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“Just keep silent”. Teaching under the control of authoritarian governments (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia)

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Abstract

In the light of globally resurging authoritarianism, this paper investigates how Ethiopia’s ruling party governs teachers to produce conformity with the regime’s objectives. The study draws from qualitative data collected in late 2018 in Addis Ababa with 77 education actors. We demonstrate how ordinary educational governance mechanisms serve as apparatuses of surveillance and sanction that create a climate of fear. The rigid control significantly hinders teachers in their everyday work by isolating and paralysing them. Despite recent changes in Ethiopia’s political system, this study shows the need to consider the challenges that teachers face due to authoritarian control in discussions about education’s potential to contribute to democracy and peace.

1 Introduction

Teachers are widely deemed as “the most important factor affecting learning in schools” (World Bank, 2018, p. 10), and, increasingly, as core agents for peacebuilding (Horner et al., 2015). Particularly in authoritarian contexts, teachers face challenges that prevent them from fulfilling said expectations.

In the light of resurging authoritarianism, it is important to better understand how governments control schools as spaces where opposition allegedly takes form. Notwithstanding the type of authoritarianism, teachers navigate the tension between regime-stabilising curricula and students’ experienced political reality. Authoritarian regimes require a docile teaching force that stifles divergent opinions in the classroom (Abens, 2015; Allina-Pisano, 2010; Jennings & Da Matta, 2009). This paper responds to the scarcity of such research by analysing how regimes attempt to assure the obedience of their teaching force to maintain authoritarian control.

This article focuses on Ethiopia, ruled by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) from 1991 to 2019 until Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed merged EPRDF’s coalition parties into the current ruling Prosperity Party. Ethiopia, officially a multi-party-democracy, has been known for its authoritarian practices, including uncompetitive elections and violent repression of civil society (Horne, 2019). These repressive practices have strongly affected the education system. Schools have been used as spaces for political indoctrination and party recruitment. Teachers have been expected to implement this agenda (Rawlence, 2010) while simultaneously being threatened, harassed and imprisoned (GCPEA, 2018). To both understand how the Ethiopian government intervenes in teachers’ work and how teachers navigate through these interventions, we investigate the following research questions:
1) *How does the Ethiopian government attempt to govern teachers’ compliance with the regime’s ideology and practices?*
2) How do Ethiopian secondary school teachers navigate through the Ethiopian government’s attempt to assure teachers’ compliance with the regime’s ideology and practices?
We demonstrate how authoritarian regimes can attempt to assure teachers’ compliance through seemingly neutral educational governance mechanisms that entail discipling and punishing techniques. Doing so, we show how authoritarian control creates a general atmosphere of fear which paralyses teachers in their work.

Ethiopia as a case of entrenched authoritarian government practices, with dynamic shifts and continuities, rather than rising authoritarianism, permits an analysis of a variety of such control mechanisms. Control strategies stand in a stark contrast to student-centred teaching and active citizenship, both of which are present in the Ethiopian civic education curriculum and pursued by international discourses on education. Our research provides critical insights in the struggles of teachers when implementing national education agendas in classrooms of authoritarian countries. These insights contribute to critical analyses of the feasibility and relevance of national education programs as well as (international) peacebuilding agendas, in both repressive and non-authoritarian regimes (Hope, 2015; Novelli, 2017).

This article unfolds as follows: first, we discuss the contextual background. Then, we outline the theoretical framework, followed by the research methodology. We then present our analysis.

Next, we discuss the findings and reflect on the implications of the findings for the Ethiopian education system, researchers and policy makers.

2 Context: educational governance and curricula in the context of Ethiopia's authoritarianism

A new wave of authoritarianism has been unfolding. Freedom House speaks about a global "long-term democratic decline" in the last 15 years (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2021, p. 1) and categorises only 16% of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa as free democracies. While scholars still disagree about the scope and implications of these changes, reinvigorated authoritarian practices arguably merit attention (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). At the same time, authoritarianism has never disappeared (Art, 2012; Köllner & Kailitz, 2013). Since the 1990s, authoritarian structures frequently exist alongside democratic facades, and various discourses are applied to legitimise autocratic rule (Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2017; Soest & Grauvogel, 2017). International donors have played a complicit role in legitimising and supporting autocratic regimes (Hagmann & Abbink, 2013, p. 2). Mechanisms of autocratic rule legitimisation have changed over time and encompass "indoctrination, performance, passivity, and democratic-procedural" dynamics (Dukaliskis & Gerschewski, 2017, p. 253). Totalitarianism and utopian ideologies have become rarer, while a focus on socio-economic development became more pronounced. Regimes have focused less on controlling every aspect of citizens' lives, as long as citizens are acquiescent and do not obstruct regime power (ibid.). Mirroring these 'waves', various types of authoritarianism exist – electoral, competitive, hybrid, developmental, and many more (Matfess, 2015).

Descriptions of Ethiopia's political system are emblematic of this variety. A popular term is "developmental state" (Brown & Fisher, 2020), used, for example, by Ethiopia's late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. A middle-ground is the term "developmental authoritarianism" (Matfess, 2015). We concur with Hagmann and Abbink (2013) that the search for a precise label is elusive as Ethiopian politics is better characterised by various "paradoxes" between claims and actual practice, rooted in several partially overlapping concepts such as ethno-nationalism, Marxism-Leninism, revolutionary democracy and the developmental state (Gebregziabher, 2019). Similarly emphasising practices rather than labels, Glasius (2018) extends the discussion from regime types towards a focus on authoritarian practices, which she defines as "patterns of action that sabotage accountability to people over whom a political actor exerts control, or their representatives, by means of secrecy, disinformation and disabling voice" (Glasius, 2018, p. 516). Such practices have undoubtedly marked Ethiopia's political system.

