# Table of Contents

Table of Contents.............................................................................................................. 1

List of Illustrations.......................................................................................................... iv

Declaration........................................................................................................................ v

Acknowledgement ........................................................................................................... vi

Acronyms .......................................................................................................................... viii

Summary ............................................................................................................................ ix

Part One .............................................................................................................................. 1

   The Research Settings, Methodology and Theoretical Frameworks ................................ 1

   Introduction .................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter One ...................................................................................................................... 3

   Setting the Context and Methodological Frameworks .................................................. 3

   1.1. The Problematic of Protected Areas Conservation .............................................. 3

   1.1.1. Some Conceptual Debates on the Politics of Nature Conservation .............. 3

   1.1.2. Problematizing Conservation Enclosure in Ethiopia ..................................... 9

   1.1.3. Situating the Debate of Enclosure within the Post-1991 Political Reconfiguration 16

   A Point of Departure .................................................................................................... 20

   1.2. Research Questions .............................................................................................. 24

   1.3. Methodological Frameworks ................................................................................. 26

   1.3.1. The Research Framework and the Choice of Methodological Perspectives .... 26

   1.3.2. Methodological Approaches and Methods .................................................... 31

   1.3.3. The Challenge of Encountering Competing Actors in the Field .................. 38

   1.4. Actor-Oriented Approach as Analytical Concept .............................................. 46

   1.5. Ethical Considerations .......................................................................................... 48

   1.6. Structure of the Work ......................................................................................... 50

Chapter Two ..................................................................................................................... 52

   Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks ................................................................ 52

   2.1. Conceptual Frameworks ..................................................................................... 52

   2.2. Theoretical Frameworks ..................................................................................... 55

   2.2.1. Notions of Nature-Culture Debates: Dualism vs. Mutualism ...................... 55

   2.2.2. Political Ecology of Conservation ................................................................. 75

Chapter Three .................................................................................................................. 94

   The Study Area, the People and their Relations to the Land .................................... 94

   3.1. The Study Area .................................................................................................... 94

   3.2. The People and their Land .................................................................................. 98

   3.2.1. The Guji: the People and their Economy, Settlement History and their Conception of Nature 98

   3.2.2. The Koore and their Land ............................................................................. 122

   3.3. The Establishment of State Farm and Arba Minch Town: State expansion to the Periphery 133

Part Two ........................................................................................................................... 138
Political Ecology of Nature Conservation.................................................................. 138
Introduction................................................................................................. 138

Chapter Four ............................................................................................................. 139
The Exportation of National Park Ideals to Africa............................................. 139
Introduction................................................................................................. 139
4.1 The Countryside Ideal and ‘Wilderness’ Conservation.............................. 142
4.1.2. From Countryside Ideal to National Park Model in Africa............... 146
4.2. Colonial Legacies and Post-colonial Dynamics in Conservation Discourses 160
4.2.1. National Parks as Colonial Legacies............................................... 161
4.2.2. Global Influences .......................................................................... 163
4.2.3. Changes in Value Systems among African Elites............................ 164
4.3. Center-Periphery Relations in Ethiopia and the Establishment of Nech Sar National Park...... 168
4.3.1. The Center-Periphery Relations in Ethiopia................................. 168
4.3.2. The ‘Natural’ South and the Establishment of Nech Sar National Park 174

Chapter Five ............................................................................................................. 187
Ethnic Federalism and Contested Spaces in Ethiopia: Situating the Nech Sar National Park in the Political Discourse 187
Introduction................................................................................................. 187
5.1. The Reconfiguration of the Periphery within the New Political Order...... 188
5.1.1. Recognition of Cultural Pluralism.................................................. 191
5.1.2. Decentralization of State Power.................................................... 194
5.2. The Lived Reality of the New Political Order (mixed results).................. 196
5.3. Ethnic Federalism and Community Voices in the Periphery.................. 204
5.4. The Experience from the Nech Sar National Park.................................. 209
5.4.1. Ethnic Federalism, Decentralization and the National Park............. 210
5.4.2. Privatization of Nature Conservation – the African Parks Foundation 217
5.5. Extending the Nech Sar Case beyond Local Contexts............................ 225

Part Three ............................................................................................................... 230
The Nech Sar National Park: An Arena of Contestation/Negotiation on Nature-Culture Relations 230
Introduction................................................................................................. 230

Chapter Six .............................................................................................................. 234
The Ethiopian State: Conservationist, ‘Developmental’ or Encroacher?.... 234
6.1. Situating the Conservation-Development Debate within the Identity of the Ethiopian ‘State’ 234
6.1.1. The State and Peripheral Representations..................................... 238
6.1.2. Development and Conservation in Ethiopia – Perspectives from the State 243
6.1.3. Towards the ‘Making of Environmental Subjects’?......................... 247
6.1.4. The National Park as a Field of Contention between the Two Regional States 256

Chapter Seven ....................................................................................................... 265
Grassroots Actors, a Business/Conservation Organization and Human Rights Advocacy Groups.... 265
7.1. Grassroots Actors.................................................................................... 265
7.1.1. The Guji Oromo.............................................................................. 266
7.1.2. The Koore ...................................................................................... 286
7.1.3. Other Local Actors/Groups............................................................ 294
7.2. African Parks Foundation and International Human Rights Advocacy Organizations... 301
List of Illustrations

Figure 1: Location Map of Nech Sar National Park ......................................................... 11
Figure 2: Map of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia ........................................... 17
Figure 3: Photo Showing our Boat Trip on Lake Abaya ....................................................... 42
Figure 4: "Map of the Nech Sar National Park" as depicted by SNNP Regional State .......... 95
Figure 5: "Nech Sar" (White Grass) .............................................................................. 96
Figure 6: Guji's Pastureland Burning Practices ................................................................. 108
Figure 7: Mango and Avocado Trees in Golbo/Tsalke ...................................................... 112
Figure 8: Guji and Koore women exchanging crop and animal products in Golbo market ...... 114
Figure 9: Amaro District Map ....................................................................................... 123
Figure 10: Vegetable Market in Golbo/Tsalke ................................................................. 131
Chart 1: From Countryside Ideal to National Park Model in Africa .................................... 141
Figure 11: A Few Areas of Large-Scale Agri-business in Ethiopia ................................. 202
Figure 12: Actors and their Interactions ........................................................................... 233
Figure 13: Guji Oromo slaughtering a Calve during a rite of transition in the Gadaa System .... 270
Figure 14: Guji Resource Mapping done through Participatory Mapping Method ............ 280
Figure 15: Horny trees grown in parts of the national park after the banning of burning .... 281
Figures 16 & 17: Farm Land in Amaro Highland; and Coffee Plants in Tsalke/Golbo Lowland... 288
Figure 18: Resource Sites in/around the Park Important for the Koore ................................ 290
Figure 19: Guji and Koore Women in Golbo/Tsalke Market ........................................... 318
Figure 20: Guji individuals traveling on local boat (Jatara) .............................................. 319
Figure 21: A Guji boy with his AK47 gun ....................................................................... 330
Figure 22: Guji children in classroom attending lesson, Arda Guddina Primary School ....... 339
Declaration

I hereby affirm that I have produced the thesis at hand without any inadmissible help from a third party or the use of resources other than those cited; ideas incorporated directly or indirectly from other sources are clearly marked as such. In addition, I affirm that I have neither used the services of commercial consultants or intermediaries in the past nor will I use such services in the future. The thesis in the same or similar form has hitherto not been presented to another examining authority in Germany or abroad, nor has it been published.

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_Asebe Regassa, March 2014_

_Bayreuth, Germany_
Acronyms

APF  African Parks Foundation
EPRDF  Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front
EWCA  Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority
FDRE  Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
GTP  Growth and Transformation Plan
IUCN  International Union for Conservation of Nature
OPDO  Oromo People Democratic Organization
PA  Protected Area
SNNP  Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples
TPLF  Tigray People Liberation Front
UNESCO  United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Einleitete: "Die Kritik der Jagd (Recher) über Angehörige der Säugetier"
Summary

This study deals with the politics of nature conservation in Ethiopia taking the case of Nech Sar National Park in Southern Ethiopia that was established in 1974. Discourses and practices of nature conservation in the form of Protected Areas entail the convergence of competing narratives and perspectives on the side of various actors about human-environmental interactions. The problems in establishing national parks in Africa in general are fundamentally embedded in the notions of nature-culture dualism that consider humans and non-humans as inhabitants of a distinctively delineated world. This dominant perspective was introduced to the continent as part of the colonial process of annexing African resources and controlling the peoples. Postcolonial states adopted similar perspectives and further strengthened it in their ambitions to forge nation-states. Thus, conservation enclosures have reinforced state and non-state actors’ control over resource owners by restricting them from having access to their customary resources. Despite its history as a country never colonized by foreign powers, Ethiopia also exhibited similarities with other African countries in adopting colonial discourses and practices of nature conservation. As geographical limits and national borders do not bound colonial ideologies and practices; the country adopted similar conceptions of nature and internally ‘exported’ it to the periphery, which was incorporated into the Empire in the late nineteenth century.

The underlying problems of the dominant and colonially inherited approaches to nature conservation in Ethiopia are the imposition of hegemonic power and knowledge, denigration of the ways of life and indigenous practices of conserving the environment and dispossession of resource owners from their land. Moreover, the state intervention has created a hostile relationship between the people and the national park administration whereby the local communities have resorted to different strategies of resistance in order to regain their customary land rights that in turn threatens the biodiversity in the national park. In the process, there have been evident cases of biodiversity depletion particularly the wildlife such as the endemic Swayne’s hartebeest. The most striking aspect of the conservation trajectories in the Nech Sar National Park is the commonalities across different regimes in the country with regard to representation of the territory and the approaches of resource management the successive regimes have employed across time. More importantly, this study problematizes the politics of participatory development and local autonomy as it has been advocated by the Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) government that has been on power since 1991. Despite the political rhetoric of ethnic federalism, that grants rights
of self-determination to ethnic groups, resettlement, eviction and dispossession of the Guji and Koore local communities from the Nech Sar National Park took place under the EPRDF regime as well. The exclusion of local communities from the management, utilization and ownership of their traditional resources indicate a contradiction within the political project because the practices in and around the Nech Sar National Park do not conform to the rhetoric of local autonomy, participatory development, customary rights and recognition to ethnic groups’ historical territories of settlement.

This case is paradigmatic in many ways. Firstly, unlike many scholarly works on the politics of nature conservation in Africa who posit their discussions within colonial system where colonial institutions continued beyond the colonial era, this work investigates how Ethiopia adopted colonial ideas and practices of nature conservation though it did not have direct colonial experiences. Secondly, this research is the first work to situate the establishment of national parks in Ethiopia within the center-periphery relations in the country. I argue that the establishment of over eighty percent of the national parks in Ethiopia to be located in the regions that were incorporated to the Empire in the late nineteenth century was not a mere ecological choice. It was part of the broader representation of these regions as ‘natural’ and ‘uninhabited’ in contrast to the north that the mainstream society and academics depicted as ‘historical’. Thirdly, the study creates a nexus between the American and European notions of wilderness conservation and countryside ideals, the exportation of national park ideals to colonial Africa and the continuation of similar models in postcolonial periods by situating the debates in nature-culture relations. In doing so, it probes into contours of similarities and differences between colonial Africa and imperial Ethiopia with regard to representation of nature and practices of nature conservation.

As points of investigation, the study has set four major research questions. First, it addresses questions pertaining to the exportation of the national park ideals to Africa. In investigating this issue, this research goes beyond the commonly ‘accepted’ notion of associating national parks in Africa with ‘environmental degradation thesis’ and the glamorization of African territories and wildlife. As it posits discourses and practices of nature conservation in other parts of Africa within colonial ideologies (economy, identity, nationalism, political control etc.), the research also situates the establishment of national parks in Ethiopia within the empire-building project that commenced under the imperial regime. Second, since any aspect of territorializing environment under the guise of conservation involves interaction between various actors with competing narratives and perspectives about human-environmental interaction, the study takes as another point of investigation actors and their notions of nature-culture relations with reference to the Nech Sar
National Park. Third, because the new political order under ethnic federalism is critiqued for enhancing state encroachment into the periphery despite its promises to enhance local autonomy and participation, the research investigates how the new political restructuring addresses conservation enclosure, community participation and customary rights. Fourth, the study looks at domination/resistance interfaces within the context of contestations between different actors over the Nech Sar National Park.

This study, therefore, aims at understanding multilayer contestations over the Nech Sar National Park by synchronizing the micro level claims and competitions with the macro level political, economic and environmental discourses at different levels. By doing so, it aims to unveil how competing notions of nature and conceptualizations of human-environmental interactions influence conservation practices in the national park, and more importantly how local communities articulate, contest, negotiate and appropriate different perspectives of conservation and development.

Methodologically, the study uses ethnographic approaches and extended case method. The ethnographic approach was used to understand local communities' lived-in experiences, day-to-day interactions with their environment, their culturally embedded understandings of conservation and responses to state intervention. Likewise, the extended case method was employed to create the nexus between micro contexts and macro processes with regard to state intervention and local responses in the study area. Similarly, I used different data collection methods during the fieldwork. In this regard, key-informants’ interview, semi-structured interview, focused group discussion, participatory mapping and transect walk methods were used. Each method was employed in particular context according to its specificity.

In-depth interviews are often used in investigating an issue from its source. Unlike structured or semi-structured interviews where informants or research participants are expected to answer to questions under frequent intervention of the interviewer, in-depth interview is open-ended giving considerable time and freedom to the interviewee to narrate their experiences. In this study, in-depth interviews were used to unveil complex experiences of the communities under study. Semi-structured interview method was also used mainly among selected government authorities, park staff members and tour operators using some semi-structured interview questions on which informants elaborated their views. From the government offices, people at different administrative structures of the government were included.
Moreover, participatory mapping is a technique used in human geography, development studies and childhood research. This technique gives research participants the freedom to depict their views through concrete diagramming (e.g. mapping, time lines, cartoons and pie charts) and can be used beyond cultural, language, and literacy barriers. Participatory diagramming or mapping increases the degree of involvement of participants in the research process and enables one to read their minds through what they do rather than what they speak. Among possible participatory mapping techniques, historical and resource mapping were used in this research. In historical mapping, participants drew ‘maps’ showing their settlement areas in and around the park in different time. They were also asked to draw some maps about vital resource areas in and around the national park. Furthermore, transect walk that is a guided walk in a village, farmland or pasture area that is conducted by one or two members of a community was used to collect place-based information that would have been difficult to uncover through other methods. In this particular research, transect walk has been used to get information about some contested territories such as the boundary of the park, boundaries between Guji and Koore territories, and to locate some sacred spaces such as ritual sites, burial spaces, a healing hot spring (xabala) and access route (malka) to Lakes Abaya and Chamo and to the Sermale River.

The above research problems and questions are discussed and analyzed in different chapters. In chapter one, the problems, research questions and methodological frameworks are presented. To extend the research problems to the empirical analysis, chapter two situates the research in theoretical frameworks. The theoretical frameworks of this study are related to the prevailing competing conceptions of nature-culture relations, complex environmental, economic, cultural and political claims and motives behind nature conservation in the Nech Sar National Park and the persistence of multilayer actors that shape the dynamics related to the park. More specifically, the territory now designated as the Nech Sar National Park represents different meanings and purposes for the competing actors involved. The territory signifies arenas of struggle over the symbolic, cultural, economic and political representations. The national park has now become a territory where competing actors deploy different forms of power in the process of achieving their respective interests or in deterring the interests of others.

