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"They Have Stolen Our Land" Enclosure, Commodification and Patterns of Human-Environment Relations among Afar Pastoralists in Northeastern Ethiopia

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“THEY HAVE STOLEN OUR LAND” Enclosure, Commodification and Patterns of Human-Environment Relations among Afar Pastoralists in Northeastern Ethiopia

Asebe Regassa, Georg Klute, Mohammed Detona

Abstract: This paper takes enclosure and commodification processes of “nature” one step beyond a political economy perspective conceptualising them from ontological notions of nature-culture relations. Taking the case of enclosure for large-scale commercial agriculture schemes and a game reserve in northeastern Ethiopia, the paper argues that enclosure and nature commodification are part of neoliberal environmental governance that has been built on the notion of subduing nature and subaltern groups into the power of capitalism. More specifically, while the economic and political dimensions of these processes are salient, the ontological notions of the nature-culture dualism has been invoked by states in their justification of expropriating pastoralist lands, thus nullifying indigenous people’s claim to ancestral homelands. The data for this paper was collected from 2013 to 2016 through ethnographic fieldwork, mainly conducted by the authors. The findings show oscillating perceptions of human-environment relations among the Afar pastoralists: from human-environment, conjointly constituted by humans and non-humans, to the utilitarian dualist approach of environmental use which is mainly caused by the infiltration of capitalist economy and state driven development and conservation projects.

Keywords: *Enclosure, Nature Commodification, Dualism, Mutualism, Afar/Ethiopia*

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Introduction

Most of the literature on state and non-state actors' encroachment to pastoralist areas in Africa emphasise the socio-economic and political impact of the new rush for the acquisition of pastoralist land (Abbink 2011; Lavers 2012; Makki 2012). We concur with the notion that the practices of nature commodification and monetisation that characterise the capitalistic mode of production, have been spreading even to peripheral regions in Africa, where typically pastoralist groups are to be found. The impact of such capitalist encroachment on the socio-economic, cultural, ecological and political realms of pastoral societies have become evident. The new wave of a scramble for land in Africa in general and in the Ethiopian lowlands in particular, has enhanced the enclosure of formerly communal lands for state and non-state economic or conservation purposes, and in doing so contributes to changes in the perceptions of humans and their place in nature.

However, we depart from the mainstream "land grab" literature on two fundamental grounds. First, recent discourses on large-scale development projects in Africa underline the salient power of development actors (state and non-state). By contrast, they hardly mention local communities and their agency, particularly those at the periphery of the state (Lavers 2012; Tache 2013). By conceptualising the state as a situated and negotiated institution on the one hand, and by recognising the agency of local communities in contesting and negotiating external intervention, on the other, we move beyond the victimisation discourse towards understanding state-society relations as negotiated even within hierarchically ordered relationships (Migdal 2004). Second, literature on "land grabbing," new enclosure and the territorialisation of pastoral lands rarely probe into the ontological notions of human-environment relations. Rather, they delve into the themes from the political economy perspective situating the phenomenon within global and national political and economic interests of actors, including those of nation states. While this line of argument contributes to the broader knowledge of agrarian politics in developing countries as part of the interconnectedness of global-local phenomena, a further conceptualisation of the new enclosure and commodification of nature within discourses of nature-society relations would contribute to a better understanding of how capitalism reproduces dominant narratives and entrenches itself

into society. According to Merchant (2003), the dominant discourse of nature-culture dualism reinforces destructive human practices and actions over the environment by converting these to monetary values in the form of extractive economies (e.g., logging and mining). Moreover, the practices of territorialisation and enclosure in the form of nature conservation were rooted in the convergence of nature commodification (tourism) and nature-culture dualism (delineating humans from non-humans) (Brockington et al. 2008; Regassa 2016).

The key points of this paper resonate around positioning the new forms of enclosure and commodification of nature within the post-enlightenment discourse of nature-culture dualism. Enlightenment, science, technology and capitalism contributed to the new conception of "civilizing nature." that "targets transforming undeveloped nature into a state of civility, producing a reclaimed Garden of Eden" (Merchant 2003: 65). Whether it is the late 19th century establishment of national parks in the USA that spread to colonial Africa or the new wave of the enclosure of communal pastoral lands through capitalist privatisation and/or state ownership, it entails the exercise of the dominant narrative that separates a certain group of people – depicted as less civilised – from nature that is considered to be mastered, subdued, protected and utilised for human consumption. In this context, the resettlement of Native Americans to reservations in the United States during the late 19th century, for example, was aimed at "taming" both the people and their land and to subdue the earth to capitalism (Merchant 2003).