No Ethiopian government prior to EPRDF had ever come to power by election and none had "the slightest plausible claim to democracy" (Clapman, 2004). Ethiopian regimes rarely ended peacefully but were usually ousted by force. Emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1974) ordered armed attacks on peaceful opposition protestors, strictly controlled the press and prohibited political parties. The military dictatorship Derg (1974-1991) killed masses of suspected government opponents. In their research on Eritrea, Hirt and Mohammed (2013) draw on Durkheim's (1897) concept of *anomie* as a "sort of malaise and inability to move forward" (Riggan, 2020), observed in authoritarian states where constant control and threats paralyse the

population (Riggan, 2020). In contrast to other states that seem blocked by protracted authoritarianism, Ethiopia, despite long periods of acceptance of authoritarian rule, regularly managed to manoeuvre itself out of its anomie and resisted by (violent) uprisings (Riggan, 2020). Indeed, protests have been common in Ethiopia and have often been rooted in schools and universities. Emperor Haile Selassie and the Derg have cracked down on student protests and killed participants in student movements, university professors and other intellectuals who criticised the government (Abebaw Yirga & Balsvik, 2018). However, student protests led to the overthrow of Haile Selassie and EPRDF itself has its origins in the student movement that ousted the Derg.

EPRDF, a coalition of ethnic-based political parties, came to power in 1991. Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) founded EPRDF and stood as the dominant party in the coalition. None of the allied parties was represented in the Executive Committee of EPRDF until the inauguration of Prime Minister Abiy in 2018, retaining hierarchies of Tigrayan monopolisation of power and fuelling ethnic inequalities (Abbink, 2011). Ethnic federalism further intensified the connection of politics and ethnicity (Tronvoll, 2008). From 2015 until 2019, EPRDF held all seats in the parliament (Horne, 2019) and has been known for "disregard for civic rights and political freedoms" (Hagmann & Abbink, 2013, p. 3). This involves holding uncompetitive elections, adopting repressive anti-terrorism laws, oppressing civil society, imprisoning, killing and torturing protestors and censuring independent news channels (Badwaza & Temin, 2018; HRW, 2019). Since April 2018, Ethiopia's new Prime Minister Abiy altered the political landscape, for example by re-inviting banned opposition parties and freeing political prisoners. This study took place before his inauguration, and we reflect on recent dynamics in the conclusion.

Building on village-level structures installed by the Derg, EPRDF formally introduced a decentralised governance system. The regional states are split in zones and the two chartered cities in sub-cities. Zones and sub-cities are then clustered in *woredas* which are divided into *kebeles*. EPRDF-affiliated political parties have been in charge of regional and local governments, who hence function as extended arms of the ruling party (Arriola & Lyons, 2016). Rawlence (2010, p. 22) reveals that the *kebele* and *woreda* structures provide an "intrusive mechanism for the ruling party to gather information on and control communities". EPRDF appoints loyal members to leadership positions and ensures that only EPRDF-loyal citizens can access job opportunities in state bodies. All of the above demonstrates Ethiopia's excessive and historically grown use of authoritarian practices.

The outlined dynamics in Ethiopia are emblematic for ruling parties that deem teachers as potential initiators of critique, protests and contestations; these functions are indeed emphasised by critical educationalists (Fernandes, 1988; Freire, 1993; Giroux, 2003; Leonardo, 2004). Given the education system's potential to serve as a platform for criticism of the government and political dissent, as well as its potential for regime-stabilising political indoctrination, the EPRDF frequently intervened in the education sector to secure political conformity (Rawlence, 2010). Next to administrative structures – bureaus for educational governance exist at every administrative level, except for *kebele* – one important tool for the inculcation of norms have been civic education courses. While the participants of our qualitative study were teachers from

various (social science) subjects, we present civic education as an illustration for tensions that teachers face.

2.1 Ethiopia's education system: civic education and regime control

EPRDF started reforming the education system directly after coming to power. It passed the Education and Training Policy (ETP) in 1994 (FDRE, 1994). ETP included civic education, which through later reforms became Civic and Ethical Education (CEE), which is taught in primary and secondary schools.

CEE is high on the government's agenda: it has become an examinable subject, a mandatory subject in university entrance exams and the number of teaching periods increased over time. Ethiopians authored the CEE textbooks, unlike other textbooks that were outsourced to international consultants, and CEE reforms coincided with national elections (2000, 2005, and 2010) (Yamada, 2011). Today's CEE has two predecessors. First, 'moral education' that "emphasised the glory, sacredness, indisputable power, and hereditary rights of the Emperor" Haile Selassie (Ghebru & Lloyd, 2020). Second, 'political education' that sought to produce "communist values [and] attitudes" (Semela, Bohl, & Kleinknecht, 2013). The current CEE is dressed more democratically. It focuses on creating patriotic, scientific, responsible citizens that actively participate in public issues to strive towards more peace and justice for society, within a constitutional democratic environment that respects human rights (Ghebru & Lloyd, 2020). Teaching about domestic law and constitutions, CEE presents democratic legitimacy of the government and distinguishes it from its predecessors (Semela et al., 2013), thus mirroring EPRDF's wider "symbolism" and "legitimatizing strategy" (Bach, 2011, p. 653).

Ethiopia's CEE curricula reflect changes in the way authoritarian regimes have legitimised their rule and political practices. Social sciences curricula, particularly civic education and history, are part of wider discourses of "autocratic legitimation"(Apple, 2004; Soest & Grauvogel, 2017). In authoritarian states, such discourses have often evolved from indoctrination to mimicking democratic processes (Dukalskis & Gerschewski, 2017). Curricula have followed suit in that they prescribe student-centred teaching methods and portray democratic dynamics, human rights and the right to actively participate in public life (Altinyelken, 2015; Riggan, 2020).

While the Ethiopian government attempts to ensure that teachers act according to its political agenda, "the political elites of the ruling party do not trust the teachers for fear that they could use the subject to promote the ideas of the opposition and negative attitudes towards 'constitutional order'." (Ayalew, 2017, p. 128). This tension is central in our theoretical framework.

3 Theoretical framework: how authoritarian regimes govern teachers' behaviour

We investigate how authoritarian regimes attempt to govern teachers' behaviour so that it conforms with their legitimising discourses and political practices. Doing so, we follow Robertson and Dale (2015, p. 156) who assert that we cannot explore *who teaches what to whom* "without considering the 'rules of the game' or 'paradigmatic setting' that both promote and set basic limits to what is considered possible and desirable from education". Teachers can act on the spectrum between counteracting and reproducing social injustice. However, the wider

political context and concrete government techniques are crucial to understand what pushes them into either direction.