Thus, the study critically probes into the politics of conservation by investigating how the economic, political and cultural motives of different social groups shape their understandings of
people-park relations. Therefore, in order to situate the discussions within broader academic debates, I have posited the study in two interconnected theoretical approaches. First, debates on nature-culture relations were addressed from the perspective of the social construction of nature. Discourses of nature-culture relations have paramount implications on policies and practices of protected areas management. While the notion of nature-culture dualism supposes humans and non-humans as distinctively isolated from one another, the other perspective called mutualism considers nature-culture relations as conjointly constituted. On the one hand, those who advance the idea of nature-culture dualism consider nature conservation as a practice of maintaining the ‘beauty’ and ‘naturalness’ of nature without humans. On the other hand, people are represented as societies of nature and the success of any conservation practice depends on the recognition and integration of local people’s knowledge according to those who adhere to nature-culture mutualism. In African context, the protectionist approach of nature conservation was introduced during the colonial period and has been adopted and strengthened by postcolonial states as a hegemonic control of the people and their territories.

Second, the project moves beyond the ‘traditional’ approach of studying nature conservation and environmental problems from apolitical perspectives by interrogating the political, ecological, economic and ideological forces and processes behind the motives for the establishment of national parks. Notions of setting aside territories in the form of protected areas are political and economic inasmuch as they are ecological. They also involve actors including state, non-state conservation and business organizations, individuals and local communities, all of which are internally heterogeneous in terms of interests and perspectives. Thus, political ecology is used as a theoretical framework to disentangle complex conceptualizations of conservation discourses, practices and motives. In both cases, the study investigates issues of power constellations among different actors and how domination and resistance have been exercised.

Chapter three describes the people and their land with particular focus on people-environmental interactions. By historicizing the settlement history and narratives of both the Guji and Koore communities and their references of claim for entitlement to the land, the chapter sets background discussions for the analytical chapters on contestations over the Nech Sar National Park between various actors. In chapter four, I discuss the exportation of national park ideals to Africa by tracing its history to the American and European countryside ideals and their imaginations of Africa as ‘natural’ and ‘wild’. I argue that the motives behind the establishment of national parks during the colonial period in Africa should be understood beyond the dominant ‘environmental degradation
thesis'. Rather, national parks were often used by colonial and postcolonial states as strategies of controlling resource owners and their territories for economic and political purposes. This chapter also creates a nexus between the colonial perspectives of national parks and the adoption of similar notions by imperial Ethiopia.

Chapter five continues the discussions on center-periphery relations in Ethiopia presented in the second part of chapter four and synchronizes it with the post-1991 political order in the country. The chapter situates contestations over the Nech Sar National Park within local and national political contexts under ethnic federalism and analyzes the rhetoric of local autonomy, decentralization and community participation vis-à-vis realities on the ground. By taking the Ethiopian state as one of the major actors with pivotal influence on the contestations over the Nech Sar National Park and yet as an internally differentiated actor, chapter six presents and analyzes the state's conceptions of nature conservation and how it exercises power in achieving its economic, political and conservation motives. I argue that despite differences in political and economic policies at macro level, state representation of the territory as 'wild' and 'uninhabited' was commonly shared among different regimes in the country and it was used as a discursive instrument of delegitimizing local communities' customary rights to the land.

Chapters seven and eight take grassroots actors and their claims of interests and referents of contestation as important points of analysis. The findings from the analysis in these chapters illuminate that local communities had the agency, knowledge and power to challenge the state discourses and practices of nature conservation through production of critical knowledge despite the state's exercise of dominating power. Local people's conceptions of their surroundings and their resistance to state intervention are informed by their lived-in experiences, cultural and spiritual connectedness to the land, economic significance of the territory and memories of state eviction among others.

The final chapter gives some conclusions drawing on the empirical and theoretical discussions in the preceding chapters. In this concluding chapter, the central arguments and findings of the study are presented. It has been concluded that the introduction of national park ideals to colonial Africa and its continuation into the postcolonial period was fundamentally because of economic and political purposes it provided the state and non-state actors than for environmental reasons. In colonial Africa, national parks were expressions of hegemonic knowledge and power that
designated 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' approaches of human-environmental interactions and that controlled the movements, behaviors, and ways of life of non-humans, particularly the wildlife. That is why it is difficult to understand the foundations of nature conservation policies in the colonial and postcolonial Africa without historicizing it within the general European imaginations of Africa and the colonial ideologies of imposing hegemonic governance.

In Ethiopia's context, the establishment of over eighty percent of the national parks in the regions that were incorporated into the Ethiopian Empire in the late nineteenth century was not because of a mere geographical and ecological choice. It was rather part of the continuous state encroachment into the periphery. The successive Ethiopian regimes used conservation and development discourses as state technologies of controlling and coopting local communities particularly in the periphery. With specific reference to the Guji and Koore communities who are the core local actors in the contestations over the national park, the study finds out that the multidimensional representation of the territory (cultural, spiritual, economic, historical, symbolic and political) informs their resistance to state intervention. Despite internal variations in terms of how they define human-environmental interactions and their relations with the national park, the local communities considered the national park as a threat to their customary rights. The findings also show that there are fundamental differences between the state and local communities in their representation of the territory, conceptualizations of conservation and development and questions of participation. As a result, the government's exercise of dominating power in the process of imposing its own perspectives upon the local communities had nurtured resisting power on the side of resource owners/users whereby they utilized different resources at their disposal to reclaim their customary rights over the land. Against many works that consider everyday forms of resistance as trivial to change the status quo of external intervention, this study concludes that depending on their capabilities to use various strategies of resistance, grassroots actors can undo external intervention by prompting state and non-state actors to negotiate and come to terms with their demands.

This study also brings some epistemological and theoretical considerations in the understanding of human-environmental interactions. In this regard, the analysis of the empirical data and theoretical approaches hints that environmental conservation discourses and practices advocated by state and non-state conservationist organizations largely ignore multiplicity of knowledge and ways of knowing human-environmental interactions. The emphasis on the modern scientific knowledge as an ultimate source of knowledge, for example, is an epistemological notion rooted in positivist thinking that obscures multiple interpretations of a phenomenon or object of knowledge and ways
of knowing it. Colonial and postcolonial states adopted this notion of knowledge production and, thus, denigrated the voices, conceptualizations and ways of knowing of local communities in the human-environmental interactions.

From theoretical dimensions, debates on nature conservation in Africa have rarely positioned the notions behind national park ideals within the broader conceptual discourses on nature-culture relations. It is my contention that national parks in Africa, as arenas of competing discourses and practices, should be positioned within the broader historical genesis of wilderness conservation that was part of the European and American imaginations of nature. Understanding motives behind the exportation of national park ideals to Africa also helps us to comprehend debates on why people are restricted from access to resources in national parks, why indigenous knowledge of resource management is denigrated, and above all, competing views on human-environment interactions in and around protected areas.

Moreover, by employing political ecology framework, particularly the ‘conservation and control thesis’, this work has found out that the politics of nature conservation advocated by state and non-state business/conservation actors entails the exercise of hegemonic forms of knowledge and governance that control local people’s access to their customary resources. In contrast to many works in political ecology that discuss protected areas within the ‘environmental degradation thesis’ or those that situate local communities as victims of conservation enclosures, this work addresses the problems from a different angle. By synchronizing political and economic motives of actors with environmental concerns and at the same time by using an actor-oriented approach where local communities are also understood as active agents in influencing the course of interaction, the work conceptualizes national parks as fields of contestation and negotiation between competing actors. The study concludes that the existing conservation practices in the Nech Sar National Park are the products of the interplay between dominating power and resisting power in which both forms of power exist entangled into one another.
Part One

The Research Settings, Methodology and Theoretical Frameworks

Introduction

Since the onset of the colonial era in the late nineteenth century, Africa has become one of the most glamorized places on earth for the conservation of nature. Despite a long history of human habitation, the continent has been represented within mainstream Western media and academic works as ‘natural’, ‘wild’ and ‘unspoiled’ by human influences (Adams and McShane 1996). While it was part of the colonial discourses of ‘othering’ non-Western traditions, ways of life and territories, such representation of Africa eventually gave rise to the argument that unless they were ‘rationally’ managed, natural resources, particularly wildlife in Africa would be ‘threatened’ to extinction by ‘unwise’ management and utilization on the side of Africans. Eventually, the colonial powers imposed hegemonic colonial rule, knowledge and worldviews upon colonial subjects through the territorialization of African customary land into protected areas, whereby they criminalized customary rights and practices of resource use, ownership and management. The situation becomes more complex when we incorporate issues of environmental degradation and biodiversity debility into our debates on the human dimension of environmental conservation. Moreover, the involvement of multilayer actors\(^1\) with competing interests, actions, perspectives and narratives in the process of nature conservation necessitates a comprehensive investigation into the political, economic, cultural, ecological and social dimensions of environmental conservation, particularly in the form of national parks.

Despite its history as a country never being colonized by external forces, Ethiopia has much in common with other African countries in importing the dominant Western conservation discourses that consider the separation of humans from non-humans as an appropriate approach to nature conservation. Following its involvement in the international environmental conservation initiatives in the early-1960s, Ethiopia introduced the protectionist conservation principles upon its establishment of national parks in the 1960s and 1970s. Taking the case of Nech Sar National Park in southern Ethiopia, which was established in 1974, this work investigates how different actor

\(^1\)I use the concept, “multilayer actors” in this study to indicate actors at different levels that include local, regional, national and international actors who interact, cooperate, contest, negotiate or at times enter into conflict in the struggle over environmental resources such as the case in the Nech Sar National Park in Ethiopia.
groups conceptualize, define, negotiate and contest nature conservation in the country.

This first part of the study encompasses the first three chapters. Chapter one begins the investigation by problematizing notions of nature conservation in the form of protected areas in Africa in general and the Nech Sar National Park in particular. In doing so, it hints at how the colonial representation of the African landscapes as ‘natural’ and ‘wild’ informed the establishment of national parks based upon ontological orientations of human-nature dichotomy. Taking the case of the Nech Sar National Park, the chapter frames the problems, research questions and methodological frameworks that are central to the entire research project. Chapter two articulates the conceptual and theoretical frameworks drawing upon the notions of nature-culture relations and the political ecology of conservation, providing theoretical debates that are important platforms for analytical discussions. The third chapter deals with human-environmental interactions in the study areas, thus grounding the theoretical discussions in empirical realities. Under this chapter, I will present the settlement history of the people in and around the area that later became the Nech Sar National Park and thereby discuss some empirical data on human-environmental interactions from multidimensional angles.
Chapter One

Setting the Context and Methodological Frameworks

1.1. The Problematic of Protected Areas Conservation

1.1.1. Some Conceptual Debates on the Politics of Nature Conservation

The practice of setting aside nature as a protected area (game reserves, sanctuaries and national parks) is premised on the perspectives of delineating a boundary between humans and non-humans (Cronon 1996; Merchant 2003). Debates concerning nature conservation among scholars, environmentalists, human rights activists, nation states and local communities in different parts of the globe have been contentious, given that there are different ontological and epistemological foundations in the understanding of nature-culture relations (Pálsson 1996). The history of Protected Areas (PAs) in the form of national parks in the modern era can be traced back to the Yellowstone National Park in the United States, which was established in 1872 (Brockington et al. 2008). In the context of this study, I use the concept Protected Areas to refer to a geographically defined area that is controlled, designated, managed and utilized by powerful actors for the sake of political, economic, social, cultural and environmental/conservation objectives. Although there are conventional definitions of PAs, such as those in Chape et al. (2008: 9), defining the concept as, “a geographically defined area which is designated or regulated and managed to achieve specific conservation objectives”, I argue that such a definition does not fully capture the complex motives and involvement of various actors in the establishment of PAs. Indeed, the above definition does not thoroughly address inter-actor relations and issues of power positions among competing actor groups.

In the African context, different societies in the continent have multidimensional indigenous approaches to nature conservation, as well as specific norms, values and beliefs that shape their interaction with their surroundings. In these indigenous approaches and practices, humans are perceived as part of the natural environment. During the colonial period, Europeans introduced a dualistic view that separates humans from non-humans (Adams and McShane 1996). Within this perspective, Europeans’ representation of Africa as pristine territory came to underpin ideologies
that designated Africa as a continent deserving of preservation. As colonial rule progressed, colonial officials, conservationists and private investors continued to translate Western views of wilderness into practice by establishing national parks from which native Africans were either evicted or they were denied their customary rights to utilize the resources (Neumann 1998). This conception of nature in Western thought has brought attempts to dissect human-nature relations to areas of conservation. This eventually led to the introduction of a protectionist conservation paradigm that often excludes local people from their customary lands (Campbell 2005). Despite differences in the objectives and approaches in the establishment of national parks, most of such projects resulted in the exclusion of Africans from ‘nature’ and the restriction over access to their customary resources.

However, the colonial discourse and practices did not end with the passing of the colonial period. Both the colonial and postcolonial states in Africa adopted various forms of power, such as the eviction of local people and enclosure of formerly common-access resources in the process of making these resources legible for governance and commoditization. In a similar manner, as Scott (2009) rightly argues in the case of South East Asia, nation-states’ attempts to convert common property land into privately owned or state controlled enclosures were mainly processes of controlling the society. Scott (2009: 5) further contends that such state projects are designed “to ensure that their economic activity was legible, taxable, assessable, and confiscatable or, failing that, to replace it with forms of production that were [replacing for example pastoralism by sedentary agriculture].” Common-access pastures, forests, fishing areas and hunting grounds were enclosed as national parks or game reserves in many parts of Africa, perpetuating the “tragedy of enclosure” (Bryant and Bailey 1997: 154). By tragedy of enclosure, following Bryant and Bailey, I refer to the social, cultural and economic crisis enclosure brings to the people living in or adjacent to protected areas, to the ecological and biodiversity implications of such practices that often threaten the livelihood of local people. Against this background, I argue that the establishment of protected areas or enclosures and the subsequent introduction of modern conservation discourses and practices have brought to the scene a power-laden relationship between states and other external actors on the one hand, and local communities on the other hand. In this regard, it is essential to position competing perspectives and practices such as questions of scientific and indigenous knowledge, state control and customary rights as well as state intervention and local responses within different power relations that embody domination and resistance as mutually constitutive aspects of power.

Despite rich literature on conservation enclosure in Africa, only a few studies have tried to
comprehensively address the complex relationships between the practices of exclusionist conservation approaches, colonial discourses and European images of Africa. A few have proceeded beyond the ‘taken-for-granted’ discussions of the social and economic impacts of protected areas on the ‘poor’ local people (Garland 2008). Some scholars, such as Brockington (2002) and Igoe (2004), have emphasized the social impacts of colonial and postcolonial conservation enclosures in the form of evictions and restriction of local communities from access to resources that eventually led to impoverishment of indigenous communities. Others have delved into discussing how the colonial imposition of the ‘wilderness’ conservation disempowered the African local communities through asymmetrical power relations (Anderson and Gove 1987; Mackenzie 1990; Neumann 1998). Although the scholarship on conservation projects in Africa has attempted to establish a nexus between colonialism and the introduction of the national park ideals, works in this category do not adequately interrogate colonial rule and its conservation discourses. Such works take colonial imposition as inevitable without probing the motivations and ideologies behind the colonialists to introduce and promote the establishment of national parks based upon the nature-culture dichotomy. Moreover, they also fail to pay due attention to the outcomes of interactions between competing forms of environmental knowledge (Adams and McShane 1996; Garland 2008).

Neumann’s (1998) seminal book, *Imposing Wilderness: Struggles over Livelihood and Nature Preservation in Africa*, was one of the pioneer works linking Western perspectives of nature and the exportation of the national park ideals to Africa. Neumann himself emphasizes the aesthetic or pristine dimension of nature in Africa as a major driving motive behind the colonial powers’ establishment of national parks in the continent. He argues that “it is principally the vision of Africa as earthly Eden – a romanticized wilderness in opposition to the decadent metropole – that underpins the historical development of the national park ideal in colonial Africa” (1998: 18). In this way, Neumann underlines the glamorized and idealized landscape visions of Africa, which was imagined to be in sharp contrast to the despoiled metropolitan cities of Europe as the fundamental historical and discursive phenomenon behind the establishment of national parks in the region. While this line of argument is valid to a point, it glosses over complex political, ideological, economic, social and environmental/ecological motivations within the general colonial political and economic discourses of the period.