Discourses of nature conservation and enclosure for large-scale agricultural projects entail the application of different technologies of power in managing people and nature. In their discussion of neoliberal biodiversity conservation, Büscher et al. (2012) juxtapose aspects of the conservation and commodification of nature – the latter through complex chains of capitalist extractivism such as mining, agricultural enclosure, biofuel production, ecotourism and so on – with the extractivist view of nature. While the conservation dimension of neoliberal nature calls for "saving nature through their submission to capital," the extractivist notion hints at "a way of reworking environmental governance and entrenching commodification of nature" through extractive economies (Büscher et al. 2012: 4). From the broader nature-culture perspective, the discourse and the practices

of delineating humans from nature are rooted in the dualist ontology that considers humans not only as external to nature, but also as capable of dominating, subjugating, transforming and civilising it (Descola 2013). Most of the literature on society-nature relations deals with the question of how competing narratives of the place of humans in nature influence environmental conservation (Cronon 1996, Neumann 1998, Brockington et al. 2008). Understanding the nexus between the dualist human-environment relations, the capitalist political economy and the emerging wave of nature commodification and enclosure, however, deserves a critical academic interrogation to which this paper attempts to contribute.

The notion of nature-culture dualism resonates not only around the separation of both realms, but presupposes also a human dominion/mastery and stewardship over nature that Pálsson (1996) conceptualises as orientalism and paternalism. It presumes that "rational" human beings control and "protect" the environment from "irrational" human action. However, there is a dialectical contradiction between discourses of wilderness conservation and neoliberal economy. From the neoliberal economy perspective, everything is turned into "exchange value (into commodities of exchange that can be traded)" (Büscher et al. 2012: 8). As Castree (2010) elucidates, built on the principle of profit maximisation and based on Adam Smith's notions of human progressive evolution from hunting and gathering to trade and commerce, capitalism enhances the appropriation of resources (land, labour, livestock etc.) from people portrayed as inhabiting the lower level in the modernist pyramid of civilisation – that are hunting and gathering and pastoralist communities. In the process, societies engaged in hunting, gathering and pastoralism have been expropriated from their land and resources in order to accelerate the expansion of capitalism. Enclosure and the commodification of nature are thus highly interconnected with capitalist extractivism. Harvey (2003) notes that enclosure is at the heart of *accumulation by dispossession* by expropriating peasants, pastoralists and agro-pastoralists from their land. Accumulation by dispossession is "the process by which land and other resources are enclosed, and their previous users dispossessed, for the purposes of capital accumulation" (Hall 2013: 1583). Apart from economic interests and modernist reasons by which the livelihood of pastoral and agro-pastoral communities are transformed through a transfer

of land to investors, enclosure hinges at the practice of detaching people from their culturally embedded environment, and in doing so, reinforces the separation of humans from non-humans.

By taking the enclosure and commodification of nature in the Afar national regional state in northeastern Ethiopia as a case, this paper analyses how these phenomena have been interconnected to the notions of nature-culture dualism and how they changed patterns of human-environment interactions among the Afar. The Ethiopian case is interesting for two reasons. First, despite the government's inclination towards the developmental state paradigm, its practice of transferring large areas of fertile land to domestic and international investors shows how it grapples with the two competing political and economic discourses – the developmental state discourse and the neoliberal discourse. Second, Ethiopia is a state in which centre-periphery relations have been dichotomously created, reproduced and articulated, by using narratives depicting the periphery as empty, vacant, wasteland, backward, violent and in some instances as wilderness (Markakis 2011; Turton 2011). By contrast, the state considers the pastoralist frontiers also as a resource that awaits the combined forces of technology, capital, and labour that may convert them into productive commodities. Such a modernist discourse of denigrating the pastoralist frontiers as empty and backward, on the one hand, and recognizing the potential of the frontiers as productive resources, on the other, promotes the notion of redeeming "backward" nature and subjects.

This paper argues that the new wave of the enclosure and commodification of nature in pastoralist regions of Ethiopia, including the Afar region, is ontologically rooted both in the nature-culture dualist and in neoliberal environmentalism discourses that constitute the ideology and techniques of environmental governance. Neoliberal environmental governance entails the exercise of hegemonic knowledge and power to counter the stifling resistance from previous resource users and owners of the territory. This is in line with what Agrawal states: neoliberal governmentality enhances the creation of governable subjects through the exercise of disciplinary and/or sovereign power – education, rhetoric, repertoires such as development, conservation and tourism, and coercion (Agrawal 2005:15). The paper further argues that external intervention is not

a direct translation of policies and programmes into practices, rather it is negotiated and contested at the local level by local communities who perceive, define and understand it from their own indigenous knowledge, perspectives and experiences (Long 2001; Berkes 2008). This paper thus probes into local communities' interpretations of external intervention and how they negotiate and contest the large-scale cotton plantation scheme and game reserve. The data for this paper was collected from 2013 to 2016 through ethnographic fieldwork in local Afar communities.