3.1 The two faces of educational governance: discipline and punish

Education research and policy tend to focus on the effectiveness of teacher management or governance, usually measured through students' test scores. Governance includes recruitment, retention, deployment and training. Instruments of choice to reach these objectives are, for example, inspections or appropriate salaries. Besides this technical policy-perspective, there is 'real teacher governance' (De Herdt & Olivier de Sardan, 2015). Governments can use supposedly technical governance mechanisms to govern teachers' behaviour to produce compliance with regime politics, in what we call the *two faces of educational governance* (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000).

Foucault's concepts of governmentality and biopower have been widely discussed (Dean, 2010; Foucault, 2007, 2008; Lemke, 1992). A central term for Foucault is "government", which he extends from the common understanding towards any act of governing, such as self-regulation. In Foucault's analysis of the European context, governmentality has not replaced other forms of power but interacts with sovereignty and discipline (Foucault, 1977, p. 143). Our contextual discussion suggests that teachers' behaviour in Ethiopia is governed according to disciplinary techniques. Foucault (1995) suggested that changes of punishment and control mechanisms went hand in hand with broader regime shifts. While sovereign monarchs applied direct and brutal force, new modes of production and types of delinquency required a more cost-efficient system that deeply penetrates society. The emerging disciplinary society no longer only reacted to violations but increasingly sought to prevent them by making disobedience unattractive ("punishment") and aligning people's conduct with the needs of the wider political economy ("discipline"). Discipline is concerned with directly regulating and acting upon an individual's body, and by extension, mind.

Foucault discusses several disciplinary technologies: First, regarding "docile bodies", technologies entail the breakup of masses into small governable groups, detailed sets of tasks according to exact timing, the organisation of the evolution from one task to another and the arrangement of all these aspects. Second, regarding "the means of correct training", technologies interact with the preceding ones and together are meant to 'normalise' the behaviour of the disciplined persons, to the extent that such normalisation becomes part of an individual's self-regulation (Foucault, 1995). On top of these disciplinary technologies, Foucault also discusses punishments and imprisonment.

In disciplinary societies, schools figure prominently. Notwithstanding a few exceptions, Foucault focused on the disciplining of students *inside* of classrooms. Similarly, Apple (2004) emphasises forms of discipline and dispositions that are taught explicitly and implicitly. We zoom out of the classroom to note that authoritarian regimes require teachers as docile front-line civil servants who interact with students to enforce a strict moral and political code of conduct. Possibly recalcitrant teachers need to be disciplined. This study considers the education sector, including curricula and administrative structures, as part of the state's disciplinary infrastructure through which state and party actors seek to control masses of

students and teachers. Both students and teachers occupy a hybrid place as disciplined and disciplining actors.

Authoritarian regimes have used educational governance mechanisms – class observation, teacher transfers, etc. – for surveillance and disciplinary purposes (Abens, 2015; Bunke, 2005; Riggan, 2013). Other, non-authoritarian, contexts have displayed similar dynamics (anon., Bryan, 2017). Mitchell (2017, 2019) applied Foucault's notion of discipline to Ethiopia's education system. While acknowledging political influences in the education sector, he focuses on the educational and social control functions of educational governance.[1] We explore how state actors use these mechanisms to govern teachers' behaviour towards compliance with the government's ideology and practice.

3.2 How do teachers act?

Authoritarian and political power dynamics affect to what extent teachers can become active agents with the potential to transform these very dynamics (Fernandes, 1988; Freire, 1993; Giroux, 2003; Leonardo, 2004). Prior research on teachers' interaction with governments' control mechanisms pointed to teachers' agency (anon.), and Fernandes (1988) underlines that teachers can find niches and exploit their autonomy to challenge recurrent (state) ideologies. We therefore consider teachers as active agents, able to interact with disciplinary infrastructures. Agents (teachers) and structures are in a contingent, dialectical interplay. While power dynamics at different levels constantly constrain, condition, and enable strategic actions, those actions may (re-)produce or challenge these structures. Actors orient their strategies on the conditions presented by their environment (Hay, 2002).

Strategies are not purely rational. Riggan (2020) thematises the contradictory function of emotions for mass-mobilisation in authoritarian regimes. Authoritarianism produces extreme emotions such as anger, paralysation and fear, that can work for or against the ruling party: "…fear may mobilize or silence, serve as catalyst to protest or curtail it" (Riggan, 2020, para. 3). To legitimise their rule, leaders might require a certain passion from their citizens, which however risks to become incontrollable. Instead, authoritarian leaders rely on shaping "rational" individuals that will support the state while avoiding heated emotions, as the CEE curriculum and its goal to create hard-working patriots demonstrates. Nevertheless, Riggan (2020) shows that strong emotions have played a key role in Ethiopia's history of mass protests. Since teachers as main actors in formal education are central in political mobilisation processes, this paper pays special attention to teachers' emotions, particularly to fear and its function in creating anomie and paralysation (Riggan, 2020).

4 Methodology

Given the outlined context, we believed a qualitative methodology to be most adequate to explore participants' perspectives on control mechanisms. Different from studies that focus mainly on curricula, we "study power where it is exercised over individuals rather than legitimated at the centre" (Jessop, 2007, drawing from Foucault). Author A conducted 64 interviews and 4 focus group discussions between September and November 2018. Out of the

[1] His comments on an earlier draft of this paper helped us to sharpen this distinction.