Many scholars wrote much concerning issues of colonialism, environmental degradation, conservation discourses and the establishment of protected areas in Africa (Anderson and Grove 1987; Grove 1990; Neumann 1998; Igoe 2004; Brockington et al. 2008). Nonetheless, we have
limited information on how the nexus between pre-colonial European imagination of Africa, colonialism and the introduction of the national park ideals to Africa outlived the colonial era. For instance, unanswered questions include the following: how did the countryside ideal in Europe and the national park ideal in Africa resemble each other? If national parks and other forms of protected area conservation discourses and practices were attributed to colonialism, why did the postcolonial African states fail to dismantle this colonial institution, instead of building, strengthening and expanding it? What forms of knowledge, values and discourses did the interplay between colonial forms of conservation and African customary practices reproduce? Alternatively, what kind of discourses on and practices of nature conservation did postcolonial African elites and states inherit from the colonial powers?

All these questions call for broader investigation into the historical trajectories of the ideas and practices regarding the introduction of national park to Africa and into how the changes and continuities regarding conservation discourses and practices unfolded. Academic attempts to find answers to these questions would enable us understand changes and continuities in the politics of conservation enclosures during the colonial and postcolonial epochs in Africa. Garland (2008) problematizes essentializing colonial impositions of wildlife conservation in Africa because, according to the author, wildlife conservation trajectories in Africa were more informed by changes in perspectives and value systems that occurred as a result of interactions between competing discourses and perceptions among Africans and European colonial powers. Thus, the postcolonial conservation practices are products of such interactions, rather than being imposed by external actors. Along these lines, Mitchell (2012) illuminates how conflicts between the European settlers and the Khoisan indigenous peoples in southern Africa were more of ontological contradictions between the two groups (settlers and Khoisans) in terms of their representations of nature and the place of humans in it. Mitchell (2012) goes further in arguing that contestations between competing social groups over environmental resources that often emanated from competing perceptions of human-nature relations eventually compelled the colonial rulers to negotiate their understandings of human-environmental relations and livelihood practices, as in the case of settlers’ appropriation of transhumant nomadism.

Most research works on conservation enclosures in Africa have rarely addressed two fundamental areas of interrogation. These are the issues of unmasking the political ecology of colonial conservation discourses and the questions of treating postcolonial conservation practices not only as inheritances of colonial impositions but also as modes of production and a product of contestations,
negotiations, appropriations and changes in value systems among competing perspectives and actors (Garland 2008). This work addresses these issues by exploring beyond the common understandings of considering national parks as mere colonial impositions. It is the central argument of this study that struggles over environmental resources such as the case of the Nech Sar National Park have partly emanated from competing perspectives on human-nature relations, while partly reflecting forms of exercise of power/knowledge among competing social actors.

In discussions concerning issues of environmental conservation in the form of protected areas, it is important to contextualize the debate with regard to pervasive competing ontological positions on nature-society relations. It has been evident that the general popular imagination and academic tradition in the West has established an ontological dualism between nature and society in which the former was presumably alienated from the latter (Descola 1996; Merchant 2003). In contrast, most non-Western and non-industrialized societies have a holistic understanding of nature and culture, believing in the conjoint constitution of the human and non-human worlds (Braun 1997; Escobar 1999; Ingold 2000, 2005). While the dominant Western notions of nature-society relations distinguish the biophysical, human and supernatural power, local models in non-Western contexts are often based on the tripartite relations between these three domains, conceptualizing the living, non-living, and supernatural beings as conjointly constituted (Braun 1997; Ingold 2000). Although studies reveal the embodiment of the social and the physical, which in turn implies that different conceptions of nature are social and cultural constructions (Freudenburg et al. 1995), conservation practices in Africa are expressions of the dualist notion of nature-society relations. This is why most national parks in the continent still subscribe to policies of delineating humans and the wildlife.

For instance, in debates about nature conservation, the notion of dualism entails the separation of people from the natural environment, in presuming that human activities disrupt the 'natural beauty' or 'wilderness' of nature (Cronon 1996). This is why we should critically scrutinize these notions and the practices that have been translated from the discourses. As dichotomic thinking is the basis of modern science in dividing between object and subject, body and mind, nature and culture, the notion of dividing humans from non-humans in the conservation practices should also be understood within this broader way of thinking. In this regard, the exportation of different ideas, policies, ideologies and perspectives such as development paradigms, conservation discourses, 'good governance', democratization, Structural Adjustment Programs and, very recently, climate change protocols and policies on the fight against terrorism all reveal some aspects of asymmetrical power relations between various actors at different levels and are subject to different forms of
contextual interpretations. Nonetheless, this does not rule out the agency of postcolonial African states in appropriating and re-imposing foreign discourses for their local political or economic interests.

In Ethiopia, successive regimes have adopted and used different foreign development models and conservation approaches in the process of empire-building cementing the control of the people, resources and territories in the southern part of the country since the late nineteenth century. The state also used such models as mechanisms of building legitimacy by presenting the people with development programs that seemed to 'improve' their lives. In this regard, different governments attempted to emulate development models from different parts of the world. However, the adopted socio-political and economic models were in most cases incompatible with local contexts and proved failure stories (Clapham 2006a). They have also been practicing similar approaches of imitating the West in conservation schemes, and particularly in the southern parts of the country, where the center has been continuously engaged in the processes of engulfing the periphery by establishing state controlled enclosures. As will be discussed in the next chapters, most of the national parks in Ethiopia were established in the southern half of the country, not because of mere ecological necessity but rather as part of the political and cultural representation of the region as 'natural' and 'wild' within the north-south dichotomy and within center-periphery asymmetrical power relations.

There has been a tradition of drawing boundaries between the north and the south in Ethiopia, whereby the north has been represented in mainstream society and academia as 'historical', whereas the south is portrayed as 'natural'. For instance, the Ethiopia saying that, 'historians go to the north whereas anthropologists go to the south' is more than a mere territorial representation of historical and anthropological research. Such a saying implies that people in southern Ethiopia have 'intact' culture to be studied by anthropologists, watched by tourists and preserved by conservationists. When it comes to foreign researchers in Ethiopia too, anthropologists mostly researched the south, whereas historians and archaeologists mainly focused on the north that represented the core of the Abyssinian state. The Ethiopian historiography, built on the myth of 'the Great Tradition', depicts the north as the source of Ethiopian 'civilization' and the south as 'unspoiled' natural environment, which later seems to have contributed to the representation of the territories in the south as 'wilderness' to be watched, protected, conserved and commoditized through tourism economy (Ullendorff 1965; Donham 1986; Turton 2011). This is quite analogous to the Western conception of nature conservation in Africa during the colonial period. Therefore, the establishment of many
national parks and protected areas, including the Nech Sar National Park in the southern part of the country, should be understood within the macro-historical trajectories that have shaped modern Ethiopia since the late nineteenth century.

Contrary to the dominant/mainstream perspectives about the people and territories in the south, the peoples in southern Ethiopia have had their own conceptions of nature. For example, the Guji people – one of the research communities of this study – understand human, non-human and divine beings as mutually reinforcing constituents of nature. The Guji believe that any disruption in the relationship between these three constituents of their surrounding affects the overall dynamics (Baxter 1991; Asebe 2012c). Concisely, competing views of nature and the place of humans in it prevail between the state, local communities and other actors in the Nech Sar National Park case. The space now designated as the Nech Sar National Park represents different meanings and purposes attached to economic, cultural, religious, political and symbolic/identity issues for different actors involved in the competition over the territory. Therefore, understanding the multiplicity of views on human-environmental interactions from epistemological and ontological dimensions, political and economic motives and socio-cultural representations is essential before attempting to address issues of conservation interventions and local responses.

1.1.2. Problematizing Conservation Enclosure in Ethiopia

The plan to establish the Nech Sar National Park started in the 1960s, following the request from the then imperial government to UNESCO seeking technical support and expertise for the process of surveying potential territories for the establishment of protected areas. Based on the request from the Ethiopian government, UNESCO commissioned a team of five renowned experts in the field of conservation and national parks management, including Sir Julian Huxley, a former director-general of UNESCO, to survey potential areas to be designated as protected areas (national parks, game reserves and sanctuaries) (Huxley et al. 1963; Abiyot 2009). In 1963, the team submitted a forty-page report to the Wildlife Conservation Board of Ethiopia, which included Nech Sar among other seven proposed protected areas. These include Managasha National Park (located at about 20km to the west of Addis Ababa), Mathara National Park (in the Awash valley), Abijata Lake National Park (in the Rift Valley), Nech Sar National Park and a scenic National Park at the source of the Nile. It also included controlled wildlife areas (in the south-west and southern peripheries, including Lake Rudolf, Lake Stefanie and portions of Omo Valley, further north the Dinder tributaries along Ethiopia-Sudan border) and, finally sanctuaries for very rare animals (this category included areas
such as Semein Mountain, Arsi-Bale Mountains, and Afar and Somali Lowlands) (Huxley et al. 1963).

In these areas, the UNESCO team recommended the relocation of the local people, as in the case of pastoralist communities in the Awash Plains. The team came up with the exclusionist notion of nature conservation, which had been the guiding principle of conservation discourses in the West recommending, for example:

The question of the nomadic Matahara people within a future National Park is a difficult one. At present, they have a reputation for keeping other people away and this may be of some advantage to the surviving wild animals. Experience from many other parts of Africa indicates, however, that the chances of the present small numbers of wild life multiplying and becoming sufficiently tame to be a major attraction will be remote unless these people and their stock can be induced to leave the National Park area, and also unless the cultivation which is taking place in certain places is stopped (Huxley et al. 1963: 22).

Accordingly, the government established a number of national parks in the 1960s and 1970s, namely Abijata Shala Lakes, Awash, Bale Mountains, Omo, Mago, Nech Sar and Semien Mountains national parks. By adopting the recommendations from the USESCO team (external ‘experts’), who advocated strict separation between humans and wildlife in the conservation practices, the Ethiopian government exercised full control of the territories through territorialization and the enactment of administrative measures on people who were deemed to have ‘violated’ national park rules. Enclosure entailed the eviction and resettlement of local communities, restricted access to their customary resource areas and the criminalization of their ways of life practices, which involved ritual practices and extraction of resources from the protected areas. Another striking point that warrants mention is the question of compensation for people who were relocated from their customary land. Issues of compensation and citizens’ rights to it go in line with the broader political context, which encompasses aspects of land rights and government’s accountability in responding in accordance with the law pertaining to such rights (if any). In Ethiopia, land effectively remained under the control of the state across several successive regimes and particularly in the subjugated regions of the south. In this regard, the late nineteenth century conquest stripped the right of land ownership from the people in this region. Under such circumstances, issues of compensation would not have legal or political grounds because the state considers itself as the rightful owner of all land and its resources.

Although it is not yet being gazetted due to multiple competing claims and conflicts, the Nech Sar National Park was formally designated with the status of a national park in 1974, a few months
prior to the downfall of the imperial regime. In fact, the government had already started to implement some forms of control over forest utilization, hunting and grazing in the area since the mid-1960s, strengthening its structured arrangement and administration following the designation of the territory as a national park in 1974. The major objective of the establishment of the park was initially for biodiversity conservation, and particularly concerning an endemic Swayne’s hartebeest. However, the economic dimension of generating economic benefits through tourism projects was also central to the conservation objectives (Dessalegn 2008).

Figure 1: Location Map of Nech Sar National Park
Source: Zenebe Hailu, Arba Minch University, March 2014)

The park harbors over 800 species of plants, 91 species of mammals, 351 species of birds, and others such as insects. It also features a vast diversity of animal population, predominantly including Burchell’s zebra, Grant’s gazelle, the endemic Swayne’s hartebeest, Nile crocodile in Lake Chamo, Lesser kudu, lion, wild dog and other animals (Dessalegn 2004; APF Annual Report

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2 Although this map of the study area shows the Nech Sar National Park in reference some adjacent villages, it does not show the Guji villages on the eastern side that were established in 2008.
Moreover, the forest and the ‘Forty Springs’ adjacent to the town of Arba Minch on the western side of the park accentuate its scenic beauty (Briggs 2006). It was with dual aim of preserving immense natural resources and generating economic benefit from tourism for the country that the government established the national park. By the time of its establishment, the park covered an area of 514 square kilometers, although the exact size of the park remains contentious. Indeed, given that it has undergone different forms of expansion under the three regimes, some authors estimated its size to be greater than the above figure (Taddesse 2004).

Despite the government’s claims that the area was uninhabited during and before being designated as a national park, Huxley et al. (1963) confirm the presence of pastoral and agrarian communities in the area. Local accounts and some historical sources also attest the presence of the Guji Oromo in the area to the west of Lake Abaya since the sixteenth century (Dhadacha 2006; Getachew 2007). Such competing narratives concerning the history of human settlement in the area have persisted as points of contestation between the state and local communities. The central issues in the study of protected areas in Ethiopia are related to two fundamentally interconnected situations. First, the country adopted the politics of nature conservation in the form of national parks based on the dominant and hegemonic nature-culture dichotomy that nullified the history and rights of local people from their land. Second, most national parks in the country, particularly those in the south were established on territories that were represented as ‘natural’, ‘wild’ and ‘uninhabited’. Such representation of the territories delegitimized local communities’ rights over their land. Therefore, the convergence between the global discourses of nature-culture dichotomy and the exclusionist approach of conservation practices, and the north-south dichotomy in Ethiopia has been part of the complex scenario in the conservation practices and contestations over the Nech Sar National Park.

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, conservation enclosures or protected areas in Africa entail the engagement of various actors. Such inter-actor interaction includes aspects of contestations, negotiations and appropriations of different narratives, discourses and practices. Thus, studying protected areas without paying due attention to the voices of local communities is a futile exercise for a researcher or practitioner attempting to understand the complex human-environmental interactions. Hence, this study takes the Guji Oromo and Koore communities who live in and around the Nech Sar National Park as its core research subjects.

The Guji Oromo traditionally inhabited and used the park for pastoral activities and to some extent
practiced farming along the eastern side of the park (Getachew 2007). The Guji belong to the Oromo, which form the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia (Taddesse 2009). While the majority of the Guji live in Guji and Borana Zones of Oromia Regional State, according to the post-1991 political and administrative reconfiguration, a significant number of the people have inhabited different zones and districts in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (hereafter SNNP) Regional State. However, over 5,000 Guji individuals who lived in and adjacent to the Nech Sar National Park remained outside of any formal government administrative structures from 1991-2008, because they were in neither the SNNP nor Oromia regional states.

The Koore ethnic group belongs to the speakers of the Omotic language group and lives in the SNNP regional state. The Koore were predominantly engaged in agricultural activities and strongly depended on the territory along the eastern and southeastern confines of the park for their livelihood. According to Koore oral information, the people moved downslope from the Amaro highlands for seasonal cultivation of the Tsalka Valley along the eastern escarpments of the national park around the mid twentieth century (Awoke 1985). Although the Koore did not inhabit the central part of the national park, they still claim that it belongs to their district because the former Amaro sub-province partly administered the area during the imperial and military regimes.

On the western side of the park, most of the low-income households of Arba Minch town established their livelihood by extracting forest resources from the park. As the town is constituted by members of diverse groups, it is difficult to distinguish this category in either purely ethnic categorization or in terms of specific livelihood practices regarding their interaction with the national park. Low-income sections of the town dwellers, mainly women and youth, sustain their living through income that they generate from selling charcoal, firewood, timber, forage and construction materials obtained from the forest adjacent to the town. Moreover, others have been engaged in fishing from the two lakes, Abaya and Chamo. These three social groups – the Guji agro-pastoral community, Koore farmers and the town dwellers – who I consider in this research as grassroots actors – have different claims. In claiming their rights of entitlement, ownership and utilization of the resources in the territory, these groups of actors also refer to different narratives, histories and resources (Dessalegn 2008; Bayisa 2011).