The second part of this paper analyses the context of the Afar pastoralists, focusing particularly on their notions of human-environment interactions and how these change in the process of land enclosure. In the third section, we synchronise the empirical data and theoretical frameworks and analyse the nexus between enclosure, commodification of nature and notions of human-environment interactions. In the final section, we offer a brief conclusion.

Caught Between two Competing Epistemologies: The Afar and State Encroachment

The Afar pastoralist people in northeastern Ethiopia have experienced remarkable changes in their ways of life, interactions with the environment and perceptions on human-nonhuman relations. These shifts can be attributed to extensive development and conservation projects introduced to the region during the 1960s. As a result, the Afar pastoralists have been and are exposed to global economic forces that eventually reinforced a value change in the people's perception of non-human beings from the principles of conjointly constituted to a hierarchically ordered and dualist model of nature-culture relations.

The Afar pastoralists adjoin the Somali to the southeast and Djibouti to the east, Karayu Oromo to the south, Amhara national regional state and Tigrai national regional state to the west and north. The Afar region is one of the hottest inhabited places on earth, with temperatures exceeding 50°C and less than 200mm rainfall per annum (Davies and Bennett 2007). The majority of the Afar depend on livestock and livestock products for food, social relations and cultural rituals. As elsewhere in pastoralist regions in Ethiopia and sub-Saharan Africa,

the livelihood of Afar pastoralists is highly interconnected to their environment (pasture, water, ritual spaces, animals), which in turn is under pressure from internal and external forces (state encroachment, conservation projects, variability in rainfall, inter-group conflict, non-state development actors and so on).

Traditionally, the Afar pastoralists had indigenous rules of resource governance. Clan elders controlled and moderated access to pasture, water wells and other resources in overseeing how members of the clan utilise the resources. However, they never restricted members of other clans to access pastures for their livestock because they believe that "the deaths are attributed to those who imposed the restrictions" (Schmidt and Pearson 2016: 25), if cattle die as a result of restrictions, thus affecting future reciprocity and inter-group relations. Among the Afar pastoralists, cutting trees was traditionally forbidden except through permission from clan elders during drought times for animal fodder. Individuals who happened to transgress the rules of environmental management faced punishment sanctioned by clan elders and implemented by all members of the community. Traditionally, the Afar had cultural, mythical, spiritual and economic representations of the land. According to oral traditions, there was no clearly delineated boundary between people, wild animals and other non-human creatures. Rather, all species were perceived as interconnected and categories were made for the convenience of identifying animal or plant species in terms of their cultural, spiritual, economic and other significance. The Afar did not consider land to be an individual property; land was a common resource for all members of the clan to which access was regulated through indigenous rules of environmental management (fieldwork in Afar 2014).

However, since the 1960s Afar pastoralists faced continuous state encroachment to their land. During the 1960s and early 1970s, Haile Selassie's regime gave concessions to international companies who established cotton, banana and sugar cane plantations in the Awash valley through irrigation. Among the major companies, the Tendaho cotton plantation, owned by the British firm Mitchell Cotts, and the Wonji Sugar plantation, and the Dutch company HVA, are some of them. The irrigation companies bulldozed much of the riparian forests along the Awash River that supported Afar pastoralists as dry season grazing land in the past (Behnke and Kerven 2013). These

irrigation schemes were nationalised following the 1975 land reform proclamation under the military regime that nationalised all rural land. Referring to the extent of irrigated land in the 1980s during the military regime, Behnke and Kerven (2013: 58) state that "over a third of all Awash valley irrigable land is already irrigated, which amounts to just about half of all the land that is presently under irrigation in Ethiopia (48,311 irrigated hectares out of a national total of 107,265 hectares)". Clapham (2006) adds that the Awash Valley Development Unit and the Chilalo Agricultural Development Unit resulted in the displacement of Afar and Karayu pastoralists, as well as of Arsi Oromo peasants in the 1960s and 1970s. During the military regime, tens of thousands of Afar and Karayu pastoralists were driven from their dry season pastures. Regarding this, Hoyt (1994: 186) argues, "in Ethiopia's Awash Valley, irrigation systems for sugar cane, cotton and banana plantations destroyed the valley's rich flood plains.... To make way for the plantations, 20,000 people were expropriated from their lands, mostly without compensation." Relocation of pastoralist people in the region still continues under the current government as massive development and conservation projects are underway.