77 participants, 52 were teachers in four government schools in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa[2]. As a mandatory procedure to gain access to schools, Addis Ababa Education Bureau (AAEB) assigned author A to four schools. The schools were chosen based on their location in four different sub-cities, which was as an attempt to assure geographic variety despite the urban setting. We acknowledge AAEB's influence on our sampling as a bias since three of the four selected schools were known for good student performance. However, patterns of teachers' experience with political pressure were similar among all schools, implying the irrelevance of the schools' performance for the research topic. In addition to (social science) teachers, we interviewed the school principal, one vice principal, one representative of the Ethiopian Teacher Association (ETA), the school counsellor at each school. To gather background information on the Ethiopian education sector, the remaining interviewees were national and regional education policy makers and staff from international organisations and Addis Ababa University. They were recruited based on their expertise (expert sampling) or recommendations (snowball sampling). Due to low levels of representation, only 14 participants were women, mirroring women's under-representativeness in the Ethiopian education sector (Panigrahi, 2013). Only around 24% of teachers in secondary and preparatory schools in Addis Ababa were women in 2015/2016 (Addis Ababa City Government Education Bureau, 2017). A lack of time prevented a targeted inclusion of women, which we acknowledge as a shortcoming of the study. Another limitation is that all study participants work in the urban setting of Addis Ababa, where political tensions and governmental intervention in education might play out differently than in other regions and in rural areas. This data is thus neither representative for the countrywide situation of Ethiopian teachers nor for dynamics in rural schools. To address this gap, we embed our findings in secondary literature with evidence from other Ethiopians regions. Most interviewees were social science teachers (history, CEE, economics, geology, and English), while one focus group discussion per school was carried out with teachers from various other subjects. We focused on social science teachers as we assumed a stronger exposure to the government's repressive practices since their subjects relate to societal and political aspects. Teachers were not asked to mention their ethnicity or their political preferences to prevent mistrust and discomfort. Therefore, the connection between teachers' ethnicity and their political experiences with EPRDF's control were not specifically explored in this paper, which presents an opportunity for future research. All interview and focus group discussion data were transcribed, categorised under (sub) codes, and analysed by using the qualitative data analysis software Nvivo12. In the analysis, numbers in parentheses refer to interview numbers in the appendix. Addis Ababa was chosen as a research site due to its ethnic and political diversity. For the research in schools, we employed a multiple-case study design as it enables the in-depth examination of a school as a "single social unit" (Dick, 2014, p. 89). In the sense of the vertical case study, we also analysed schools' relationship with administrative hierarchies and political structures (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017).

Field access was very restricted. The Directorate of the CEE department of the Federal Ministry of Education hesitated to issue the research permit due to the politically sensitive questions. The permit was granted due to continuous mediation efforts. Given the sensitivity of the research topic, we prioritised minimising the risk of doing harm. Participants signed a letter of

[2] For this paper, we only data from 40 participants (see table under references).

consent before the interview. Political topics were usually brought up by participants themselves and open questions were asked so that participants could decide what to share. Confidentiality was assured through safe data storage and withholding information that could identify the respondents in publications. A local translator, who signed a non-disclosure-agreement, was present for research activities in schools. The interviews and focus group discussions took place in both English and Amharic. As empirical data was collected in the beginning of the first school year after Abiy's inauguration (autumn 2018), the findings refer to teachers' experiences under EPRDF.

5 Findings: governing teachers' behaviour

We now analyse how educational governance mechanisms govern teachers' behaviour to ensure compliance with the government's political agenda. Then, we demonstrate how tabooing political topics in schools is used to stifle dissent. Next, we discuss teachers' strategies to navigate through these control mechanisms.

5.1 The two faces of educational governance: Discipline and punish?

In our study, we found a comprehensive socio-infrastructural system of vertical and horizontal surveillance and control, the "hierarchical chain" (6), that sustains the ruling party's control over teachers. Following, we first demonstrate mechanisms of vertical surveillance through loyalty-based career opportunities. Then, we discuss how the party ensures horizontal surveillance through spies and monitoring networks. We close with teachers' self-censorship, government strategies beyond educational governance such as imprisonment, and the shutdown of the main teacher union.

General patterns regarding the strategic appointment of EPRDF-members to leading positions in governmental institutions also apply to the education sector. Confirming that leadership positions are not necessarily assigned based on merit, Tirussew and colleagues (2018, p. 41) point out that "[t]here are education bureau heads that have no background in the field of education. In many cases, the academic level of school and bureau heads is lower than that of teachers". In our study, teachers stated that EPRDF's loyal members occupy leading positions on different levels of educational governance and that (vice) principals are EPRDF-affiliated. Teachers perceived their superiors (including their principals) as agents of the ruling party whose main concerns were not delivering education but fulfilling the government's political goals. One CEE teacher stated: "Most principals of the school are directly or indirectly the member of the leading party of this state. So, they are expected to shape the workers of this school that are in opposition of this party" (19). Statements of teachers like "the school is not led by professionals, but by politicians, assigned by the government" (8) were common, implying that school principals come to their position through political partisanship rather than through relevant qualification. A teacher who was assigned as a vice principal before stated that the position involved political activities: "They wanted me to participate in political affairs, doing such rude things rather than educational activities." (29). Political affairs are, for example, political meetings in schools with the purpose of EPRDF indoctrination or the recruitment of party members (Berihu Asgele & Mewcha Amha, 2015; Rawlence, 2010). Bach (2011, p. 648) argues that such dynamics are central to EPRDF's "revolutionary democracy

strategy: recruiting 'vanguard members', shaping their minds, and disseminating their views at every level of the society in order to impose EPRDF's view". Moreover, teachers mentioned that the school administration pressured them to join EPRDF (20, 28, 29, 33). We argue that leadership appointments based on loyalty and party positions are the foundation of EPRDF's vertical surveillance in education.

How does vertical surveillance affect teachers? Participants described that officials in education bureaus were informed about teachers' behaviour, especially if the behaviour was associated with political opposition. One CEE teacher stated: "the woreda zone, and Addis Ababa Education Bureau, […] they don't accept you, because it is interconnected with each other, from the school principal to there." (6), while another teacher mentioned "they [education officials] have chains everywhere, […] all of "them are under the control of the government" (29). Continuing these dynamics, principals treat teachers based on teachers' (suspected) political affiliation. Teachers expressed that EPRDF-loyal teachers and teachers who complied with the school principals' (political) instructions were favoured in terms of access to additional working opportunities, semesterly teacher awards, leading positions, and training opportunities (7, 11, 31, 34, 17). Berihu Asgele and Mewcha Amha (2015) with evidence from Tigray and Befekadu Gebre (2001) with data from Addis Ababa, Afar, Amhara and Oromia reveal that school administrations and local education offices pressured or attacked teachers without EPRDF-membership. Similarly, Seungcheon and SungSang (2014) found that EPRDF-partisanship is among the unofficial criteria to climb the career ladder for teachers in Addis Ababa. While headteachers make recommendations about rewards and training opportunities, education bureaus take decisions, leaving teachers and headteachers unaware of "the procedure and the selection criteria", which was found by (Workneh, 2012, p. 14) who gathered data in Addis Ababa, Amhara, Oromia and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region. While loyalty is rewarded, disloyalty is sanctioned. Berihu Asgele and Mewcha Amha's (2015) found that teachers in Tigray region were punished with random and unwanted transfers, underlining that re-allocation of suspected opponents is way of disciplining teachers. As a case in point, a larger group of teachers in one sample school who protested their low salaries were put on a government blacklist and consequently suspended or randomly allocated to other schools. While this case demonstrates the harsh measures taken to crack down dissent among the teaching force, it also shows collective teacher resistance, indicating that Ethiopian teachers are not necessarily stuck in a state of anomie.