The military regime evicted the Guji and the Koore communities from the park in 1982 and restricted them from the area until they returned during the transition period in the early-1990s
(Dowie 2009). In the post-1991 period, the former evictees and some others from adjoining Guji and Koore villages moved back to the park territory until the next round of eviction and relocation in 2004. By the time the government agreed to transfer the park management to a Dutch company called African Parks Foundation (APF) in 2004, "police and park rangers torched about 463 Guji houses situated in the park and forcefully expelled the people out of the park boundaries" (Dowie 2009: 227). After the eviction, over 5000 Guji were cornered to the eastern side of the park, where they encountered day-to-day pressure from the park authority. In the same year of the Gujis' eviction, around a thousand Koore families were relocated to an area called Abulo Alfacho, located to the south of the park (Dessalegn 2008; Dowie 2009). In addition to the challenges faced by the local people due to the enclosure of their traditional resources, there have also been reports of biodiversity depletion, particularly concerning the wildlife in the national park, although the cause of such environmental problems remains contentious.

Following the establishment of a federal government in 1991, the government formally placed the park administration under the SNNP Regional State until 2004, when it transferred to the park administration to the African Parks Foundation. However, as the park adjoins two regional states – Oromia and SNNP – inter-regional competition seems self-evident. Indeed, some even argue that the removal of the Guji Oromo from the park area itself was part of an ethno-federalist fixation that has been premised on establishing administrative units along ethno-linguistic lines (Dowie 2009). In this regard, many actors with different interests, narratives of entitlement and varying degrees of power relations involved in competition over the park, in direct or indirect ways. Some of these actors include the state (the federal state, the regional states of Oromia and SNNP and their respective local administrative units), the two communities (Guji and Koore), African Parks Foundation, park administration and tour operators, among others. However, it would be overly simplistic to presume the interests and claims of entitlement of these actors to be unified in alignment. Because of internal variations such as gender, age, political affiliation and economic activity exist within each category of actors, variations in perceptions and conflicting interests over the territory are likely to be part of the complexity of the situation. Inevitably, there will be winners and losers. Given that it pays attention to different grounds of claims and referents of entitlement, this study seeks to address internal variations within the actor groups.

The selection of the Nech Sar National Park has been based on some fundamental reasons. First, apart from having existing across the three regimes – unlike the majority of national parks in the country – the Nech Sar National Park has remained particularly contentious due to its location on
the border of Oromia and SNNP regional states. It thus has posed a strong challenge to the federal government due to strong claims of entitlement on the part of the two regional states. Second, it has been the most visited national parks in southern Ethiopia and the second in terms of tourism income generate at the national level. Nonetheless, in contrast to other national parks in the region, this national park has been noted for its exclusionist approaches to conservation, due to which local communities have been displaced, restricted and denied their right of participation and benefit. Third, its location in the region that was conquered by the Ethiopian empire and was subsequently considered as ‘natural’ will give us with the opportunity to establish a nexus between the establishment of national parks in Ethiopia and the broader trajectories of exportation of national park ideals to colonial Africa. Fourth, this national park has been rarely researched and not at all within the broader debates on nature-culture relations. Its proximity to the town of Arba Minch and scenery of the landscape that could be gazed down from the town, its long history, being a home to endemic animals and highly contested among multilayer of actors all provide opportunities to investigate how different actors define, understand and claim various aspects of rights over the national park.

Although the social and environmental repercussions of colonial forms of protected areas management are also common in other African countries, the Ethiopian case is a paradigmatic one to understand the colonial discourses of conservation, because this work deals with an African nation that does not have the colonial past, as opposed to its counterparts in other African countries. Unlike other scholars who are problematizing the colonial discourse of conservation in a given context where the colonial history and its legacies are quite visible and active, this inquiry takes another trajectory of analysis. It probes into two key areas: the dynamics of importation of nature conservation discourses and practices; and issues of power relations between the center and periphery within Ethiopia that have been created following the birth of the modern Ethiopian state in the late nineteenth century.

Therefore, by locating the establishment and management of the national park and different forms of contestations, negotiations and claims of entitlement to the territory within broader political and historical antecedents that shaped the center-periphery relations in Ethiopia, the study sheds some light on issues of state control over the people and their territories. For example, while discussing how the incumbent Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) government articulated rhetoric of conservation and development with reference to this particular national park, the study interrogates the state’s strategies of channeling down its policies in its quest to exercise
effective control over the periphery in which its predecessors significantly failed to achieve. Moreover, by paying attention to different actor groups who compete over the territory for different reasons, I also examine how the actors position their claims over the territory. Thus, the study investigates the issues from ontological representations of human-environmental interactions and day-to-day practices such as dependence on the territory for livelihood, conservation practices and tourism interests, as well as local responses to state intervention by employing an actor-oriented approach in the analysis. This work locates this specific investigation within broader debates on nature-culture relations by focusing on how notions behind the establishment of national parks were introduced to colonial Africa and sustained across the postcolonial period including Ethiopia despite some differences.

1.1.3. Situating the Debate of Enclosure within the Post-1991 Political Reconfiguration

In 1991, Ethiopia embarked on a new political experiment following the overthrow of the military regime by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)\(^3\), Oromo People Liberation Front (OLF) and Eritrean People Liberation Front (EPLF). Following a period of transition (1991-1995), the EPRDF took control of state power and introduced a new political model and administrative structure based on ethnicity (Clapham 2002; Turton 2006; Dereje 2010). The formal recognition of ethnic questions and the institutionalization of ethnicity as a foundation for political, economic, cultural and social entitlements marked a new political order in the country. It was a fundamental departure from the past, both in deconstructing the ambitious homogenization policies of the state building project, as well as in presumably reversing the century-old hegemony of the center (Markakis 2011). In this regard, the 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia recognizes, above all, the right to self-determination of nations, nationalities and peoples, including the right to secession (FDRE Constitution 1995, Article 39). This implies the devolution of state power to lower administrative units through principles of ethnic federalism and policies of decentralization. In economic terms, the regime has tested different development paths from market liberalism to the recently introduced developmental state paradigm. In contrast to the neoliberal political and economic discourse that advocates limited state involvement in development schemes, the developmental state paradigm calls for strong leadership in the political and economic spheres and endorses the use of authoritarian means to protect the state’s

\(^3\)The EPRDF is a coalition party of four ethnic-based parties that include Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF), Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), Oromo People Democratic Organization (OPDO) and Southern Ethiopian Peoples’ Democratic Movement (SEPDM). The EPRDF was formed in 1989 by the initiative of the TPLF as a strategy to frame its struggle within the broader questions of nations and nationalities in the country. Since 1991, EPRDF continued to be the only ruling party in the country’s political system.
Ethnic federalism was expected to address questions of local ownership of development programs through promoting decentralized governance and the participation of local communities in decision-making. The discourse presumably seeks to redress the past asymmetrical power relationship between the state and society, thus ensuring equal opportunities for citizens (Mohamed and Markakis 1998). Mohammed and Markakis (1998: 8) further argue that:

Decentralization in Ethiopia is not seen merely as a device for the satisfaction of ethnic political demands, but also as the path leading to democratization through devolution of decision making in a manner that enables more people to influence the political process. Furthermore, since decentralization and democratization are regarded as requisite to development, the empowerment of ethnicity is intended to harness ethnicity to the purposes of development.

While historical antecedents in the country dating back to the late nineteenth century had significant influences in shaping center-periphery relations in Ethiopia, the post-1991 political reconfiguration
has significantly influenced developments regarding the national park and its relations with the surrounding communities. The investigation of this political order is important because, while the new system has supposedly deconstructed the old political culture and identity of the Ethiopian state that previously marginalized the diverse nations and nationalities in the periphery, the government did not devolve power to the regional states in key areas such as land, budget, taxation, investment and privatization. Indeed, the center still maintains effective control and inspection of the activities in the periphery. Moreover, this Ethiopian oxymoron of a political project has also created another pattern of internal heterogeneity within the state, whereby claims of entitlement to environmental resources have now adopted ethnic and regional dimensions as the case of the Nech Sar National Park clearly illuminates.

Although the institutionalization of ethnic federalism was supposed to ensure the self-determination of the nations and nationalities in Ethiopia, many scholars have criticized the new political arrangement, particularly with regard to its practical implementation. For instance, as Dereje (2006) contends in his study of the Gambela case, despite a promising start that ensured formal and symbolic empowerment of the historically marginalized periphery, the new political order has proven to be a curse for the majority of the people in this region, having escalated the existing conflicts following the new political experiment. Detractors and supporters of ethnic federalism alike have questioned whether the political rhetoric has been effectively translated into practice (Assefa 2006; Clapham 2006b; Abbink 2009; Dereje 2010).

Despite claims of using participatory approaches to development, hierarchical structures persist under the new political landscape in the state-society relationship in the process of implementing development programs. Some scholars argue that the concept of ‘development’ has become a rhetorical device through which ethnic entrepreneurs exercise hegemonic control over the people rather than serving as a grassroots level platforms upon which all actors can negotiate based on their understandings (Zerihun 2004). In line with this concern, Mohammed and Markakis (1998: 8) cautiously note that the success of this unfinished political project depends on “whether the formal i.e. constitutional provisions of decentralization and democratization are realized in practice.” Turton (2002) also invites us to further scrutinize the rhetoric concepts such as participation, decentralization and empowerment, which the EPRDF frequently uses in the process of broadcasting its power, political programs, development policies and conservation schemes. According to Turton (2002: 110), “the essential feature [of participation] is that local people are involved, from the start in design and implementation. It must surely be accepted by now that,
unless people have real power to influence the way a project is designed and managed, they will not feel that it is ‘theirs’, whatever (often temporary) benefits they derive from it.” As Jennings (2000) also discusses, participation is conceptually understood as:

[II]nvolvement by a local population and, at times additional stakeholders in the creation, content and conduct of a program or policy designed to change their lives. Built on a belief that citizens can be trusted to shape their own future, participatory development uses local decision making and capabilities to steer and define the nature of an intervention (Jennings 2000: 1).

Participation is far beyond consulting a particular society about development programs or any other project; rather, it is intertwined with a political ecology approach that recognizes the power and capacity of local communities legitimate at local and national levels in decision-making processes. Put differently, believing in and promoting participatory development and conservation is to believe in the fundamental importance of self-determination of the subjects. Although participation as a methodological and theoretical instrument has presumably been a focus of many development and conservation practices over recent decades, it has failed to bring meaningful social changes, mainly due to its failure to engage with issues of power and politics (Mohan and Hickey 2004). According to Mohan and Hickey (2004: 66), participation should be situated within a wider range of citizenship rights through which “people extend their status, agency and rights as members of particular political communities thereby increasing their control over socio-economic resources.” Issues of citizens’ right to participation are also important in areas of nature conservation, because most conservation projects such as national parks often ignore the voices, knowledge and perspectives of local communities and rather impose scientific and expert-based approaches to conservation. It will be under such context that this study interrogates whether the Ethiopian political model under ethnic federalism enhances or hinders the customary rights of local communities in and around the Nech Sar National Park.

Critics of management approaches to protected areas point out that states and non-state actors often use these schemes as instruments of control over people and territories. Building his arguments on experiences from the Lower Omo Valley in Ethiopia, Turton (2011) argues that conservation and development discourses advocated by the Ethiopian state are being used as instruments of control and mechanisms of co-opting people under the guise of conserving the environment and improving people’s living standards. Since the late nineteenth century conquest and the subsequent incorporation of territories in the south into the Abyssinian Empire, the state has employed different strategies to maintain its control over diverse groups in the subjected regions. Among these strategies, state control over the territories through state enclosures of indigenous territories under
the guise of development and conservation were cases in point (Turton 2011). Peet et al. (2011: 28) substantiate this argument with a more general statement, suggesting, “Any effort to environmental conservation in its many forms, for better or worse is basically a form of environmental control.” I would extend the above statement to how control over the environment entails control over the people, because any control over people’s environmental resources is tantamount to putting them under the control of the state or non-state actors, particularly in developing countries where most people depend on the environment for different purposes.

In the case of the Nech Sar National Park, there are contestations between different actors over the management, ownership and utilization of the territory and its resources. Local communities claim that the state has relegated their customary rights of resource ownership and indigenous knowledge of resource management through its version of development and its protectionist conservation approach. They accuse the state of interfering in their livelihood and imposing upon them what to do and what not to do in conservation and development questions. This brings us to the fundamental themes of this study, namely conflicts, narratives of entitlement, competing views of nature-culture relations and power positions. While addressing local struggle between different actors, the study simultaneously probes into interplays between the national political and economic discourses and local conceptions of these issues.

A Point of Departure

The initiative for this project was initially conceived from my personal encounter with competing views of government authorities, local Guji and Koore communities and an international conservation company on people-animal relations in the Nech Sar National Park. The following narrative elucidates the intricate and multilayer competing interests, perceptions of nature and stories produced by different actors who compete for/argue about the park. In 2005, a large number of zebras moved out of the park and flocked to Guji villages close to Dilla University where I was teaching at the time. Apart from being a resident in a nearby town to the village, I had long research experience among the Guji since 2003, which provided me the opportunity to take a closer look at the dynamics within the community. The incident of outmigration of the zebras happened a few months after the local Guji and Koore communities were moved out of the park in the process of transferring the management of the park to the African Parks Foundation. Explanations of why the animals moved out of the park differed. The incident was intriguing because it contradicted the claims made by the government and the conservation company that the resettlement was carried out
to enable wildlife to roam freely in the park territory and to enhance tourism activities. Government officials linked to the park administration listed apolitical, ecological and demographic factors such as hunting threats, fire and shortage of pasture as driving forces behind the withdrawal of the animals. In 2005, I received a peculiar explanation from a park biologist concerning the incident:

We came to understand that the presence of people in and close to the park territory has been a major threat to the wildlife. The people encroached into the park territory through poaching, cattle trespass, setting fire, clearing the land for farming and so on. All these threatened the animals. Moreover, the contact between livestock and the wildlife enhanced transmission of contagious diseases from livestock to wildlife. On the other hand, tourists often complained when they saw wildlife mixed with livestock because the major interest of tourists for traveling such long distances and paying their money was not to see cattle. They could see cattle from everywhere. This, no doubt could affect our tourism sector and the image of the park. However, because of overgrazing that occurred actually before the resettlement, the animals migrated in search of pasture and water. The people who were relocated outside the park also continued hunting practices. Therefore, the animals moved out of the park territory to escape such threats (informant Girma, April 2005).

In contrast, local Guji elders saw the phenomena from a different perspective. A Guji elder whom I interviewed in 2006 during my fieldwork among the Guji for my Master’s thesis commented that:

The animals followed the people who were evicted out of the park. In the past, they lived together with our people [the Guji] and their livestock. Now, after the government removed the people, the animals were left alone in the hands of their enemies [predators]. In the past, the animals were able to stay close to the kraals and the people rescued them from predators. In our culture, we care for all animals. They are harmless just like cattle. We treat those animals like our cattle because our ancestors had oath with Waaqa [God] to take care of those animals. We know that Waaqa is pleased and reciprocates us by blessing our people and livestock when we take care of the animals. If people kill these innocent animals of Waaqa, the action would provoke retribution from Waaqa. It would cause punishment like infertility of people and livestock. Sometimes drought and flooding destroy Guji land when people are involved in such activities. The animals migrated also for food. The government banned burning grass in the park. These animals could not get fresh grass in the park. No fresh grass regenerates for the animals. These people [the state/park officials] dismantled both the people and the animals. I am afraid that Waaqa may punish them with something bad (discussion with Boru Galgalo, July 2006).

The Koore had mixed views about the incident. While some of them shared the Guji’s arguments concerning the ban on burning and the subsequent shortage of fresh grass in the park as a cause for the animals’ outmigration, others still share the park authority’s views and cast the blame on their rival Guji community for threatening the animals through hunting. According to Gudo Mamacha, a Koore elder who was among those relocated to Abulo and Alfacho villages in 2004, “the outmigration of zebras was related to Guji’s hunting practices in the park. The Guji retaliated against the animals following their eviction from the park core areas. The animals moved out of the park to escape Guji hunters” (Informant: Gudo Mamacha, April 2008). Although the arguments of
the park officials and the Koore elders do not fully explain why the animals moved out of the park and sought shelter close to the Guji villages, given that it contradicts the alleged hunting practices of the Guji, it is nevertheless an equally important argument in revealing the divergence of perspectives among different actors. That is why it is now important to probe into the depth of such competing perspectives and narratives of each actor group.