The regime change in 1991 that ousted the military regime and brought to power the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) had introduced a new political and economic order in the country. Above all, the peripheral regions in Ethiopia's lowlands such as Afar, Gambella, Benishangul Gumuz and South Omo valley have become major hotspots of domestic and international concessions through agribusiness projects. In this regard, Afar continues to be one of the peripheries where state and non-state development and conservation actors converge for mega-projects, such as the state owned Tendaho sugar cane plantation and sugar factory, national parks, or privately owned animal ranching underway in Gawane district in Afar region. Apart from large-scale concessions for agro-business and state run development projects, the new land rights policy that promotes private holdings of land restricts access to communal natural resources in the pastoralist areas. Under the guise of encouraging farming, the government has resorted to creating private enclosures of previously communal grazing lands (Schmidt and Pearson 2016). Schmidt and Pearson (2016: 28) further argue that the government builds on the dominant narratives of depicting the area as empty and uses the rhetoric of providing education, health services and clean

water to the pastoralist communities as instruments of imposing its sedentarisation and resettlement programmes. In doing so, it makes the society legible to its bureaucratic administration and control. Apart from the sedentarisation programme that contributed to disrupting traditional settlement patterns of the Afar pastoralists, the government established administrative units at the village level through which it manages and controls the people, and channels its polices.

Traditional grazing lands of Afar pastoralists were enclosed not only by large-scale irrigation schemes, but also through national parks and game reserves. We consider the latter as another strategy through which the state expropriates communal lands and turns them into state owned areas. While irrigation schemes were introduced under the three successive regimes, all of whom used the modernist discourse of developing and transforming the peripheries, protected areas were established as a move towards subduing nature by delineating humans from non-humans. At the same time, the declared economic aim of protected areas was converting them to human consumption, mainly through tourism. One of the oldest national parks in Ethiopia, for example, the Awash national park located partly in the Afar region, was established within the dominant discourse of conserving wilderness from human influence; its establishment and management followed a strict protectionist approach in 1966 (Regassa 2016). Since then, Yangudi Rassa national park (4,731 km^2) and Mille-Serdo Wild Ass Reserve (8,766 km^2) were established as protected areas within the Afar region in 1969 and officially recognised in 2002 (Moehlman et al. 2015).

In the past decades, Afar pastoralists have been caught between different competing forces, perspectives, epistemologies and practices. On the one hand, their land was incorporated into the national and global economy as well as the global politics of conservation; this, in turn, brought about changes in their resource management regimes, human-environment interactions and the territorialisation/enclosure of Afar lands. The capitalist economy, spearheaded by the state and followed by multinational corporations introduced notions of private land ownership and a commodification of resources, including eco-tourism, waged labour, or cash crop production. Referring to the consequences of the emulation by successive regimes of development models and ideals from abroad, Clapham (2006) argues that Ethiopian

governments introduced development models without contextualising and adapting them to local realities and as a result they all face failure. Scott (1998) adds that modernist projects, as for instance Ethiopia's massive villagisation programme under the military regime in the 1980s, fail because attempts at social re-engineering introduce policies and programmes that denigrate indigenous epistemologies and wisdom.

On the other hand, the Afar pastoralists are grappling with the changing conditions in their indigenous traditions, wisdom and practices to maintain the coexistence between humans and non-humans in their environment. Although the Afar people still maintain environmental values, beliefs and knowledge, there are evident changes in their perception of their relation with nature, particularly among the youth. The change in their perception of human-environment interactions, from a mutually constituted to a utilitarian dualist perspective, is mainly caused by the infiltration of capitalist economy and state driven development and by conservation projects.

The Afar and their Experiences with Development and Conservation Projects

State expansion and the consolidation of power in Ethiopia's pastoral peripheries began in the 1960s with two seemingly competing, but often complementary phenomena: nature conservation and large-scale agribusiness schemes. However, both phenomena entail the commodification of nature in the form of tourism and commercial agriculture (Brockington et al. 2008). The Ethiopian governments established nature conservation areas adopting the protectionist approach that was diffused to colonial Africa during the colonial era in the 19th and 20th centuries. The Awash national park and the Haladagi game reserve in the Afar region were established in the late 1960s following this protectionist approach. During the same period, however, large-scale agribusiness schemes such as sugar cane and cotton plantations were introduced in the same region (Clapham 2006).