Another crucial disciplinary and surveillance technology in schools are "spies" (1, 3, 4 and many others). Most teachers in our study indicated that EPRDF appoints teachers and students as spies within schools, creating a pervasive structure of horizontal surveillance. Their reported main task is the identification of potential opponents by carefully examining if and how a person criticises the government or speaks about what the regime deems as political topics. The informants would then report to the school administration, to political authorities or the police. Most frequently, informants were said to be teachers or students who are EPRDF members, but party membership does not seem mandatory for monitoring duties. However, since Tigrayans held the main power in EPRDF, teachers of non-Tigrayan background claimed that it is mostly Tigrayans engaging in spying activities, while non-Tigrayans are victims of spying (Int 1, 6, 7, 27, 28, 31).

Acting as an informant for the government can ensure loyalty-based appointments and other rewards. Additionally, we found organised forms of spying in the form of 1-to-5 (1-5) group arrangements, meaning that one person monitors or coaches 5 others (Tirussew et al., 2018). The function of 1-5 is controversial. Contemporary educational literature describes it as an intervention for student participation and cooperative learning launched in 2010 (Mitchell, 2017; Tirussew et al., 2018). However, 1-5 existed first under the Derg and has been widely used in other sectors, including prisons and ministries. It usually involves one selected individual overseeing five other households or individuals, allowing the government to monitor citizens' actions (de Freytas-Tamura, 2017; Rawlence, 2010; Vaughan, 2011). Some teachers used 1-5 for their instruction to organise group work among students (3, 4, 5). Others avoided it (24, 27, 32) because "it is generally a political system" (32). Nigusse & Tsegay (2017) found teachers' attitudes towards 1-5 to be mostly positive. In another school, teachers perceived 1-5 student groups as a mechanism for EPRDF's recruitment and surveillance:

> Students were selected to be part of their [the government's] political mission [...]. They are highly organised in doing this; first they group them [the students] in an arrangement of 1-5, this is done to assess the thinking of five students within the group, that is how they run their politics. They will establish a system of report and based on that, one student from the six will report who is who and what's going on in the school. (24)

School administrators also used 1-5 arrangements for discussions among teachers. A few teachers deemed it as a good forum for exchange (2, 17), while most teachers thought of 1-5 as the government's way of pushing their political agenda on them (1, 7, 25, 26, 31, 32, 35). Some teachers reported that forced 1-5 discussions included question on whether they knew teachers who disturb the school environment by promoting negative views about the government. Mitchell (2017) lists several other posts that, we believe, can have disciplining functions, for example teachers working as unit leaders whose "primary function is teacher surveillance", heads of department or student "monitors".

Additionally, we found *gim gima* (literally meaning public evaluation) – a public forum invented by TPLF – as another example in other studies, but not in our own. Students, parents, and teachers use it to publicly criticise, discipline or reward individuals for their behaviour. The practice is originally inspired by (self-)criticism sessions employed by socialist parties. While allowing for bottom-up accountability, it can also function as a monitoring platform. Mitchell (2017, p. 53) found that teachers in Tigray criticise the school administration during gim gima "for rudeness, quarrelling amongst themselves, attempting to unfairly benefit relatives", suggesting that not all forms of 'opposition' and 'disloyalty' are forbidden and sanctioned. However, Vaughan (2011, p. 628) stresses that "whilst some outsiders have seen gimgema as potentially embodying the best of modern management practice, in effect it also offered a basis on which to attack, often even humiliate, those who promoted alternative viewpoints, and has long been controversial." Substantiating Vaughan's claim, we encountered one case where interviewed teachers dared to publicly criticise their principal for corrupt behaviour, who was suspended as a result (24, 27, 31, 33, 35). Yet, shortly afterwards, said principal was assigned to a leading position in the *woreda* education bureau and allocated these teachers to rural schools. Interpreted by teachers and the ETA representative as an act of revenge, this example

indicates that open resistance can lead to retaliation, again underlining how educational governance mechanisms are used to control and punish.

Outside of the classroom, we observed how a disciplinary regime fosters teachers' self-regulation in the form of isolation. Teachers' caution regarding political topics and constant fear of spies led them to constrain their interactions with their peers (Seungcheon, Ha & SungSang, 2014). Most teachers stated that "all teachers fear each other" and that the "air is full of lack of trust" (12). They minimised the interaction between each other, kept to themselves and avoided making friends within the teaching force. As one teacher said:

> I am isolated. Because those teachers are just doing the spying activity. […] The teachers become isolated. No more talking about political or any aspects of their country, just keep silent. (1)

A few teachers mentioned that teachers tend to create ethnically homogeneous groups (6, 28, 30), which was deemed to be "connected with political issues" (6). Since most political parties in Ethiopia are ethnicity-based, socialising with members of the same ethnicity might serve as a strategy to avoid controversial discussions. Moreover, the government's power to exert authoritarian practices in schools is not limited to educational governance. EPRDF reportedly arrests teachers whom it deems as potential opponents (GCPEA, 2018). In our sample, two history teachers were imprisoned during the two states of emergency that took place from 2016 to 2017 and in early 2018 due to suspicions of partisanship with "terrorist" oppositional political parties (1, 7). One was imprisoned twice and forced to participate in a governmental indoctrination camp for a duration of two months (see Kalkidan (2017) for more information). Numerous teachers reported to know colleagues who were imprisoned due to suspicions of opposition support. Additionally, older teachers reported arbitrary mass arrests of teachers especially during elections in 2005 and 2010. Fear of imprisonment reinforces self-regulation: "just keep silent. For the sake of survival. Otherwise, their [teachers'] lives will end in prison" (1).