The displacement of the local people from the park territory by the EPRDF government, which ostensibly advocates decentralization and self-government, has sparked criticism from international human rights organizations (Dowie 2009). The EPRDF government’s actions attracted the attention of many observers of the Ethiopian political order, not because it was the first to take such actions of displacing local communities under the guise of conservation or ‘development’, but rather due to the paradox between the EPRDF’s official narrative of local autonomy and its practical actions on the ground. Some of the groups, particularly the Guji Oromo, claim the area as their ancestral land with cultural, historical, livelihood and religious significances. Therefore, the displacement contradicted the EPRDF’s constitutional provision, which gives ethnic groups the right to self-determination on territories that they historically inhabited, as well as deciding on development matters that affect their communities.

In the context of this narrative, it is worth mentioning that the specific territory now designated as a national park has different meanings for the actors based on their worldviews. Regarding contestation between social groups over space, Sharp et al. (2000: 26) once indicated that space is inscribed with different meanings suggesting that, “different social groups endow space, of course place, with amalgams of different meanings, uses and values. Such differences can give rise to various tensions and conflicts within a society over space for individual and group purposes, and over domination of space by the state and other forms of dominating social (and class) power.” This hints at contestation between social actors, not only due to conflicts of interests (material, economic, political), but also owing to disparities in ontological orientations through which they represent space. In other words, if competing groups have conflicts of interests and differences in meanings ascribed to a particular space or territory, this reinforces tensions over environmental resources. It has also become evident that notions of establishing protected areas that mediates human-environmental interaction through categorization of ‘appropriate’ and ‘inappropriate’ activities have resulted in the exclusion of indigenous peoples from their customary homeland and have impinged on their access rights to their resources (Adams and Hutton 2007; Campbell 2005).
In this study, I will discuss the prevailing competing perceptions of nature, claims of entitlement and contestations over territories between and among actors, based upon the case of the Nech Sar National Park. Through this case, the project investigates the nexus between the official narratives of ethnic federalism, which presumably provides opportunities of self-government, local development, decentralization, participation and empowerment to local communities, and their lived realities. In this regard, it attempts to draw contours of connection/disconnection between the state’s official narratives of development and conservation and local contexts. In doing so, the project probes into different constellations of actors, investigating how their conceptions and definitions of nature, conservation and development are contested and negotiated. By relocating the establishment of the national park within conservation and development discourses across three regimes in Ethiopia, the research project investigates how the state addressed customary rights, local knowledge of resource management, the livelihood dependence of local communities and the people-environment relationships, with particular reference to their relations to the wildlife in and around the park territory. The claims and struggles over the territory are signals to questions of entitlement and ownership rights, issues of legitimacy, cosmological schemes, and knowledge/power relations between different actors. The contestations and negotiations over the Nech Sar National Park embody complex interactions among local communities, the state and non-state actors. There have been elements of interactions and engagement in the struggle which take the form of competition between local communities and the government, as well as within local communities. Moreover, there have also been cases where local communities have struggled against intervention from non-state actors, including business organizations and conservationists.

Therefore, this study aims to understand multilayer contestations over the Nech Sar National Park by synchronizing the micro level claims and competitions with the macro level political, economic and environmental discourses. By doing so, it aims to unveil how competing notions of nature and conceptualizations of human-environmental interactions affect conservation discourses and practices in Ethiopia, and more importantly how local communities articulate, contest, negotiate and appropriate different perspectives of conservation and development.
1.2. Research Questions

From the short ethnographic description above, it is evident that there have been competing perspectives on notions of human-environmental interactions in the Nech Sar National Park. The territorialization of the Nech Sar National Park and the subsequent control over the multidimensional spaces of the local Guji and Koore communities and low-income town dwellers near the park have unequivocally threatened their livelihood conditions and disrupted their historical coexistence with the wildlife (Dessalegn 2004; Getachew 2007). This phenomenon shares much in common with many national parks in other parts of Africa that contributed to impoverishment and marginalization of local communities during colonial and postcolonial periods (Neumann 1998; Igoe 2004). Despite the government’s rhetoric of creating a suitable environment for a thriving and vibrant tourism industry by removing the settled inhabitants from their longstanding homesteads, the biodiversity in the national park has not prospered in the last twenty years (APF Annual Report 2007; Freeman 2006). Animal population dramatically decreased since 1990s and particularly after the withdrawal of the African Parks Foundation in 2007. Thus, the fundamental problems related to the state projects of nature conservation should be addressed within the broader debates on nature-society relations.

Another complex phenomenon that I interjected in the previous section, the interrogation of which I postpone for the upcoming chapters, is the contradiction between ethnic federalism’s promises of local autonomy on the one hand, and its lived realities that enhanced strong state intrusion into the periphery on the other. In the context of existing struggles over the national park, continuing state interventions and local responses to different forms of domination, this study will address four major research themes, each involving specific questions:

**Theme One:** Introduction of Notions of “Wilderness” Conservation to Ethiopia

1. What kind of link can be drawn between the Western notions of wilderness conservation, colonial conquest in Africa and the establishment of national parks in Ethiopia?

2. How can the establishment of the Nech Sar National Park be understood within the context of the empire-building process in Ethiopia?

**Theme Two:** Competing Actors over the Nech Sar National Park
1. Who are the major actors involved in the contestation/negotiation over the Nech Sar National Park, and what are their interests over the territory claims?

2. How do the actors understand nature-society relations? More specifically, how do they define the territory and the place of local communities with regard to resource conservation and ownership rights? Moreover, whose views have been hegemonic, and when and how did they prevail?

3. How was the relationship between different actors established? Who is allied with whom and why?

Theme Three: Conservation Enclosure, Ethnic Federalism and Community Voices/Participation:

1. How is the designation of the Nech Sar National Park understood within the context of ethnic federalism?

2. What forms of inter-group relationship has the new political reconfiguration brought into the contestation between different actors?

3. How were issues of local community voices, participation, customary rights and self-government addressed within the context of ethnic federalism on the one hand, and the government's efforts to promote conservation and tourism on the other?

Theme Four: Domination/Resistance Interface in Contestations over the Nech Sar National Park:

1. What were the patterns of state intervention regarding conservation practices in the Nech Sar National Park?

2. How have the local communities responded to external interventions?

3. What forms of power relations have prevailed in the interaction between the state and grassroots actors?

4. How have the actors been contesting, negotiating and coming to terms with different perspectives and power positions?
1.3. Methodological Frameworks

1.3.1. The Research Framework and the Choice of Methodological Perspectives

Before embarking on the murky debates on methodological choices, I will explain here how I associate a research process with a journey that one follows along different paths from one point to another. Let us imagine that a person travels to a certain destination, which might be a Western metropolitan city, an Amazonian forest, the African Kalahari Desert, an Australian Seashore or Alaskan Polar Iceberg. The knowledge that the traveler would report to colleagues upon completion of the journey would be highly influenced by how the traveler conceived the spaces, what he/she wanted to know and how he/she went about collecting data. One might travel to the Amazonian forests to either ‘discover’ the presumed ‘savage’ and ‘wilderness’ creatures of the Amazon or produce knowledge in collaboration with the indigenous peoples about how the people understand, conceive, and interact with the environment and thereby give meaning to the space. This forms a foundation for the traveler to make important decisions about what equipment to take with him or her, where to go and what to do before beginning the journey.

Likewise, a social science researcher should take decisions at every step of the research process, given that such decisions influence the outcome of knowledge production (Crotty 1998). The major purpose of this section is not to delve into the bulk of discussions on social science research paradigms, but rather to pinpoint specific research paradigms that have informed and shaped my methodological framework in this particular work. Four research paradigms are widely discussed in academic works, namely positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructionism (see Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Guba 1990; Crotty 1998). After outlining each research paradigm, I will explain why I selected one of these approaches: the social constructivist.

A positivist thinking that presupposes a social world as a fixed, predictable and external object informed traditional social science research. Positivist thinking assumes the existence of an objective ‘reality’ ‘out there’ to be discovered through scientific investigation (Phillmore and Goodson 2004). Traditionally, this paradigm was the focus of natural science researchers although it was subsequently introduced into social science research during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries’ colonial conquests. During this particular phase in social science research, early colonial researchers used evolutionary ethnography particularly to collect data asserting the assumption that natives were at the bottom of human evolutionary progress, with the West at the top of the pyramid.
With its assumption of the social world as something fixed, predictable, controllable and measurable through an independent investigation of the inquirer, it served as an instrument to justify the predetermined conceptions of European travelers, explorers, missionaries and colonial administrators about native people in the 'New Worlds' (Phillmore and Goodson 2004). For instance, explorers and missionaries used positivist ethnography to collect data about the culture, religion, economy and governance systems of indigenous peoples. This research approach went along with colonialism, given that researchers who co-operated with the nineteenth century colonial governments in the process of suppression and exploitation of the colonial subjects mainly used this approach. In this regard, researchers' interpretations of the culture, governance systems, knowledge and ways of life of the natives were taken for granted as ultimate truth, which in turn informed colonial policies. The basic premises in positivist modes of thinking are based on its assumption of 'reality' as a fixed object independent of human knowledge, its views of the social world as predictable and the assumption that social research attempts to provide predictive, analytical and explanatory tools based on generalizations, which are then applied to broader populations (Wagner and Okeke 2009).

Some scholars criticized this perspective fundamentally for its rejection of multiple interpretations of 'reality'. It silences multiple voices, views and interpretations of the subjects, while representing a researcher as an 'expert' whose findings are taken as ultimate truth and as generalizable. Particularly postcolonial researchers have challenged the perspectives of positivism for its simplistic view of representing the 'Other' without making visible the multiple voices and views of the subjects. More importantly, positivism fails to recognize the diversity of individual experiences among different dimensions such as age, gender, race, class, religion, ethnicity, caste, education and other forms of internal categorizations. These aspects of a person's social position profoundly shape the perceptions, emotions, views and experiences he/she has with regard to a given social phenomenon. This reduces the credibility of generalizing research findings without due consideration of specific contexts (Crook and Garratt 2005).

A slight modification of positivism entered the social science research discourse in the 1970s, not as a complete rejection of the fundamental assumptions of positivism, but rather in the form of improvising on the existing paradigm, termed "post-positivist paradigm". While the ontological thought of positivists continued as the basic framework of social science research within the post-positivist paradigm, the approach to understanding the social world was changed. It recognizes that "although real world driven by real natural causes exists, it is impossible for humans truly to
perceive it with their imperfect sensory and intellective mechanisms” (Guba 1990: 20). As a result, it urges inquirers to be ‘critical’ in their inquiry process by reflecting on why things become what they happened to be. Nonetheless, positivist rigor remained, as rule-bounded methodologies continued to be part of the inquiry process (Crook and Garratt 2005).

Another paradigm that shares some similarities with the positivist and post-positivist paradigms is the critical theory. This paradigm emerged as neither as a counter argument against those discussed before nor an attempt to improvise on the former ones. It is not necessarily an immediate successor of the first two either; rather, the similarity concerns their assumption of reality. Critical theorists consider the social world from the perspective of inequality and asymmetrical power relations. They believe that people are naturally capable and have the creative and substantial potential to engineer social change but that some people block others from exercising their potential for change through different forms of oppression (Smith 2010). According to Kincheloe and McLaren (2002), aspects of hegemony and domination that prevail in the contexts of oppressive power can only be understood through critical approaches of investigating the underlying political, cultural, and socio-economic practices in a given context. According to this line of argument, critical theorists investigate how different forms of domination are expressed in popular culture, rituals, media, education and politics, as well as how people who are made subordinates to the dominating power respond to it. Driven by its presupposition of a social world as an arena of power struggle and inequality, critical theory positions the inquirer as an agent of social change and action through a value-oriented methodological approach in which he/she is supposed to reveal the ‘truth’ of oppression (Smith 2010). Like the positivist variants, this paradigm also blocks the mirror of unveiling multiple interpretations of reality. Another drawback of critical theory relates to its consideration of social science research as an instrument to liberate society from a certain social crisis, which in turn reduces the agency of research subjects in their struggle to position themselves within different social contexts. Although they criticize social inequality and asymmetrical power relations between different social actors, they also advocate for another hierarchical ordering of values and discourses by considering the researcher(s) as the main actor(s) of social change.

Since the 1980s, social science research has moved away from the notion that reality is ‘out there’ in the social world to the consideration of multiple realities held by inhabitants of the social world, which are deemed to be reachable through qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Phillimore and Goodson 2004). This entails a paradigmatic shift in many social science disciplines, from positivist notions of perceiving the social world as an objective reality that can be discovered,
predicted, measured and quantified, to a perspective that accepts the social world as multiple and context-oriented. More importantly, it necessitates a way of looking at knowledge production is now considered a collaborative process between the inquirer and the subjects of knowledge (the inquired) (Phillmore and Goodson 2004). This approach is constructivist methodological perspective (Crotty 1998).

Crotty (1998) warns us that many of the fundamental challenges facing social science researchers are related to the core activity of decision-making and the justification of the strategy and method(s) adopted. Although methodology chapters in research works like this are often dominated by methods and field experiences, it is essential to make clear the form and nature of reality (ontology), what counts as knowledge (epistemology) and the way(s) of knowing (methodology) prior to embarking on the choice of research method (Jordan and Gibson 2004). Thus, our understanding of knowledge (ontological position) and our positions concerning the relationship between the inquirer and the knowable (epistemological position) frame our positions as social inquirers, including how we go about finding knowledge (methodological approaches) and the specific tools employed, namely the method(s). As I outlined at the beginning of this section, a social science researcher faces decision junctures at different stages of the research process, which profoundly influences not only the course of the process but also the outcome(s). Like a traveler who should decide on the type of travel equipment with which he/she has to be armed based on the nature of the journey and the purpose behind the journey, I had to make decisions on the methodological framework of my project. Accordingly, my methodological framework has been informed by a constructivist paradigm. In the next few paragraphs, I will discuss what informed this paradigmatic choice in respect of this particular research project. For this purpose, it is imperative to contextualize the methodological choice within the research project.

As I outlined earlier, this study addresses how different actors contextually define and redefine the contested territory, development projects, conservation programs and ownership rights over the land. It has been evident that the state and local communities have been internally differentiated and espoused different narratives of entitlement to the national park. To this end, I adopted a methodological paradigm that recognizes the persistence of multiple views and interpretations and helps me to gain comprehensive insights into the complex nature of the struggle over the territory.

With the involvement of human rights advocacy organizations, the competition over the Nech Sar
National Park has international dimensions as well. As a space designated for conservation and ‘ecotourism’, it is a site where people from different backgrounds and perspectives have converged, including conservationists, tourists and human rights organizations that are allied with some of the local or national actors. In this regard, environmental concerns, economic aspects and human rights issues have become central agenda among the competing actors. For instance, while the involvement of the African Parks Foundation in the management of the park was a clear indication of how the ‘marriage’ between national and global economic and environmental discourses, reactions from international human rights organizations against the displacement of local communities in 2004 illuminate a different dimension of resistance against the hegemony of state and non-state actors. This hints at the actors’ utilization of available resources (social capital, knowledge, power, agency and network) to achieve their claims or deterring others from gaining a certain advantage from the same territory.

Actors’ production of different forms of knowledge in pursuing their claims over land, as well as the way in which conservation approaches, people-environmental interactions and development practices are defined, contested, articulated and negotiated, hint at multiple interpretations of ‘reality’. For example, in the aforementioned story of migration of zebras out of the national park territory in 2005, competing epistemological positions are held by different actors regarding their understandings of environmental degradation, human-wildlife interactions and solutions to redress environmental problems. In this context, I had to ask myself whether I was going to produce a single interpretation of the incident or multiple interpretations representing different voices of the actors involved. The answer is that if I had attempted to take the first option, the knowledge production process would have silenced the voices of some actors while favoring others. To avoid such methodological bias, my inquiry process should embrace from the onset of the journey an understanding that various subjects produce multiple voices and interpretations about a particular social world. My role as a social science researcher is thus to bring these diverse narratives into a dialogue, not necessarily at the same practical level in the field, but through interpretive approaches while writing the interpretations of the research subjects.