The Afar pastoralists who live adjacent to the Haladagi game reserve have recently become under pressure by sugar cane plantations and

newly built irrigation schemes encroaching their pastoral land. The Haladagi game reserve, around which most of our fieldwork was conducted, was established in 1969 for the conservation of various species, among them the (nearly extinct) wild ass. Because of the enclosure for the game reserve, the pastoralists were restricted from accessing pasture and water for the livestock within the reserve. Haladagi is a vast grassland in Afar regional state where both Afar and Issa pastoralists graze their livestock. Because of its proximity to the Awash River, Haladagi serves as dry season grazing land for both groups. According to local community members, Haladagi grazing land is now apportioned into three: one part for the game reserve, one for the sugar cane plantation, and the third for the pastoralists. In addition, there are also other agribusiness and livestock ranching projects in the vicinity run by private or state investors.

The large-scale sugar cane plantation project near Haladagi is actually an extension of the Tendaho Sugar Plantation, which is currently in a phase of massive expansion following the government's emphasis to increase sugar production as part of its Growth and Transformation Plan. In the process of implementing its programmes, the government approached local elites, clan elders, *kebele* (local administrative unit) administrators, and district officials all of whom were co-opted to the government's policies through individual benefits for their loyalty. State agents ordered local people not to trespass the enclosures (both sugar cane and conservation enclosures), even during hardship times when drought critically threatens the lives of their livestock (fieldwork in Afar 2015–16). Along the Awash River, where Afar and Issa pastoralists used to graze their livestock during the dry season or to where they used to retreat during drought periods, irrigation schemes have completely bulldozed the grazing land and disrupted the ecosystem (see also Davies and Bennett 2007). In fact, such environmentally destructive development schemes were introduced into the areas already during the imperial regime, continued under the military rule and are still being practiced by today's developmental state regime. All three regimes share in common that they detach the Afar pastoralists from the most fertile parts of their grazing land and from important water supplies (i.e., the Awash river), separating them thereby from cultural spaces with the aim to promote modernist development projects and conservation practices.

In the last twenty years under the current government, the pastoralists have been told to sell their livestock, reduce the number of their animals to five to ten per household and to adopt modern techniques of animal husbandry. This claim in fact means that the Afar were urged to give up their pastoralist way of life. “The government people told us to settle in one place and to reduce the number of our herds. They said you do it for your own development” (Hassan and Haladagi 2014). However, for the Afar pastoralists, livestock herding is intertwined with their identity, culture and livelihood. The government’s claim to restrict the number of livestock therefore affects not only the Afar’s economy. It also concerns their social, cultural and identities attached to herding. Livestock herding among the Afar is culturally constituted and denotes rituals that are performed according to Afar environmental knowledge with the aim to maintain a balanced relation between the human and non-human spheres. In any case, the Afar pastoralists in Haladagi are sandwiched between the Haladagi game reserve, the sugar plantation and various other smaller state and private projects; as a result, they face severe restrictions in accessing resources in the enclosures.

Local communities reflect on their memories tracing back to the time when wild animals grazed with their herds without any sort of predation on the latter. While this memory may well be a romanticised remembrance of the past, they also express their observations how this coexistence changed over time into hostility. One elder narrated the changing as follows:

> “In the past those animals like zebras, lions and many others came to the villages and we never heard of predators attacking our cattle. Lions eat wild animals and they knew our cattle. Zebras graze together with our cattle. Hyenas never attacked our cattle. But now, I don’t know if this curse came with these projects, but the animals became enemies to our cattle. Now, a single hyena can pull down a big camel. Can you imagine that? This is not normal. Our herds became weak. Of course they are weak because they don’t get enough pasture and water. What shall we do? Our challenges are many. Wild animals, project people, drought, expensive living conditions. We live under such challenges!” (Afar elder, Gawane, March 2015).

The above sentiment hints at the dynamics of human-nonhuman interactions and attributes the changing relations between the Afar, their livestock and wildlife to the introduction of modernist projects that detached nature from culture. Other interviewees also associated today's aggressive behaviour of wildlife against their livestock to the decline of Afar's rituals that are no longer practiced as they used to be before. These rituals are meant to foster a harmonious coexistence between the people, their herds, wild game or, more generally, non-humans.

> "Nowadays, the park people kill wild animals. It is the same people who are supposed to protect them! But also our people go hunting for the sake of money. This is why we are now cursed by Allah. There is less and less rain" (Momine, Haladagi 2014).