Amidst these dynamics, teachers can do very little to seek support. As Befekadu Gebre (2001) argues, a key reason for high teacher attrition in Ethiopia is the lack of support in case of unfair treatment by superiors. Since the ruling party controls local courts through woredas and kebeles (Rawlence, 2010; Zemelak, 2011), legal action is unlikely to help. Even ETA, once an independent civil society organisation, was coercively closed by EPRDF in 2008 and reopened as a government-controlled entity under the same name (Rawlence, 2010), in the wake of EPRDF's massive cross-sector shutdown of civil society activities (Brechenmacher, 2017). Interviewed teachers, especially those with violent experiences with the governments' control, declared that ETA did not help them with their problems (1, 4, 7, 29, 31, 32). They stated that ETA is a "puppet association" (1, 2, 31), a "sub-servant of the government" (7). Hence, the only organisation with the mandate to advocate for teachers is part of the government's control. Combined with the described control and punishment mechanisms, the lack of support opportunities left teachers "silent" (11, 12) and feeling "neglected" (23).

We sum up that EPRDF exercises control in the education sector through a system of career opportunities bound to loyalty, surveillance, and reporting, (fear of) imprisonment and the

hindrance of teachers' collective agency. Within an overall climate of fear, teachers self-regulate their behaviour to avoid being associated with the opposition. Fear thus proves highly efficient to force teachers into a state of paralysation in which they are unable to organise among themselves, and unlikely to contest their government. We have shown that the ruling party can use seemingly neutral educational governance mechanisms to enforce compliance with its ideology and to widen enrolment into the party. The next section outlines a softer discipline mechanism that governs teachers' behaviour inside and outside the classroom.

5.2 Tabooing political topics as a control mechanism

In addition to surveillance and disciplining mechanisms, we found the norm of *political secularism* to govern teachers' behaviour. When asked whether teachers should speak about topics related to ethnicity, conflict, or politics, many participants stressed that politics and education are immiscible, claiming that schools must be "secular" (1, 4, 14, 22, 25, 32). To differentiate this form of secularism from the term's usual relation to religion, we call it *political secularism*. Political secularism has no clear legal basis. The current Ethiopian constitution article 90.2 states that "[education] shall be provided free from any religious influence, political partisanship or cultural prejudices" while Point 2.2.7 of the ETP of 1994 prescribed that education must be secular, without further definition (FDRE, 1994). Evidently, education policy makers in our study reinforced political secularism in schools. One vice principal mentioned that officials from the sub-city, *woreda* and Addis Ababa Education Bureau regularly checked that "political issues will not be raised in schools" (39). School principals felt responsible to uphold political secularism. One principal underlined that "there might be a teacher who might want to share what he has heard from outside with the students, but […] we would then take actions right away." (36). The quotes too show that political secularism not only refers to the officially forbidden influence of political partisanship but involves a general avoidance of political topics.

Participants' statements suggest that political secularism has the aim to prevent students' outrage. Given Ethiopia's history of student-led uprisings to overthrow political leaders, the fear that students might develop "unmanageable" political ideas and take political action after emotional political debates was omnipresent in schools. Principals were afraid that teachers might "mislead" students (36) when speaking about political topics, and teachers were afraid that the students "will develop different political views" and that "there will be debates" (2). Riggan (2020, para. 55) highlights the deep-rooted fear of students' politicised emotions in Ethiopia and found that CEE teachers were "trying to douse any revolutionary thinking that students might have" by avoiding political topics. Political secularism served to reach this aim through assuring that teachers teach in accordance with curricula and avoid controversial subjects (36, 37, 38) to not "create something that may create conflict or initiates students to [talk about] such topics. If they stick to the subject, then there will be no problem" (36), as a school principal stressed. Prohibiting political dialogue is supposed to ensure the alignment of political discourse in schools with the government's ideology. For example, according to one official, free dialogue between teachers and students on the politically loaded topic of peace would mean opening a space for discussion that allows dissent with the government's narrative. Promoting this dialogue would lead education officials to assume that teachers aim to spread anti-government propaganda: "We are a peace lover and exercise peace, our political bureau

promotes peace, why you [teacher] need to promote or to speak about peace in the school and in the class?" (40).

Political secularism creates two tensions that pose immense challenges to teachers. First, the government obliges teachers to uphold the "political neutrality" of education while forcing them to teach its political ideology. Political secularism's underlying principle, namely the separation of politics and education, implies that education can be politically "neutral". Riggan (2020) revealed that in Ethiopia, CEE was portrayed as neutral, and several teachers in our sample thought of themselves as neutral when adhering to curricula and refraining from political discussions. However, social science curricula promote the ruling party's political narratives. Teachers reported the following: curricula blamed past regimes for the country's shortcomings while portraying EPRDF as the country's saviour (6, 12, 28, 29); a lack of scientific sources and the perception that numbers and descriptions of political events in textbooks are invented (2, 7, 11, 12, 20) and repetitive, government-praising description of (past) political events that neglect alternative perspectives (2, 7, 11, 21). Moreover, teachers complained that at "political meetings of the ruling party being held here at the school, they discuss whatever they want with students or teachers. If the school was meant to be secular, then why are they allowed, and others banned from doing so?" (1). Given also the priorly analysed control mechanisms, it is evident that teachers face a double bind of a "secular" mandate in a highly political environment. Evidently, criticism of the government is the only political discourse that is forbidden.

The second field of tension is the binary approach to politics in Ethiopian education. Our participants widely perceived politics as either the government's "business", or everything that opposes it. "Politics" either equalled the ruling party's politics, or anything oppositional to it. The word "politics" seemed like a red flag. Several teachers reacted to politics with aversion, almost with disgust. Political subjects were deemed as "dirty" (8) and "unnecessary" (6, 32). In the context of our study, politics was thought binary rather than a as spectrum. For teachers' everyday work, this binarism created a political minefield. Adhering to curricula and upholding political secularism means reproducing the government's ideology. Opening spaces for political discussions means allowing criticism, and thus opposition. The latter gives teachers power to influence students while simultaneously making them targets of authoritarian control:

> "Revolutionaries come from schools. And behind them, there are teachers who know the history well. So, if they influence students, they might even start a revolution. This is not good for the government. The government's perception of teachers and other civil servants is not the same. They see them as enemies." (20)

The next section discusses how teachers navigate these tensions and the general governance mechanisms in their teaching.