The complexity extant in the various strands of the narratives cannot be thoroughly understood unless the research process recognizes multiple voices and multiple interpretations given by different subjects involved in the contestation. As a result, a constructionist perspective of knowledge production has been used as an epistemological basis, because the narratives held by different actors show how conceptions of certain ‘realities’ are socially constructed. As Crotty
(1998: 42) maintains, “constructionism is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context.” This argument is in line with Long (2001: 3), who posits that, “In actor-oriented perspective, social constructionism is often used closely with the use of discourses and controversial analysis for understanding processes of social interaction and negotiation, constitution of power relations, and the co-production of knowledge.”

According to the constructionist research paradigm, researchers do not necessarily attempt to discover meaning, but rather construct it from multiple ways of interpretations by the subjects. Thus, human beings construct meanings about a particular object, phenomenon or practice through their iterative engagement and interaction with the world they are interpreting. For example, “a tree is a tree in a ‘commonsense’ but a tree might possess different meanings or constructions in a logging town, an artists’ settlement and a treeless slum” (Crotty 1998: 43). Among the Guji Oromo in the Nech Sar area, for instance, a tree is given different meanings from cultural, spiritual, and historical dimensions, as well as in terms of its relations to humans. In contrast to positivist views, “constructionism takes the world and objects in the world as partners to human beings in the construction of meaning” (Crotty 1998: 44). Rather than attempting to ascertain a universal reality about the contestations over the protected area, I posit that the complex dynamics in park-people relations, claims of entitlement, perspectives on environmental conservation and development discourses, and state intervention and local responses can be well understood from the perspective of those who operate within it. As Ingold (2005) also argues, individuals’ environmental knowledge is built through iterative interaction between people and the environment and through people’s expectation of environmental affordances. Thus, I agree with Phillimore and Goodson (2004: 36) that “research is undertaken in a collaborative fashion, with the researcher and the researched viewed as partners in the production of knowledge and the interaction between them being a key site for both research and understanding.”

1.3.2. Methodological Approaches and Methods

Drawing upon the above theoretical foundation, I have developed methodological approaches for data collection. At this decision juncture, it should be repeated that no single comprehensive methodological approach in social science studies is used as a toolkit in addressing a certain topic. For instance, the existence of multilayer actors, processes and forces in the field entails the use of
multidimensional approaches for balanced academic inquiries in my study. Thus, this research employs different methodological approaches from different fields of studies. I used an ethnographic method to collect data about local communities’ lived-in experiences and their day-to-day encounters with the national park, their traditional eco-cosmologies, and engagements the state. In addition, I used the extended case method to supplement the ethnographic method to link the dynamic interactions between local or micro contexts and national or macro forces that shape the subject of this study.

I selected the ethnographic method due to its recognition of context-specific accounts of the subjects. The analysis of data in ethnographic work “involves interpretation of the meanings, functions, and consequences of human actions, practices and views and how these are implicated in local, and perhaps also wider, contexts” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 3). Interpretive ethnography gives voice to people in their own local context, through “thick description” (Geertz 1973) of their everyday accounts, experiences, and encounters. Unlike empiricist methodologies, ethnography downplays the search for universal laws but rather considers meanings by unveiling the detailed experiences of the subjects within their particular culture. This is achieved by recognizing underlying social rules and beliefs that are used as resources within that particular context (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007).

Ethnography has undergone some paradigm shifts, with traditional ethnography having been characterized as a colonizing methodology, whereby ethnographers complemented colonial regimes by collecting data about the native people based on predetermined assumptions about them. By presenting their findings as the ultimate ‘truth’ without recognizing the multiple interpretations of natives’ accounts, colonial ethnographers served as ‘academic’ agents in the process of oppression and exploitation of indigenous peoples (Philmore and Goodson 2004). From the mid twentieth century onwards, ethnographic work moved away from its traditional positivist orientation to describing the accounts and experiences of local people in their natural contexts as per the meaning conferred upon the phenomena by the people holding the culture, belief, practice and social institutions. However, during the post-1980s period, ethnography reached another level, where, according to poststructuralist and postmodernist theorists, it is presented as an advocacy work in favor of a minority position rather than being solely used as a process knowledge production (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). In this work, I have used ethnography as a methodological approach to study the research subjects’ lived-in experiences and interpretations within the research settings.
The second methodological approach that complements ethnography is the extended case method. As Burawoy (2009) discusses, this approach is a methodology that stretches or extends the researcher’s scope of investigation beyond specific contexts. It is defined by four extensions: the extension of observer into the lives of participants under study; the extension of observation over time and space; the extension from micro processes to macro forces; and finally, the extension of theory. I am mainly interested in the first three dimensions of the extended case method. The extended case method is not used as a substitution for ethnography, but rather as its complementary methodological approach that fills some of the gaps for which traditional ethnography has been criticized. For instance, ethnography has been criticized as ahistorical and location-specific due to its emphasis on on-the-spot and face-to-face interactions with the subjects as a way of recording their day-to-day experiences (Burawoy 1991).

Extending the investigation beyond the temporal and spatial limits of a particular phenomenon helps to grasp the social world from broader contexts and to create a nexus between local or micro processes and external or macro forces. This approach does not have its own unique features in terms of methods of data collection, but rather shares methods used by ethnographic approaches. However, unlike traditional ethnography, which encourages the concentration of the ethnographer on a natural setting of the research theme, the extended case method supports engagement and dialogue between multiple actors, processes and forces that directly or indirectly influence events in the field. This approach is important in understanding the interconnectedness between different actors and processes through interactive dialogue. According to this method, the dialogue “involves participant and observer (subjects and researcher), successive events in the field, micro and macro processes and forces and reconstructions of theory” (Burawoy 2009: xv). In its specific techniques of dialogue between various actors, the extended case method shares similarities with ethnographic methodology, employing observation, interviews and group discussion.

In this study, one cannot separately investigate local people’s perceptions about the people-nature relationship, claims over territories, conservation and development programs and contestations over boundaries without linking them with external forces that shape the economic and political discourses of different actors. In this regard, I have made two major extensions from the present scenario to past trajectories and from micro processes to macro forces. In fact, I also analyzed the interpretations of my research subjects from their own points of views positing the research into
their life worlds. Despite being difficult to conjure the past through observation, people’s narratives of their experiences and encounters of the past help us to thread the past with the present. In this regard, I have made a historical reconstruction about the people’s settlement history, economic practices, rituals and inter-group relations to gain an insight into current claims and conflicts over the territory. As Neumann (1998) argues, local people’s resistance against state conservation discourses in East Africa is part of the broader peasant resistance against hegemonic states that spanned from the colonial period to the postcolonial era. In the Ethiopian context, it is important to contextualize the territorialization of indigenous lands as a continuation of the empire-building project that began in the late nineteenth century (Turton 2011).

The second aspect of the extended case method involves extending micro processes to macro forces. In this regard, there are many interrelated dynamics; for instance, I investigated aspects of local people’s claim for customary rights over the land in the context of the official political discourses of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia that ostensibly grants rights of self-government to local ethnic-based administrative units. By tracing the historical trajectories that brought about the establishment of the Nech Sar National Park in 1974 and extending the observation and investigation beyond temporal and geographical limits of the current fieldwork site through the minds of my research subjects, the project positions the contestation within broader political trajectories at different levels. Issues related to inter-ethnic or inter-regional claims over resources and their management, national political discourses of ethnic federalism and its lived experiences, as well as interplays between local and external factors, were addressed by extending the investigation of local phenomena to extra-local forces that influence the micro contexts. Therefore, the extended case method reflects one of the appropriate methodological approaches to supplement the ethnographic approach.

1.4.2.1. Methods

The epistemological and methodological perspectives discussed above are not simply ends in themselves within the process of knowledge production; rather, they are used to guide the journey towards the end goal. For topics such as mine, which involve competing actors whose interests, narratives and claims are significantly different, any attempt to use a single method of data collection cannot be a fruitful exercise. Therefore, I employed in-depth and narrative interviews, semi-structured interviews, focused group discussions, participatory methods and transect walk observations, according to their suitability in specific contexts. I used each method or combination
of methods depending on the types of issues and the type of research participants involved. I employed these methods during the data collection process in 2011 and 2012 among the Guji and Koore local communities who inhabited the eastern side of the park and government officials related to the national park.

**In-depth/Narrative Interviews:** In-depth interviews are used to investigate an issue from its source. Unlike structured or semi-structured interviews where informants or research participants are expected to answer questions with the interviewer’s frequent interventions, an in-depth interview is open-ended and gives considerable time and freedom to the interviewees to narrate their experiences. In this study, I used in-depth interviews to unveil complex experiences of the communities under study. In most cases, these types of interviews share some similarities with the narrative method, which help the researcher to “organize a sequence of events into a whole so that the significance of each event can be understood through its relation to the whole. In this way, a narrative conveys the meaning of events” (Elliott 2005: 3). In this study, research participants’ lived experiences related to the national park, their historical attachments to the land and their claims thereof, and narratives of displacement following the establishment of the national park are traced through narrative interviews. Remarking on the significance of narratives in qualitative social science research, Shkedi (2005: 13) states that, “human beings organize and manage their perception of the world through stories they construct and tell. These human narratives give a structured quality to experience and are the way people make sense of the world around them.”

For in-depth/narrative interviews, I went on selecting informants based upon their knowledge about the research theme. To this end, I first contacted village chairpersons and schoolteachers in both Koore and Guji villages to obtain a list of a few local elders for this purpose. Once I met some individuals, the selection of knowledgeable elders who were locally known as ‘culture men’ or ‘men of history’, was conducted through the snowball method for the purpose of key informant interviews. Although men dominate public spaces in both the Guji and Koore communities, women were also included in the interview to understand the gender dimensions of the themes investigated. The inclusion of women into the research was not merely for the purpose of representativeness, but rather because the lived-in accounts of women are often different from their male counterparts regarding human-environmental interactions. Therefore, women’s participation in the research has both ethical and paradigmatic imperatives. For instance, I asked elderly women to narrate their memories of state intervention and its implications on them. Therefore, interviews with the women were mainly important because the government’s enclosure restricted the people from access to
environmental resources (water and forest) and social services such as the route to the market. This is because in Africa in general, women play major roles in activities such as resource extraction for household consumption and engagement in local markets. Thus when these social and economic spaces are restricted, women are commonly prompted to travel long distances to find these resources or to identify market centers (Neumann 1998; Igoe 2004). Women were also the main actors in enhancing inter-societal relations, particularly during conflicts, due to the common understanding among Guji and their neighbors not to attack women, despite any sort of inter-ethnic conflict.

**Semi-structured Interviews:** I mainly used this method in interviews with selected government authorities, park staff members and tour operators, using some semi-structured interview questions, based upon which informants elaborated their views. From the government offices, people from different administrative structures of the government were included, including culture and tourism bureaus of Oromia and SNNP regional states, officials of Amaro and Galana districts, former administrators of both districts, and chairpersons from villages adjoining the park and staff members of Ethiopian Wildlife Authority. In addition, former staff members of African Parks Foundation were also interviewed to get detailed information on the management approaches of the park from 2004-2007.

**Participatory Mapping:** This is a technique used in human geography, development studies and childhood research, which allows research participants the freedom to depict their views through concrete diagramming (e.g. mapping, time lines, cartoons and pie charts) and can also be used beyond cultural, language, and literacy barriers (Pain and Francis 2003). Participatory diagramming or mapping increases the degree of participants’ involvement in the research process, enabling one to read their minds through what they do rather than through what they speak. Among possible participatory mapping techniques, my research subjects and I used historical and resource mapping in this research (see chapters 3 & 7). In historical mapping, participants drew ‘maps’ about their settlement in and around the park across time. Regarding resource mapping, the members of the Guji and Koore communities were asked to draw which resource type was/is located in a particular place. Their depictions of resources provided me with preliminary insights to the prevailing competing interests between the local communities and the park and within the local communities as well, because there were instances in which both the Guji and Koore people were engaged in exploiting the same ecological niche along the eastern border of the park.
Observation through Transect Walk: A transect walk is a guided walk in a village, farmland or pasture area, conducted by one or two members of a community to collect place-based information that might be difficult to uncover through other methods. In this particular project, transect walk has been used to gain information about some contested territories such as the boundary of the park, boundaries between Guji and Koore territories, as well as locating some sacred spaces such as ritual sites, burial spaces, a healing hot spring (Xabala) and the access route to a lake or a river (malka). By this method, two different transect walks were conducted by members of the Guji and Koore communities respectively. Throughout the walk, we made observations and discussions to elucidate the individuals’ mental conceptualization of the territories. During the transect walk, we observed about cattle trespass, farming encroachment and some activities of park scouts, such as their response to cattle trespass.

During one of the transect walks, Danbala Edema, a Guji man who guided us (my field assistant and me) instantly changed his tone of conversation to one of distress, telling that the place was where three of his family members (his grandfather, uncle and nephew) were buried before the Guji were evicted in 2004. We continued our walk after Danbala dropped a leaf on the top of the graveyards of his relatives, as is the custom among the Guji. From conversations that we had afterwards, it became evident that members of the Guji who lived in the park territory and had experiences of eviction under successive regimes had developed a sort of negative attitudes towards the park because it detached them from their ancestral spaces. In this particular case, a transect walk was useful to observe the individuals’ emotional attachments to their land or to particular spaces, such as sacred, ritual and burial sites.

Focused Group Discussion (FGD): The key qualities of this method are “related to the synergistic effect of group interaction and their potential to break down the researcher–researched power relationship” (Thomas 2004: 200). Group interaction partly replaces the interviewer–interviewee relationship found in individual interviewing and thus provides opportunities for participants to raise their views and arguments about a particular issue. This method is also important in giving participants opportunities to remind one another about issues under discussion. By putting them into debates concerning opinions that they do not commonly share, this gives the researcher the chance to discern the diversity of views within the group. In such cases, a guided interview with individual members of the group discussion helps to gain detailed views and explanations on their points of
argument.

To gain diversified views, discussions were arranged among elders, youth and women. Six FGD sessions were held with peasants from three villages in Amaro district. Moreover, I conducted four FGDs with the agro-pastoral Guji community. Participants in the FGDs were selected based on their knowledge, experience and involvement in the contestations and negotiations over the Nech Sar National Park. The specific selection process was made deliberately through a snowball method. Local people knew one another and mentioned who could give detailed knowledge about the themes of discussion. To gain views from the youth, school youth from Darba Manana, Tifate and Yero of the Koore villages and Arda Guddina and Tore among the GujiGuji took part in three separate focused group arrangements. Moreover, discussions were held with out-of school youth to increase diversity.

An interesting part of this method, particularly among the youth, was that they became active in the debate after a few moments of being passive in the interaction, and began arguing against one another for some time. They were initially reluctant to pronounce their views due to a lack of experience and to being skeptical about the objectives of the research. The major themes covered by this method include the role of local communities in planning and management of the park, issues of eviction and resettlement, livelihood dependence and challenges of living close to the park, as well as the future prospects and questions of benefit to local communities. The discussions actually provoked additional issues such as inter-ethnic tension, hunting, cattle trespass and the role of local scouts in hiding perpetrators.