Afar pastoralists' everyday experiences with the government's conservation and development projects or with private agribusinesses are actually part of the broader centre-periphery relations in the country that are built on asymmetrical power relations with the centre having a monopoly on resources, power and knowledge. By introducing conservation and development projects built on the hegemonic narratives of conserving the wilderness and transforming untamed resources into economic commodities, the state reserves to itself the prerogative of deciding how local communities ought and actually are forced to interact with nature.

Enclosure and Nature Commodification as Forms of Separating People from Nature

Central to the analysis of this paper are two interconnected conceptualisations. First, enclosure and nature commodification are coproduced within the political economy and ontological notions of the nature-culture dualism. Second, the interplay between competing epistemologies produces new forms of human-environment interactions and perceptions. In this section, we synchronise these conceptual dispositions with empirical data from Afar and analyse the issues from the point of view of human-environment relations. These two conceptualisations hint at the dynamic nature of human perceptions of the environment that are simultaneously shaped

by global economic forces and different notions of nature-culture relations. Empirically, the Afar pastoralists seem to respond to and negotiate with these emerging phenomena in their surroundings.

From a land grabbing perspective, scholars conceptualised enclosure and commodification as processes of capital accumulation or, as Harvey (2003) notes, as accumulation by dispossession. In this line of argument, state and non-state actors accumulate wealth at the expense of local communities who are dispossessed of their ancestral lands (Makki 2012; Lavers 2012). When we move this argument further into its ontological dispositions, notions of enclosure and commodification are not merely economic processes of capital accumulation through dispossession, but are also inherently reflections on the discourse of human dominion over and control of nature and its capabilities of transforming externalised nature into commoditised objects through science, technology and capitalism (Merchant 2003).

In the case of Afar, for example, the enclosure and commodification of nature ensued in the 1960s through irrigation schemes and conservation projects both of which expropriated Afar pastoralists from their pasturelands. When protected areas were established in the 1960s and 1970s, the underlying narratives were depictions of the territories as wilderness, as well as empty land or *terra nullius*, both of which were built on the late 19th century's dualist epistemology behind the establishment of national parks in the United States (Brockington et al. 2008). This dualist epistemology was diffused to Africa during the colonial period and was practiced through the establishment of national parks, game reserves, sanctuaries, and forests reserves (Grove and Anderson 1996; Neumann 1998). In the colonial context, setting aside territories as protected areas created spaces of exception where native communities were excluded from these areas, whereas tourists, colonial officials, scientists and other privileged groups were given access to the "protected" spaces. The Ethiopian case is similar to the African colonies in that it created hierarchically ordered relations between humans and non-humans in which some groups are excluded while others are given privileged rights, for example under the guise of tourism.

Apart from delineating humans from non-humans, particularly from wildlife, national parks produce spaces of exceptionality. Although

access is restricted for local communities, parks are accessible for privileged categories of people deemed civilised or participating in civilising nature itself. An Afar elder reflected his memory of the early encounters with protected areas as follows:

> "In the past, we did not know such things like restriction of our people and our livestock from animals in the bush. All lived together and there was no problem. Our animals knew them, and they also knew the cattle. It was only rarely that lions attacked our cattle and that was only when bad omens had happened. People never killed the animals. We gave them water when we found sick or weak animals in the bush. But these people of the government came first during the imperial period and said your cattle should not mix with [wild] animals. They also restricted us from accessing forests and sacred spaces in the parks. Now came this irrigation and as a result, land became fragmented. People now consider land as money. It is no more under our clan. It is government people who decide to whom they want to give the land. They have stolen our land and gave it to investors. It is only the investors, the government people and tourists who have free access to the enclosed lands" (Mohammed, Gawane, February 2015).

For Afar elders like Mohammed, enclosure of their territory is more than the dispossession from economic resources. It also entails a deprivation from cultural spaces, ancestral home and the overall separation of a conjointly constituted sphere of humans and non-humans. It has brought asymmetrical power relations between the state, non-state development actors and conservationists, on the one hand, and Afar pastoralists, on the other; it hence has created categories of eligible and ineligible subjects with regard to access and entitlement to the environment that is now completely territorialised and fragmented. That is why Campbell (2005) notes that territorialisation and the enclosure of commons exacerbate the exclusion of some groups of people – namely, the local users of resources –, reconfiguring entitlement rights that finally give non-local actors, state and non-state alike, the right to control and utilise local resources.

