ethiopian students put up in

their struggle to limit the untamed power of the state against all odds over a decade and a half.

The current civil societal struggle should be fortified by economic and social organizations representing 'idirs' and 'equibs' as well as familial association that started to mushroom beginning four decades ago in Addis in particular. Urban dwellers and farmers associations need to reassert their rights to reorganize themselves and seek participation in the mediation of their interests vis-à-vis the state.

Civil societal groups at home and abroad should put together their human and material resources behind this effort. Coordination of activities by these organizations is an essential component of the struggle that aims at solidifying the power of civil society. A weakened civil society accords strength to a weaning and abusive state.

A subdued civil society, in other words, is not in the best interest of society and that of itself. The state is strengthened when it finds out civil society is emaciated. Generally speaking, civil society is befriended when a foreign threat is imminent or when it is actuated.

It is not only during times of war, as we saw earlier in this paper, that civil society should be befriended or even begged to join hands with the state. In times of peace also it should be given its rightful space that it needs to promote its multiple and diverse interests.

A developing country like Ethiopia has not only been faced by foreign aggressors, which tried to bust her sovereignty from time to time. Beyond such foreign aggressors and internal power mongers, there remains an illusive enemy that had firmly entrenched

itself. This enemy poses an eternal challenge to the society and it will continue to pose the same danger in the future too.

This powerful enemy is no other than poverty and its attendant manifestations that exhibit themselves in the form of pestilence and ill health. The two together sap the strengths of the people who should otherwise be able to be active and unleash all their powers toward growth. The state, as an institution invested with the power to help facilitate this growth, should not stand in the way of such a development. One of its cardinal duties is to create the necessary environment for the people or civil society to freely organize and take the initiatives to help itself.

The state would do well if it partners with strengthened civil societies rather than weakened ones. The national interest and democratization would be served better if a genuine effort is made by the state not to pin down the struggles civil societies make to empower themselves. Other social, economic and professional associations should be given the right to organize and help civil society. The state or the polity that constitutes it is not an institution that would stay forever. But social and other institutions stay much longer and they represent the true interests of individuals and groups that continue to be there for all times.

Whatever its nature any polity that constitutes a government, would go after a time – a limited time -- or through violent changes. When there is a semblance of democracy and regular elections the transition exhibits orderly transfers of power. In dictatorial and authoritarian state systems, however, governments stay longer bleeding the large majority of the people. But both types of governments go away in the end.

Moreover, people who serve civil societal interests are proximate to the people they serve. They do little to subdue their membership's interests since they work under the watchful eyes of their members. They are better positioned to work for the common good. The state, however, far removed from the nitty-gritty of everyday life, becomes an institution that tends to paternalize one group against the best interests of other social and economic groups that do not see the world its way.

Strengthened civil societies are better disposed to work for their membership and others rather than a state that is far removed from the constructive activities that civil societies manage to create for their membership and the larger society. A free political space for civil society provides an assured way of creating a functional rather than a dysfunctional society where stability and harmony take center stage and the best interest of all are served.

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<http://www2.dw-world.de/amahric/avwindow/custom .audio/>