5.3 Teaching within a political minefield

The fear of facing the consequences of non-conformity with political secularism or of being considered an EPRDF opponent played a constant role in teachers' work. Due to this fear, many teachers asserted to (reluctantly) teach the content of highly regime-friendly textbooks. When presenting the content, many teachers expressed to feel "not professional" (9), "ashamed",

“regret”, “disappointed”, “embarrassed” (12), “bad” (33) or worse: “Always, when you teach, you feel hate” (7). These emotions become particularly articulated when teachers face students who address the gap between textbooks’ portrayal of the country’s political system and reality. Students’ provocative remarks typically pointed to the contradiction between teachings of the government’s upholding of democracy and justice, and the reality of human rights violations: “Teacher, this is not practical. Because we are observing that the government is killing, the government is arresting, innocent people, polite people. There is no justice.” (16)

These remarks challenged teachers as they knew that they must promote the ideas presented in the curriculum, while feeling responsible to address students’ concerns: “You play a reconciling role as a teacher. The text says ideology, the students say it is wrong, and you are in between” (28). This feeling of being caught in between the script and the reality was often perceived as an unresolvable dilemma: “They (the students) see in the outside and real world that the police is arresting, killing, torturing citizens. […] I have no right just to pretend the government in the classroom, but at the same time I am observing, and they are observing truth. So, this is a challenge, how can I just tell the truth?” (16). Similarly, one of Riggan’s (2020, para. 51) respondents stated that “the students are not afraid, but the teachers are afraid.” In fact, teachers felt uncomfortable presenting an imposed reality and shutting down students, but simultaneously knew that they needed to avoid exposure to critical discussions: “Sometimes, the students ask about the issue of the government. Simply, you drop it. […] You cannot make it understandable for the students” (3). Others presented political content “…cautiously, very careful[ly]” (16), avoided giving examples (2), and were discreet with the words they used to not express political opinions. Another solution was to explicitly shut down political questions of students directly, by for example saying “I don’t like politics. So, leave this question, please” (18). Avoiding dialogue with students and denying their questions restricted the establishment of genuine relationships between students and teachers. This plays into the agenda of the government, as critical dialogue might be more likely to happen if teachers and students have a trustful relationship (3, 7, 9, 12).

Despite the pervasiveness of authoritarian practices, a few teachers employed subtle strategies to inspire students to think outside of the script. These included adhering to the curricula while using its content to spark reflections on Ethiopia’s political situation without addressing it directly. CEE teachers presented a concept, such as democracy or fair elections, and had students analyse the difference between the concept and the reality in Ethiopia (28). International examples, like Nelson Mandela’s quotes, were used to encourage students not to blame previous regimes for mistakes (4). History teachers used examples such as the Russian revolution and the European industrial revolutions to illustrate the possibility of change (1). Others contrasted the advantages and disadvantages of previous regimes: “‘Don't always blame the Derg Regime. Try to find out important measures taken by them’” (7).
A few teachers directly encouraged students to do better in the future, and to stand up against corruption and election fraud both as citizens and potential leaders (16). The modification of curricula was an important strategy, for example by using own material from sources that they deemed reliable, shortening the textbooks, adjusting false information, and preparing own handouts. One teacher disclosed to sometimes tell students after class that what he just taught represents the government’s view and not the reality (7). These examples demonstrate that

Ethiopian teachers are not necessarily stuck in a state of anomie and, despite all limitations, can negotiate space for criticism while taking risks. However, the above-mentioned teachers faced the consequences of their resistance. Two of them were imprisoned. While one of them claimed not to be afraid, his colleague who led protests for Oromo rights as a student and was already detained at university was intimidated and declared: “I have to refrain from being a frontman for myself and for the rights of others” (7). Others were attacked and punished by the school administration and received reprimands like: “’You are teaching students […] in a bad manner. Why you don't say that there is democracy here in Ethiopia?’” (19) or “'Why you are doing this? You are simply a teacher, teach your subject and go out.'” (16).

The control mechanisms left little space to manoeuvre for teachers, resulting in teachers' frustration: “Teachers are not satisfied. Because they want to involve, they want to talk something, what they believe, in the classroom.” (16). Some of them complained that students were unable to develop creativity and critical thinking skills due the targeted undermining of critical remarks: “Coming up with a new thing is taboo. […] To go out of the box is considered rude, and always they teach the students to be silent, to be cool, to be hiding.” (12). When asked how their work would change if schools were free from the government's political intervention, teachers expressed that they would then build genuine relationships with their students and finally teach “the reality” (7). Quotes like “It would give me comfort, to do my job interested, and allow me to be free” (32) and the vision of teaching “freely without fear” (1) illustrate the tremendous impact that authoritarian control has on teachers' everyday work. Many teachers expressed that the constant pressure led them to consider leaving the teaching profession, as this quote exhibits: “I just dream how to escape from this profession. With such poor feeling, how can I teach? […] It is mind-slavery, it is not easy for expression.” (12).

In sum, teachers work in an ambivalent education system where politics are omnipresent, yet where teachers are sanctioned for political discussions or disloyalty, in an overall “pervasive climate of fear” (Rawlence, 2010, p. 10)

6 Conclusion

Drawing from qualitative research in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, we have shown that authoritarian governments can manipulate regular forms of educational governance to ensure teachers' compliance with its political agenda. EPRDF did so by installing a comprehensive system of surveillance that involves complex disciplining and punishing mechanisms. Tabooing of political topics in schools is not only another way of governing teachers' behaviour but creates a challenging tension for teachers due to the highly politicised school environment. Moreover, as ‘politics’ is perceived as binary, any act of critical discussion becomes an oppositional activity. Further contradictions between curricula and lived realities add to these tensions. Curricula praise active citizenship and glorify EPRDF's coming to power through protests, yet discourage protest and critical political participation (Yamada, 2011). Curricula promote participatory student-centred learning including discussions while “teachers are disengaged from participatory learning activities such as debate and dialogue because they do not care/dare to touch political issues either appreciating or disregarding the existing political system because of presumed consequences.” (Ayalew, 2017). We identified a double bind between ‘modern’ student-centred interactive curricula and the taboo of freely discussing any political matter.