1.3.3. The Challenge of Encountering Competing Actors in the Field

In Ethiopia, social science research faces government scrutiny at different levels. Research topics might be labeled as ‘developmental’ or ‘anti-development’ and ‘peaceful’ or ‘anti-peace’, not based on critical investigation of the objectives and findings but rather haphazardly from the superficial impressions that the topics might convey. For example, according to Baye (2008: 57), Addis Ababa University has increasingly become a political center and lost its alleged claim “to be national authorship on sociopolitical developments of the country and on the collective consciousness of the people. Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences has always been prescribed and often under-funded and/or indirectly discouraged with stringent financial rules and inefficient financial administration.”
Such denunciation of social science research as a threat to government political ideologies has created a tendency among local government officials, whom I consider as ‘gate-keepers’, to be skeptical about giving research permits. In the case of this particular research, the Nech Sar National Park has become one of the national parks located in volatile regions of the country due to the persistence of conflicts and claims between competing actors. This is why the government put it under the administration of the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority under the federal state in 2009 (Personal Communication with the Former Head, Culture and Tourism Bureau, SNNP, April 2012). Issues pertaining to the relocation of the Guji and Koore people and the subsequent criticism it generated from human rights organizations have compelled the government to inspect any research activity that involved the local communities closely. There were day-to-day encounters of hostility between the people and the park administration officials. Therefore, the park administration suspects that researchers would reveal to the public its actions against the local communities if the administration gives them access to the field. Below, I mention only a few of the complex scenarios on the ground, because space constraints do not allow me to describe all the complex circumstances regarding the politicization of the research and the control of access on the part of the ‘gate-keepers’.

Based upon its relevance to the political ecology theoretical framework and actor-oriented perspectives that I employed as an analytical approach, my encounter with competing actors warrants further discussion, as provided below. The fieldwork challenges and experiences are presented from three different dimensions, namely bureaucratic challenges related to research permission, inter-group conflict and accessibility problems, as well as competing actors’ attempts to manipulate the course of the research to their interests. Regarding the issue of getting research permission, the initial challenge was related to frequent turnovers of management of the national park, resulting from the oscillation of managerial responsibility between regional and federal administrations and a multinational company. Initially, the park administration was centrally managed, as was the case for other state institutions during the military regime (1974-1991). Following the downfall of the military regime, the park administration was given to the SNNP regional state as part of the decentralization of state institutions (1991-2004) until the government transferred it to the APF (2004-2007). Since then it has been reverted to the federal government, having been administered under the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA). Such administrative changes created different sorts of discontent on the part of government institutions, who covertly claim the right of managing the territory, as in the case of SNNP culture and tourism
bureau and the EWCA.

I approached the regional Culture and Tourism Bureau in Hawassa, requesting research permission because it handles issues of tourism related activities within the region. After giving me two weeks appointment to decide on my request, the bureau later informed me that it had no mandate to give research permits, given that the park administration had been transferred to the federal government. Thus, it referred me to the EWCA in Addis Ababa, from where I finally got the permission within a few days. As it became clear throughout my research, there have been tensions between the Culture and Tourism Bureau (SNNPR) and the EWCA over the administration of the park. Typified by the saying “where elephants fight, only the grass suffers”, the lengthy bureaucratic process of obtaining my research permission was part of the costs of conducting research.

The major obstacle in the process of getting a research permission, which continued throughout the research process, was posed by the park administration located in Arba Minch town. The park headquarter is located at the eastern outskirt of Arba Minch, in Gamo Gofa Zone. Unlike the federal authority, people in this local office knew more about the conflicts between the park and the local communities. They were also the central actors in displacing local communities, with the latest incident being the destruction of sixty-four Guji houses along the park border on the eastern side in March 2012 (see chapter eight for detail). As a result, they were not keen on allowing researchers to enter the communities via the park territory. This route is the only on-land route to the territory of the Guji Oromo from Arba Minch side, with the alternative involving a boat ride on Lake Abaya, which is often risky. As it has been described earlier in this chapter, the newly established Guji village is located between the park and Amaro district (see map 3 in chapter three).

There were only three possible routes to the Guji villages. While the first and perhaps ‘safe’ and easy way was crossing to the villages through the park from Arba Minch town from the west, the other option involved descending to the valley from Amaro district from the east. The third option, which was more risky than others, was crossing on Lake Abaya using a traditional boat called Jeatarra or Wogolo. I was aware of the fact that without access to the Guji who are the major local actors in park-people relations, my project would not be complete. At the end, the two possibilities turned against my attempt. My first attempt involved requesting the park administration to cross the park territory to the people. However, the park administration gave me permission only to enter the park territory and observe the wildlife, but not to contact any group of people beyond its boundary.
To ensure the terms of the permission were adhered to, park officials assigned scouts to patrol my activities. Nevertheless, given that my research is not on the wildlife per se, my entry permit to the park only enabled me to observe some cattle trespassing into the ‘park territory’, wildlife distribution and environmental degradation, as well as how scouts respond to cattle trespass from a distance.

Because of the authority of the ‘gate-keepers’ over information and territory, I had to suspend my effort to reach the Guji for some time. While it would have been an hour’s walk from the park outposts to the villages, I had to travel for four days by public transport in my attempt to enter Guji villages through the Amaro district. Luckily, four Peasant Associations/villages (kebeles) in Amaro district (Gumure, Darba Manana, Tifate and Yero) were part of my research because many people from these villages had plots of land in the contested Sermale Valley called Tsalke/Golbo. Getting a research permission and a field assistant from Amaro went smoothly. Although the road from Amaro Kelle (administrative center) to the Kooro villages was difficult because of the rugged Amaro Mountains, which took us eight hours to climb and descend, the hospitality of the Kooro people in these localities was very good. The fieldwork in the Kooro villages also went quite well. Once again, it would have been a matter of few hours to cross to the Guji community adjoining the park, but because the conflict that erupted between the two groups in late 2010, shortly before my arrival in the field, there was a sense of insecurity among the people crossing into each other’s territory following. My Kooro field assistant refused to guide me to the Guji villages and threatened to leave me alone in the field if I insisted on going to the Guji territory. Considering the repercussions this would bring during the course of my research, I had to accept his proposal not to travel to the Guji villages. Thus, my continuous efforts to get access to the Guji villages were entirely blocked by different actors on both sides. Meanwhile, I conducted several interviews with Guji individuals who came to Arba Minch town for their own business in 2011, during these failed efforts to reach the Guji. However, I felt that this was insufficient in gaining detailed knowledge about people’s day-to-day encounters and lived-in experiences in terms of their interaction with the national park.

As a last resort, I had to return to Arba Minch, which took me another four days by public transportation. As part of this last option, I had to make one of the most difficult decisions in the fieldwork process, namely the decision to cross Lake Abaya with a traditional boat, which the Guji use when they travel to and from Arba Minch for market, healthcare and other purposes. The risk is attached to reports concerning the existence of dangerous crocodiles in the lake, often attacking
people on the boats. Moreover, the risk is associated with the keeling over of the small, locally made boats. The most recent incident at the time was when a boat capsized in February 2012 on its way to Arba Minch town, killing nine passengers. These stories placed me in a dilemma for some time, before I finally decided to set aside my fears and to take the boat ride.

![Image of boat trip on Lake Abaya](image)

Figure 3: Photo Showing our Boat Trip on Lake Abaya  
(Photo: Asebe Regassa, May 2012)

My Guji field assistant, myself, two boat operators and sixteen Guji individuals were on board when a strong wave suddenly rose up to a height far above the boat in the middle of the lake, but luckily the two skilled operators were able to divert the direction of the boat and escaped the wave. When we were about to cross to the other side of the lake, a hippopotamus emerged from the water and was about to tip our boat over, had it not been for one of our Guji companions who slapped his machete into its head. While I did not see a crocodile, these two incidents were ‘good’ experiences in terms of showing the authority of ‘gate-keepers’ over the territory and the risk that the local people incur in their day-to-day interaction with Arba Minch town. This was mainly because of the blockage of the route in the mainland by the park administration.

Another challenge that I faced was after my field guide and I entered the Guji village, Arda Guddina, which was established in 2008 and is claimed by the park administration as its de facto
territory. The incident was as follows: while they were patrolling around the villages, two park scouts asked me how I came to the village. They were not authorized for such inspection because the village was not formally under the park administration. However, I had to tactfully and diligently deal with the encounter in order not to obstruct my fieldwork. They asked if I had gained research permission from the park administration, which I did not get despite relentless efforts. In fact, I had a letter of permission from Galana district, to which the Guji villages belong. Finally, they reported to the park administration in Arba Minch about my entrance to the Guji villages and eventually the park administration ordered them to arrest me, having allegedly accusing me of entering the 'park territory' 'illegally'. The park administration asked the chairman of Arda Guddina village to extradite me for arrest, although the chairman and other local government officials angrily reacted against the intervention of the park into their administrative spaces. The chairman boldly reacted stating that it is neither a Guji custom (aadaa Guji) nor is it administratively sound to hand over an imala (guest) to a third party that might endanger the person's safety.

The Guji gave me the status of imala (guest), conferring on me a privilege of protection and respect. They defended my case, arguing that the park administration has no right to inspect who entered their village. The chairman warned them that any attempt to arrest their imala would lead to open conflict between the park administration and the people. One month later, when I came out of the fieldwork, I was informed that the park administration had appealed to Borana Zone administration accusing both the chairman and myself of flaunting official orders. They sought to politicize the case as it is often done in Ethiopia, stating that the village had hosted a 'stranger'. While the Guji received me as their imala with respect, the park administration labeled me as stranger. Within this context, the term 'stranger' was used with the politically loaded meaning of referring to a person who is there with hidden motives. The case was finally settled after I presented to the officials the research permits and support letters I had received from different institutions. My field guide, who immediately returned to Arba Minch after introducing me to the Guji villagers and local government authorities, was later detained for three days in Arba Minch town, being accused of guiding me into the villages.

The second dimension of fieldwork challenge was related to the Guji-Koore conflict in late 2010. Fieldwork in a conflict zone poses significant methodological and practical challenges, particularly where research activities involve two or more conflicting groups (Robben 1995; Asebe 2010). There are tendencies to label a researcher either as a government agent surveying perpetrators or as a spy collecting information for the 'Other' group. Based upon such suspicion and a sense of insecurity,
inter-group communication between the Guji and Koore was limited and subject to scrutiny. As I described earlier, I was unable to pass from Koore territory to the Guji villages because my Koore field assistant refused to guide me to the Guji border. Koore informants were also not comfortable with my plan to enter the Guji territory. During one of my fieldwork trips to the Koore villages, my field assistant warned us (my brother in-law and myself) not to speak the Oromo language as the Koore informants would associate us with their Guji Oromo rivals. In this regard, my own ethnic identity with one of the research groups, the Guji Oromo, had two different implications. Among the Koore, it would have given them an impression of mistrust had I disclosed my ethnic identity because they had open conflict with the Guji only a year prior to my fieldwork. Apart from suspicion regarding my impartiality, the Koore would have been skeptical about freely discussing their discontent concerning the Guji and Oromia regional state in general.

At this point, it is important to reflect on the implication of working in my own ethnic group from three different dimensions. First, when I entered the Guji, my ethnic membership at times enabled me to gain backstage information or, as Scott (1990) calls it, the ‘hidden transcripts’ and culturally embedded norms and practices that are difficult to obtain for outsiders. Accordingly, due to their experiences of marginalization and mistreatment in the hands of government and the park authorities whom they consider as outsiders, the Guji developed a sense of trust to share their grievances with me. Second, despite opening some opportunities of gaining access to their backstage information, my ethnic background did not automatically enable me to win the trust of the Guji, as they had had experiences with Oromo government officials who were allied with the park administration and who evicted them from their land. Therefore, it was only after long periods of rapport establishment that they became open in revealing their experiences, views and actions. Third, because they considered me as an insider who was supposed to know Guji values, norms and practices, they were not keen to explain some of their stories in detail. The Guji socialize their children into the customs, values and practices of their community. As a result, they found it surprising when I asked for explanation about some stories or practices, because adults of my age were not supposed to lack the knowledge of common practices such as herding culture.

In a different dimension, I encountered another fieldwork challenge, which I put here as a third category of challenges. Whenever I moved from one territory to another, I came across contrasting perspectives among the Guji and Koore communities. It was actually not my expectation to experience a uniform knowledge production from multiple actors. I was cognizant of the fact that multiple interpretations of realities characterize complex themes in cases such as my project.
However, my encounter was more with the two groups’ accusations of one another. For example, the Koore informants directed their blame towards their Guji rivals for transgressing park laws, whereas the Guji blame the Koore for hunting the wild animals in the national park. Far beyond this local context, government officials from both regional states blame one another for the human and environmental problems in the national park. Under such circumstances, members of different competing actor groups produce narratives that place the researcher into a methodological dilemma. This hints at how competing actors strategically craft different narratives to win the researcher’s attention. As a social science researcher, I had to use different mechanisms of crosschecking information, sometimes by going beyond the specific locale to incorporate the views of outsiders and sometimes by probing into the backstage information of each actor group. In fact, my objective is not to find ‘truth’, but to investigate how actors construct narratives and discourses in their production of knowledge and counter narratives against their rivals. Even then, it was essential to interrogate how and why competing actors use a certain type of narrative and downplay the views of the other.

Interrelated to competing actors, particularly the two local communities, there were also continuous attempts by my informants to manipulate me to their ideas and opinions. In fact, working in one’s own ethnic group compels a researcher to enter into what Robben (1995) calls as ‘ethnographic seduction’ – the challenge of being seduced or manipulated by the views of the research subjects. In all such challenges, I employed techniques of impression management to control my own subjectivity and the pressure from my informants. As Robben (1995: 85) rightly describes, fieldwork on groups with memories of conflict puts a researcher in a condition of “ethnographic seduction”, because both groups strive to recruit the ethnographer into their own camps by highlighting all possible ‘justifications’ for their actions, while also denouncing the actions of their rivals. Unless one receives such information cautiously, the data from the field would tend to favor the interest of one or two actors by silencing others. Despite persistent efforts by different competing actors to drive the course of the research to their advantage by accusing their rivals and concealing what they perceive as wrong on their side, I managed to balance the views while also reserving the right of my subjects for their views. This is why we need to interpret the impressions of our subjects cautiously by scrutinizing what has informed their reactions (Berreman 1962; Robben 1995). The analysis of such competing views becomes important to understand the complexity of the circumstance.
1.4. Actor-Oriented Approach as Analytical Concept

From the previous discussions of the involvement of different social groups and institutions in the struggle over the Nech Sar National Park, it has become clear that the study should encompass the characteristics, actions, interests, perspectives and networks of actors who could be place-based or non-place based with direct or indirect influences on the dynamics of the national park. In the study of human-environmental interactions, political ecologists have begun to adopt a comprehensive approach of researching the political and ecological conflicts and cooperation by analyzing how actors perceive, contest and negotiate environmental issues (Bryant and Bailey 1997). This approach is called an actor-oriented approach (Long 2001), touching upon competing environmental discourses and narratives espoused by different actors in their interactions over environmental resources. For instance, conflicts between pastoralists and state, peasant farmers and pastoralists, and farmers and state could be the subjects of investigation in political ecology to understand how these actors compete, cooperate and negotiate over environmental resources and what actions they take in the process of achieving or defending their interests. By recognizing the agency of social actors, particularly concerning grassroots actors, the actor-oriented approach scrutinizes how different actors respond to discourses of nature conservation. This includes how they define nature-culture relations and conceptualize development and community-based conservation because these ideas reflect the actors’ power relations and ideological dispositions (Escobar 1996).

