

Pellerin, Camille and Logan Cochran (Editors). Citizens, Civil Society, and Activism under the EPRDF Regime in Ethiopia: An Analysis from Below. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

The book 'Citizens, Civil Society, and Activism under the EPRDF Regime in Ethiopia,' edited by Camille Louise Pellerin and Logan Cochran, provides valuable insights into Ethiopian politics, civil society, and activism. I found the anthology to offer a comprehensive examination of civil society dynamics during the EPRDF's authoritarian rule from 1991 to 2019.

In the introductory section, the book sets the stage for a comprehensive exploration of civil society dynamics in Ethiopia. It challenges the conventional view of a solely suppressive state and emphasizes the complex relationship between civil society and the state. The theoretical framework introduced categorizes interactions into four distinct categories: co-optation, cooperation, coexistence, and contestation. This framework forms the foundation for analysing civil society in an authoritarian context.

Building on this framework, the book challenges the prevailing narrative of authoritarian rule in Ethiopia by highlighting various forms of contestation, citizen agency, and civil society activism. It provides crucial historical context, tracing Ethiopia's transition from imperial rule to the rise of the EPRDF and illustrates diverse citizen engagement. This challenges the conventional wisdom of a top-down, authoritarian regime and offers insights into civil society dynamics, including the role of ethnic-based federalism in Ethiopia's complex political landscape.

In the chapter on Achievements and Resilience of Civil Society Organizations in Ethiopia, the book explores the evolution of Ethiopian civil society organizations (CSOs) and their shift from humanitarian aid to development and rights advocacy. It discusses the pivotal CSO law introduced by the EPRDF government in 2009, which imposed significant constraints on CSOs, particularly those committed to human rights, good governance, gender equality, and policy advocacy. Despite these challenges, the chapter highlights the positive developments and resilience exhibited by many CSOs, particularly those focused on development and service delivery.

In the chapter on Eliminating Violence against Women, the book explores how women's rights organizations in Ethiopia are addressing violence against women through social media campaigns. These campaigns align with the global Sustainable Development Goal 5 and have proven effective in raising awareness and influencing policy changes. The chapter also incorporates insights from interviews with women's rights organizations and an online survey to assess the impact of these initiatives.

Transitioning to another facet of Ethiopian civil society, the chapter on Women's Development Army analyses the Women's Development Army (WDA) in Ethiopia, focusing on unpaid labour among community health workers (CHWs). It explores Ethiopia's health challenges, introduces the WDA (2011), and examines CHWs' roles in the global health development industry, discussing their impact on rural Ethiopian women's relationships with government structures and grassroots health initiatives.

Shifting to digital activism, in the chapter on the Zone 9 Bloggers, the book explores the experiences and activities of this group of Ethiopian activists who used online platforms for political change. It originated in response to a distressing incident involving an Ethiopian domestic worker in Lebanon, leading to a powerful online mobilization effort through social media. The chapter delves into their well-structured online campaigns, addressing constitutional rights, freedom of expression, public assembly, and a more democratic Ethiopia. Zone 9's approach includes respectful engagement with

authorities, the use of local languages like Amharic, and a strategy involving visiting political prisoners to shed light on human rights violations.

Returning to contemporary analysis, the chapter on the Muslim protest provides a historical and political analysis of the relationship between the Ethiopian government, particularly the EPRDF, and the Ethiopian Muslim community. It discusses how the EPRDF positioned itself as a liberator of marginalized religious groups, including Ethiopian Muslims, often subordinating religious identity to ethnic identity, resulting in tensions. The chapter also explores the constitutional provisions related to religious freedom and equality in Ethiopia's 1995 Constitution, suggesting these provisions were more driven by political pragmatism than a genuine commitment to religious identity. The authors shed light on the government's prioritization of ethnic-based identity politics and its tensions with the Muslim community, culminating in the Muslim protest. The chapter also discusses the government's efforts to control the religious sector and securitize Islam in the context of global geopolitics.

Continuing with this analysis, in the chapter on the Oromo Youth Resistance, the book explores the Oromo youth resistance movement within Ethiopia's complex political landscape. It provides historical context, outlines the authoritarian rule of the EPRDF, and employs an ethnographic approach. The chapter delves into the motivations, dynamics, and messaging strategies of the Oromo protest movement, highlighting its evolution from opposing the Master Plan to demanding the overthrow of the EPRDF government. The chapter effectively conveys the fervor of the largely non-violent protest movement and the government's escalating response but could benefit from a more extensive exploration of the long-term outcomes and consequences of these protests.

In the chapter on Civic Activism and Civil Society Reform, the book analyses civil society activism and legal reforms in Ethiopia from 1991 to 2019. It explores the relationship between the Ethiopian government, civil society organizations (CSOs), and international actors during the EPRDF regime. The chapter highlights the impact of the 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation (ChSP), the tension between the government and CSOs, and the effects of the 2016-17 anti-government protests. It addresses the passage of the Civil Societies Organizations' Proclamation in 2019, emphasizing the role of CSOs in advocating for legal reforms and their collaboration with the government in shaping the new civil society law.

In the concluding chapter, titled "Beyond the Public Silence," the book synthesizes key findings and offers recommendations for the future, encouraging readers to reflect on the path forward for civic activism in Ethiopia and the enduring relevance of civic engagement in Ethiopia's political trajectory.

However, it's worth noting that while this anthology is comprehensive, it may not cover all facets of civil society and activism in Ethiopia during the EPRDF era, potentially leaving gaps in the analysis. The focus is primarily on urban-based civil society organizations and online activists, possibly underrepresenting rural community-based organizations and regional movements.

Given the evolving nature of Ethiopian politics beyond the book's 2019 cutoff date, there's a need for more recent insights into the impact of these political transitions on civil society, including a deeper exploration of their outcomes and lasting impacts on Ethiopian politics and society. Incorporating an analysis of regional dynamics and the geographic spread of activism might help provide a more comprehensive picture of social movements and their impact.

In conclusion, 'Citizens, Civil Society, and Activism under the EPRDF Regime in Ethiopia' explores civic engagement during EPRDF rule, categorizing interactions between civil society and the state as co-optation, cooperation, coexistence, and contestation, with broader implications for understanding

authoritarianism, civil society, and resistance. This book is a valuable contribution to Ethiopian studies, serving as a resource for scholars, policymakers, and those interested in the complex dynamics of civil society and activism in Ethiopia.