From a political economy point of view, Harvey (2003) clearly argues that the new waves of enclosure in the form of large-scale agricultural

projects in developing countries constitute a process of extractivism and political control over subaltern groups. Enclosures in the form of protected areas or large-scale agribusiness projects, and the system of converting nature into a commodity for commercial purposes, for tourism for example, are central to the state's exercise of neoliberal environmental governance. As in the Afar case, this entails the exercise of technologies of power to create governable subjects and environments through their submission to capitalism (Agrawal 2005). Pursuing these notions of extractivism, the creation of governable subjects and territories and the separation of people from animals (wildlife), it is essential to position the argument within the dominant narrative of Ethiopia's centre-periphery relations in which the Afar represent the geographical, political and sociological periphery. Although geographical distance from the centre and the quasi absence of social services are salient features of the periphery, aspects of power relations between the centre and periphery, with the latter remaining at a subordinate position of power, are significant characteristics throughout the history of modern Ethiopia (Markakis 2011). In the dominant mainstream narrative in Ethiopia, the periphery has been and still is portrayed as empty land with people practicing backward cultural and economic ways of life. The government builds on such narratives in producing repertoires such as development, transformation, modernisation and welfare, thus justifying and legitimising state's interventions considering itself as redeemer of the people from the yoke of backwardness. In such a context, the state exercises techniques of power (hard and soft power – the practice of implementing state policies through coercion and persuasion, respectively), in the process of "managing" and "pacifying" the people at its margins (Das and Poole 2004). It coerces local communities in implementing its programmes and at times tries to convince them through education, training, rhetoric, promises and the like. Modernist states like Ethiopia also consider the sedentarisation of pastoralist communities as appropriate societal reengineering to put societies they consider backward onto the paths of modernisation and development (Scott 1998). According to Scott, modernist discourses and practices such as the villagisation programme under Ethiopia's military regime failed because they ignored local realities, contexts and knowledge (Scott 1998).

According to our Afar informants in and around the Haladagi wildlife reserve, the government has given unlimited rights to investors who can claim any communal land for investment purposes but striped the local people from their customary rights of resource utilisation. An elder emotionally mentioned that:

> "Government authorities always warn us not to touch these people even by our figure, even not to speak to them about any complaints regarding land. They told us that anybody who tries to disturb investors would be jailed. They imprisoned many people who tried to resist the transfer of land to investors. They don't call for public meetings. Rather, they invite two or three loyal individuals and then report as if it were decided and agreed upon by the whole community. These two or three people discuss with the government officials and announce to the public the decision. The government gives good positions and payment to all community elders. So they don't protest against government programmes. The elders are paid monthly salaries and other related things. They approve whatever decision comes from the government." (Anonymous informant, March 2015)

The government uses sovereign power – the power to decide on the life of subjects – and disciplinary power (i.e., pedagogies of creating governable subjects through practices of persuasion, negotiation, education, and co-optation) (Das and Poole 2004) – in its efforts to detach Afar pastoralists from their land. For all three successive regimes in Ethiopia, expropriating land from people in the peripheries has always been positioned within the discourse of transforming the "unruly" and "violent" people and the wilderness environment they inhabit into modernised, governable and transformed subjects and areas. It is a rhetoric that was and still is used as a systematic justification of the political and economic interests of the state to transform the peripheries. Because this dominant narrative does not recognise the people in the peripheries as the rightful owners and inhabitants of the land, an enclosure that restricts them from their land is justified as the state's sovereign right to exercise power over its inhabitants and territories. As an elderly woman from Gawane district close to the sugar plantation and the Haladagi wildlife reserve noted, "government authorities always tell us that the land belongs to the government not to the clans" (Woman, Gawane, May 2016). In

contrast to traditional customary rule through which clan members have access rights to pasture, water and other resources, the new approach nullifies Afar rights and transfers these to the government which, according to the notion of sovereign power, can decide upon not only the territories but also the life of the people. More specifically, the developmental state paradigm of the current Ethiopian government promotes a strong state system in which the government takes away land and other resources under the guise of development. According to the late Prime Minister Zenawi (2012), the developmental state works to inculcate the hegemony of development in the government system and among society so as to create subjects loyal to the developmental paradigm.