Student-centred methods are part of global educational architecture, transferred to many countries and applied to different degrees (Altinyelken, 2015). They can become part of wider authoritarian legitimising strategies, and teachers must navigate through the immanent tensions when these methods are formally prescribed but informally prohibited. This key finding deserves attention in further research.

While most teachers complied with the government's political agenda by teaching regime-friendly curricula or keeping silent, some teachers managed to teach alternatives to the government's ideology or organise protests. Teachers embody the described tensions and contradictions between curriculum and reality. They are the first recipients of students' confusion, frustration and anger (Ayalew, 2017; Riggan, 2020), as they are (supposed to be) the state's front-line stronghold against any opposition. The government's "fear of further antiregime mobilisation" (Brechenmacher, 2017, p. 74) translates into fear in the classroom (Riggan, 2020). However, suppressing dissident voices in the classroom does not eliminate these voices or thoughts. In fact, the frustration of constantly running into 'political secularism' might fuel students' anger and oppositional attitudes instead of oppressing them.

The described school climate of fear isolated teachers from both their students and peers. Left with little options for support, many teachers were stuck in a state of anomie. Consequently, they were not only frustrated and dissatisfied but feared for their lives. Simultaneously, teachers occupy an ambivalent position within the government's authoritarian practices. On the one hand, they self-regulate and exercise self-censorship to avoid sanctions. On the other hand, 'docile' teachers can function as informants themselves, advancing their political loyalty to seek rewards and career progress. Teachers are not only governed but are inadvertently part of the disciplinary structures. Our findings thus indicate that disciplining teachers is not only about "repression", a term frequently connoted with authoritarianism, but rather about making teachers a productive force in a wider assemblage of authoritarian legitimisation and regime stabilisation. Due to the outlined binarism, compliance with the government makes teachers agents of the government's political agenda. Non-compliance turns them into agents of opposition. Ethiopian teachers, or at the very least the teachers we spoke to, cannot escape politics. Their agency is heavily strained and conflicted, situated between the defiance of authoritarian control and its reproduction. Moreover, Ethiopian teachers have received their education and spend their working life under almost 30 years of EPRDF's authoritarianism, and maybe even under the previous military dictatorship. Despite criticism and willingness for change, teachers might have internalised political secularism and the principle of binary politics. Consequently, teachers' capacity to deal with a variety of viewpoints or to promote critical, nuanced political dialogue could be inhibited. For Ethiopian students, this means limited access to nuanced dialogue on the political reality, leaving them with little opportunities to acquire skills to deal with diversity and conflict, while simultaneously fuelling frustration and grievances. Our engagement with secondary data showed that many of the dynamics we unpacked were present in other regions as well, which suggests that the patterns exposed in this study can to some degree be applied more generally to other Ethiopian regions. Further research would be necessary to corroborate these patterns and detect specific differences between Ethiopian regions.

Our findings demonstrate that educational policymakers ought to acknowledge the challenges that teachers face under authoritarian regimes and reconsider high expectations on teachers as agents for peace(building) and societal transformation. "Open, balanced discussion of a range of evidence and opinions" (Harber, 2014, p. 89), a common way of political learning for democracy, is a difficult standard in such circumstances. The current armed conflict in Northern Ethiopia, widespread violence of governmental police forces, rise of violent ethnic clashes and repeated arbitrary arrests of political prisoners in 2020 (Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2021b) speak for an aggravation of these circumstances since the time of data collection. In addition, the massive increase of attacks on schools and universities in Northern Ethiopia (Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2021a, 2021b) and the protracted COVID-19-related school closures (Teferra, Muchie, & Kidanu, 2021) suggest immense challenges for teachers.

Education programmes by international organisations that focus on teachers frequently prioritise general challenges such as low salary or teacher professional development, while the challenges resulting from with authoritarian control are rarely addressed. We believe that the nexus between authoritarianism and armed conflict has strong implications for the fast-growing education in emergencies sector. Discussions on trauma and well-being of teachers and students in conflict-affected contexts can benefit from going beyond the focus on armed conflict by considering the impacts of authoritarianism. We thus argue that educational interventions in authoritarian environments need to address the political dynamics of fear, mistrust, and control in schools in order to support teachers effectively. Ignoring these dynamics might not only lead to unsuccessful interventions, but risks to put teachers in substantial danger.

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Annex

List of interviewees

Nr.	Function	Date
1	History teacher ETA representative of school 1	09-10-2018; 13-11-2018
2	Geography teacher	09-10-2018
3	History teacher	12-10-2018
4	CEE	10-10-2018
5	Mathematics teacher	10-10-2018
6	CEE teacher	12-10-2018
7	History teacher	12-10-2018, 13-11-2018
8	History teacher	23-10-2018
9	History teacher	25-10-2018
10	CEE teacher	25-10-2018
11	History teacher	25-10-2018
12	Economics teacher	26-10-2018
13	HPE teacher (in focus group discussion with four teachers)	26-10-2018
14	Geology teacher	26-10-2018
15	English teacher	30-10-2018
16	CEE teacher	30-10-2018
17	English teacher	01-11-2018
18	English teacher	01-11-2018
19	CEE teacher	01-11-2018
20	History teacher	02-11-2018
21	History teacher	02-11-2018
22	Chemistry teacher (in focus group discussion with three teachers)	02-11-2018
23	English teacher (in focus group discussion with three teachers)	02-11-2018
24	Health and physical education teacher	05-11-2018
25	English teacher	05-11-2018
26	English teacher	07-11-2018
27	History teacher	07-11-2018
28	CEE teacher	06-11-2018
29	Geology teacher	09-11-2018
30	English teacher (in focus group discussion with four teachers)	09-11-2018
31	History teacher	09-11-2018
32	Economics teacher	09-11-2018
33	History teacher	06-11-2018
34	ETA representative, school 2	26-10-2018
35	ETA representative, school 4	05-11-2018
36	Principal, school 1	11-10-2018
37	Principal, school 3	01-11-2018
38	Principal, school 4	06-11-2018
39	Vice principal, school 4	09-11-2018
40	Coordinator for CEE at Addis Ababa Education Bureau	10-10-2018