It should also be noted that external interventions and the interplay between competing notions of human-environment interactions coproduce new perspectives in human perceptions of the environment, enclosure and commodification of nature itself. In the Afar case for example, some people, in addition to the local elders many of whom are co-opted to government programmes, have departed from the traditional ways of understanding their relationship with nature. These people seem to shift to a mere utilitarian understanding of "nature." According to Davies and Bennett (2007), Afar pastoralists become more and more integrated into a monetary economy – they sell their livestock, or produce charcoal and supply markets. Although livestock herding still remains the defining feature of Afar identity, economy and social interaction, some people changed or have been forced to resort to small farming and wage labour in investment projects in order to sustain their life. As elsewhere in the areas of large-scale agribusiness projects in Ethiopia's peripheral regions, the government tries to gradually transform the ways of life of the people from pastoralism to sedentary agriculture or to engage them into wage labour in the projects, arguing in a clear-cut evolutionistic manner that mobile pastoralism rhymes with backwardness which Ethiopia needs to overcome (Zenawi 2011). Members of the local communities, particularly the youth who participated in focus-group discussions during fieldwork, emphasised their interest in joining development and investment projects as guards, daily labourers or, if possible, as permanent employees in the offices. Cutting trees for charcoal production is not only an economic shift, but hints also at patterns of ontological dynamics from a nature-culture mutualism to a dualist

orientation, exactly to what Pálsson (1996) has named the orientalist approach. This shift reflects a new perception of the environment that changes from considering the environment as part of their life to an understanding of it as a detached and externalised object that human beings can control and manoeuvre to their advantage.

But the shift in the human perception of the environment goes beyond an ontological shift from nature-culture mutualism to dualism. It also entails the practice of a utilitarian economy in the form of converting environmental resources into monetary values or commodities – for example, cutting trees for charcoal and killing wild animals for selling. Our empirical data from Afar youth clearly reveals such a shift as one of our informants asserts:

> "Our culture is very good in protecting wild animals and sacred trees. However, we should not remain poor for the sake of maintaining the culture. If we do not benefit from the animals [wild animals], what is their use? We should either benefit from tourism or we should be given the right to use the game reserve for our cattle as grazing land. The government people have taken our land, enclosed some areas for game reserve and transferred others to investors for agribusiness. We should benefit from these all, but nothing yet" (Anonymous youth informant, April 2015).

Different explanations might be given as causes for the shift in the perceptions of Afar pastoralists of their environment. On the one hand, due to the livelihood uncertainties and insecurity following the enclosure of their territories and resources, a number of Afar pastoralists at the proximity of these projects seem to have developed a utilitarian approach in their perceptions of and interactions with the environment. On the other, the shift in the human perception of the environment seems to stem from a general shift in people's understandings of their place in nature, which in turn is influenced by external and internal forces, such as economic transformation, the exposure to modern technologies and institutions, state and non-state actors' paedagogies of creating environmental subjects and the introduction of neoliberal and discursive notions of development.

According to the empirical data from the field, both perspectives describe the realities in Afar pastoralists' shifting perceptions and

engagement in their human-environment interactions. While the inclination of some local communities, particularly those in proximity of development projects or protected areas, towards utilitarian perspectives converges with the state's market driven human-environment relations, it should also be conceptualised as the agency of these local communities to manoeuvre and manipulate the political context of the "developmental state" to their advantage as a livelihood strategy as well as a means of accessing their own resources.

Conclusion

The practices and narratives behind enclosure and commodification processes of "nature" entail the exercise of hegemonic forms of knowledge in human-environment interactions. From the political economy point of view, it is the process of institutionalising capitalist notions of human dominion over nature that brings together human labour, capital and technology for the transformation of nature into a commodity for human utilisation. In this process, traditional economies such as pastoralism are presumed to give way to assumedly advanced economies. The narratives of creating enclosures free from human influence, particularly detaching indigenous communities from their home areas, are rooted in the ontological paradigm of nature-culture dualism, which again complements capitalist views of transforming nature for human consumption. Although some might presume that the establishment of protected areas is only meant to preserve nature in its natural context and cannot be explained in terms of capitalist utilitarian paradigms, the fact that game reserves, national parks and sanctuaries are used for tourism purposes hints at the nexus between nature conservation and capitalist utilitarianism through the commodification of nature.

The enclosure of Afar pastoralist territories in the form of game reserves and sugar cane plantations, and the conversion of nature into a commodity that can be exchanged for money (tourism, land lease, charcoal production, livestock marketing, etc.) are forms of neoliberal environmental governance, which subjugates nature to human control through discourse, capital, technology and labour. The convergence of competing perspectives on human-environment interactions, together with the restriction imposed on Afar pastoralists' access to resources, seems to have induced a shift in the perceptions, particularly among

the youth, from a conjointly constituted paradigm to a utilitarian approach of human-environment relations. We therefore conclude that human-environment interactions and the people's understanding of their place in nature are socio-culturally produced and influenced by their iterative engagement with internal and external forces and processes.

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