In this work, I use an actor-oriented perspective as an analytical approach to understand the complex dynamics related to the Nech Sar National Park and how different actors contest, negotiate or come to terms with conservation discourses and practices. In this context, I use the concept ‘actors’ to denote both social groups with similar interests and individual(s) who use their agency in articulating different narratives, discourses and practices to maneuver their interaction with other actors in the struggle over environmental resources. In the section where I problematized the notions of protected area conservation, I mentioned how the perspectives of nature-society dualism apparently brought the establishment of protected areas first in the United States and subsequently in different parts of the world under the ‘fortress’ conservation approaches. As it will be detailed in chapter two, nature conservation should be understood in terms of its economic and political dimensions, i.e. beyond the traditional apolitical approach in the study of environmental problems. In the case of the Nech Sar National Park, multiple social actors have been involved in the contestation over the territory for different purposes. For example, the state operates as a visible and
invisible actor through its institutions, officials and policies. At the same time, non-state actors such as conservation organizations, human rights advocacy groups and tour operators have their respective interests and strategies of achieving their goals. Likewise, local communities, still internally heterogeneous, operate both as groups and as individuals in their contestation against other actors. This is why Few (2001) states that in defining degrees of access to formerly ‘open’ spaces, the process creates a struggle over place, with political, economic, social and cultural implications at different scales between different agents of varying interests and interpretations. Thus, as Long (2001) also suggests, an actor-oriented approach can be used as an analytical approach in the contexts of interlocking contestations to explore the interplay between social actors at local and external arenas in a series of intertwined battles over resources, meanings, institutional legitimacy and control. This approach is often employed to understand how meanings, interpretations and concepts about a particular ‘reality’ are socially constructed, contested and negotiated, thereby addressing issues of social interaction, and the constitution of power and co-production of knowledge (Few 2001).

Social actors do not operate as separate entities; rather, they create networks and develop social capital, in turn building on their legitimacy, trust and credibility, which increase their capability and knowledge of their cause. This means that legitimacy, trust and credibility generate the agency of social actors to maneuver a certain event or process to their advantage. Thus, in inter-actors or intra-actors relationship, the type of social capital built shapes the nature of the relationship. This relationship can be analyzed at different levels (domestic, regional, national, or international), as well as in terms of actors’ interests in forming networks. An analysis of the actors’ network enables one to understand the interconnections/disconnections between actors concerning the conception of nature-society (culture) relations. In this regard, the perspectives of the actors should encompass large-scale institutional frameworks, resource fields, networks of communication and support, collective ideologies, socio-political arenas of struggle and the beliefs and cosmologies that might shape actors’ improvisations, coping behavior and planned social actions (Few 2001).

Actor-oriented approach cautions us from considering external intervention as smooth process of translating programs into practices unchallenged because as actors have the power and capability to define external interventions like national parks, it often faces counter knowledge production on the side of local communities. As Long (2001: 27) maintains, intervention into a certain social system entails a constant process of transformation that “is reshaped by its own internal organizational and political dynamics and by specific conditions it encounters or itself creates, including the responses
and strategies of local and regional groups who struggle to define and defend their own social spaces, cultural boundaries and positions within the wider power field” (Long 2001: 27). As the empirical data from my fieldwork shows, the government faced challenges both from its own structure as well as from local communities in channeling down its conservation policies. As indicated above, actors’ choices, strategies and networks are influenced by internal (local) and external (extra-local) phenomena. Thus, through actor-oriented approach, I attempt to understand broader economic and political structures and perspectives that have been shaping the government approaches of resource management and local responses to it. Understanding social relationships between individuals or groups requires a concept of human agency. In the process of contestation over a particular social space, individuals negotiate within differential power relations, including actors who are internal and external to a particular field of struggle (Gezon 2006). Therefore, I employed an actor-oriented approach to analyze the characteristics, interests, views, actions, power positions and responses of actors in the process of struggle over environmental resources as part of economic, ecological, cultural, political and spiritual spaces.

1.5. Ethical Considerations

Social science researchers deal with societies whose cultural, political, religious and economic practices are subject to different aspects of interpretations. Due to the agency of researchers and the participants of the research in interpreting a certain phenomenon based on their worldviews and experiences, the entire research process in social sciences is neither smooth nor uncontested. In developing countries such as Ethiopia, where researchers and their participants fall under government scrutiny for pronouncing their perspectives, it remains the researcher’s responsibility to handle the entire process in order to not endanger the research participants. As part of the ethical considerations in this work, I explain issues of informed consent, confidentiality and impartiality as follows.

The primary task in the fieldwork process was to acquire the consent and permission from government institutions, ‘gate-keepers’ (local government officials), local elders and members of the local communities, who participated in the research. To this end, I presented my research proposal to the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority and signed an agreement, after which the Authority granted me a research permit. Likewise, I presented my project to all government institutions directly related to the study. I clearly presented the objectives of the study and its scope
to the actors from whom I sought research permission or information relevant to the study. Local communities, particularly the Guji and Koore, had experience of outsiders’ manipulation of ‘research’ findings for the sake of implementing the government’s conservation programs. As a result, they were skeptical of welcoming researchers to their villages. Within such circumstances, it has been crucial to develop a rapport based upon trust, respect and transparency. Accordingly, this was why I had to invest my time, knowledge and skills in establishing rapport by ensuring the members that the study did not have any connection to government institutions or any non-governmental conservation organization. After we reached a common understanding on the objectives of the research at large, I had to seek permission from individual participants for audio or video recordings, photographs and for their consent on issues of anonymity.

In research work that focuses on political, cultural and religious sensitivities, the main role of researchers should be to ensure the security of their research participants. To this end, depending on their consent and interest, informants have the right to remain anonymous and their details to be kept confidentially. Due to the involvement of different competing actors in the struggle over the Nech Sar National Park and given that different claims and accusations had political implications at different levels, my informants are given pseudonyms, except on topics and issues where revealing the real identity of the informants was unavoidable yet does not threaten their security.

Another difficult aspect of social sciences research is the issue of impartiality, which is somewhat different from objectivity. Although the debates on objectivity and subjectivity are more related to the level of the researcher’s interpretations vis-à-vis the information provided by his/her informants or from fields of observation and other sources of inquiry, impartiality rather has to do with personal inclinations to or the avoidance of a certain aspect of the study (issues, people, territories, time, discipline, approach, etc.). These sorts of bias might originate from the researcher’s academic background, which favors a certain discipline, as well as his/her theoretical orientation, his educational background, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation and place of living. In this particular study, my academic background in interdisciplinary programs has given me the opportunity to mediate different methodological and theoretical frameworks from geography, anthropology, political sciences and environmental history. As a result, I have been able to avoid this challenge. Moreover, my previous fieldwork experiences among many ethnic groups in southern Ethiopia such as the Gedeo, Burji, Koore and Guji have also given me insights into research beyond my own cultural and geographical settings. Nevertheless, research that involves competing actors, particularly if one of them is associated with the researcher, falls under scrutiny. In this regard, it is
neither the ethics nor the objectives of the research to favor any group at the expense of others through the research findings. Neither does it aim to criticize government policies and practices by putting the researcher on behalf of the local communities and vice versa. Rather, it seeks to bring different voices, interpretations and perspectives into dialogue through the researcher’s own interpretive skills.

1.6. Structure of the Work

This research work is divided into three parts and nine chapters. In part one, the Research Settings, Methodology and Theoretical Frameworks have been discussed in three chapters. By articulating the research problems, questions and methodological frameworks in chapter one, the theoretical frameworks in chapter two and the study areas in chapter three, part one sets the basic building blocks in the research. In part two, the political ecology of nature conservation is presented in chapters four and five. This part begins with the discussion on the exportation of national park ideals to Africa in general and its introduction to Ethiopia, and goes on to specific discussions on ethnic federalism and the creation of contested spaces in post-1991 Ethiopia in chapters four and five respectively. Chapter four specifically deals with the political ecology of national parks in colonial Africa by synchronizing multidimensional motives behind the establishment of national parks with the broader colonial policies of resource extraction and political control. The chapter further creates a nexus between colonial conservation discourses and practices in other African countries and the center-periphery relations in Ethiopia and how the notions of nature conservation were systematically exported to the periphery. Chapter five problematizes the political experiment of ethnic federalism by analyzing the rhetoric of local autonomy and participatory development against day-to-day experiences of local communities around the Nech Sar National Park.

In part three, I analyze the Nech Sar National Park as an arena of contestations and negotiations between competing actors with various views on human-environmental interactions. This part is divided into three chapters (chapters six, seven and eight). By employing actor-oriented approach in the analysis of human-environmental interactions and contestations, negotiations and conflicts that ensue through interplay between competing actor groups, the three chapters present and analyze actors’ conceptualizations of the territory and their strategies in achieving their interests or deterring the interests of others. By taking the Ethiopian state as one of the major actors with pivotal influence on the contestations over the Nech Sar National Park and yet as an internally differentiated actor, chapter six presents and analyzes the state’s conceptions of nature conservation and how it exercises power in achieving its economic, political and conservation motives. Chapters
seven and eight take grassroots actors and their claims of interests and referents of contestation as important points of analysis. Finally, chapter nine gives some conclusions drawing on the theoretical and empirical discussions and analysis in the preceding chapters.
Chapter Two
Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

2.1. Conceptual Frameworks

The conceptual frameworks of this study have emerged from the prevailing competing conceptions of nature-culture relations, complex environmental, economic, cultural and political claims and motives behind nature conservation in the Nech Sar National Park, as well as the persistence of multilayer actors that shape the dynamics related to the park. More specifically, the territory now designated as the Nech Sar National Park represents different meanings and purposes for the competing actors involved. The territory signifies arenas of struggle over the symbolic, cultural, economic and political representations, as well as being a territory where competing actors deploy different forms of power in the process of achieving their respective interests or deterring the interests of others. Sharp et al. (2000: 26) indicated how social groups ascribe different meanings to a particular space, in that, “different social groups endow space, and of course place, with amalgams of different meanings, uses and values. Such differences can give rise to various tensions and conflicts within society over space for individual and group purposes, and over domination of space by the state and other forms of dominating social (and class) power.” This hints at the fact that contestations between social actors not only occur due to competing interests (material, economic and political), but also due to disparities in their ontological representations of the space. In other words, competing views of nature and differences in meanings ascribed to a particular space or territory might reinforce tensions over environmental resources entailing deployment of different aspects of power, namely dominating power and resisting power (Sharp et al. 2000).

For instance, the area now designated as the national park represents economic, spiritual and historical meanings for the Guji Oromo agro-pastoral community. As a physical space, it provides the people with livelihood opportunities upon which their entire economic practices (cattle herding and farming) depend. The park was part of their grazing land, particularly during dry seasons. As a cultural and spiritual space, the Guji perceive some sacred sites in the park territory as places that once served as nodal points where they used to have their rituals to communicate with Waaqa (God) for the spiritual values attached to the spaces. In the past, elders performed earnest practices of rituals and prayers to establish harmony between the people and Waaqa, as well as between humans
and non-humans (Baxter 1991). They also claim entitlement to the area, tracing their ancestral rights over the land since the sixteenth century (Getachew 2007).

On their part, the Koore peasants see the territory mainly from economic perspectives because the lowland Tsalke Valley (Golbo – as the Guji call it) on the eastern border of the park provides them with year-round crop production through irrigation and rain-fed agriculture. Besides the economic values of the area, the Koore seek to link their claim over the land to the political and administrative ownership that they exercised during the military regime. The same is true for the Gamo Gofa Zone in claiming for entitlement based upon the administrative authority it had on parts of the national parks under the past regimes.

On the other hand, the state considered the territory as ‘uninhabited’ land to be ‘tamed’ for tourism purposes. This mainstream representation of peripheral lands in Ethiopia is analogous to the Western notion of wilderness in dichotomizing the human and non-human (Turton 2011). The governments highlighted conservation and development discourses in the process of achieving its interests and representing the Nech Sar National Park as a space for economic and environmental purposes, while the process actually reinforced enforcement of hegemonic power from both the state and other actors involved in the contestation. Due to long history of center-periphery dichotomization in the country, the establishment of protected areas in southern Ethiopia should be conceptualized within the asymmetrical power relations between the highland Abyssinian state and the southern peripheries. Turton (2009: 2) argues that, “viewed from the center, with its mountain ranges, heavy rainfall, Christian tradition and plough cultivating peasantry, the southern periphery was seen as a virtual wasteland, inhabited by anarchic and violence-prone nomads.” The state thus pursues conservation and ‘development’ agendas through ‘ecotourism’ programs in the protected areas of the south that it perceives as ‘wasteland’, ‘uninhabited’ and ‘natural’. It has used the enclosure of the territories as instruments of control and mechanisms of gaining legitimacy in projecting its state power into the periphery. This perspective of the state, which emanates from the historical dichotomization of the north as source of ‘civilization’ and the south as ‘backward’ that awaited the hands of ‘modernizers’ to be tamed into useful resources, has been central in the conflicting views concerning nature-culture relations in the peripheral regions of the country.

The complexity in addressing conservation discourses of the country also lies in the fact that the state has become more heterogeneous particularly since 1991. The current Ethiopian state is
internally differentiated along ethno-linguistic regional divisions that significantly affect how people in different local state structures respond to national policies and programs such as national parks and the relocation of people in their respective regions, from where they draw legitimacy in their political endeavors.

As has been discussed in the preceding chapter, the conditions of biodiversity degradation in the national park and the livelihood situations of the people who live adjacent to the park borders have deteriorated over time. While the government presents its 'modernist' conservation discourse – the establishment of protected areas free from human influence – and its ambition of generating income through tourism as viable pathways to environmental and developmental needs, local communities often challenge this from their own eco-cosmological perspectives. Synchronizing all these interconnected elements, this study fundamentally builds on two conceptual building blocks that enhance the understanding of the dynamics in the politics of conservation in the area. These conceptual frameworks are notions of nature-culture relations and the politics of nature conservation, which entails aspects of domination/resistance, negotiation, conflict and agency of various actors in mobilizing different resources at their disposal. In other words, the contested space is the center of struggle upon which social groups or institutions with competing perspectives on nature-culture relations espouse their conservation discourses, which in turn entail the deployment of different forms of power in the process of its enactment.

Thus, the study critically probes into the politics of conservation by investigating how the economic, political and cultural motives of different social groups shape their understandings of people-park relations. Therefore, in order to situate the discussions within broader academic debates, I have situated these conceptual frameworks in two interconnected theoretical approaches. First, debates on nature-culture relations will be addressed from the perspective of the social construction of nature. Second, the project moves beyond the 'traditional' approach of studying nature conservation and environmental problems from apolitical perspectives by interrogating the political, ecological, economic and ideological forces and processes behind such projects. Notions of setting aside territories in the form of protected areas are political and economic inasmuch as they are ecological and involve different institutions and actors from local to global arenas. Thus, I use political ecology as a theoretical framework to disentangle complex conceptualizations of conservation discourses, practices and motives. In both theoretical frameworks, the study investigates issues of power constellations among different actors, including how domination/resistance has been exercised. Accordingly, the sections below will focus on these theoretical frameworks.
2.2. Theoretical Frameworks

2.2.1. Notions of Nature-Culture Debates: Dualism vs. Mutualism

Debates over nature-culture relations have been sparked among scholars in the fields of anthropology, cultural history, environmental studies, geography, development studies and literary studies since the 1980s (Descola 1996). Apart from discipline-specific arguments and theorizations of the concepts nature, culture and their conjoint or disjoint relations, the nature-culture debates stem from ontological conceptualization of nature and its relations to humans. In other words, the debates oscillate between those who conceptualize nature as a given ‘reality’ independent and outside of the human knowledge on the one hand, and those for whom nature is inseparable from humans on the other. Broadly speaking, the perspectives concerning nature-culture relations can be categorized into dualism and mutualism (Pålsson 1996), which are discussed in the subsequent sections. However, prior to embarking on the debates on dualism and mutualism and how these notions have been appropriated by academics, human rights activists, environmentalists, politicians, indigenous communities and other local or international actors, it is vital to briefly highlight the nexus between these concepts and the politics of environmental conservation, particularly in developing countries.

With its notions of human-non-human separation, dualism entails setting aside territories in the form of protected areas – protected from human influences – for the sake of aesthetic, economic, tourism and biodiversity conservation purposes. The notion of alienating people from the environment under the guise of environmental conservation has historically resulted in poverty, marginalization and conflict among indigenous peoples in different parts of the world, where most people in developing countries depend on environmental resources for economic, spiritual, cultural and other socio-political purposes (Igoe 2004).

On the other hand, some scholars and indigenous peoples’ activists promote the notion that indigenous peoples have developed splendid ecological wisdom, enabling them to live in harmony with nature (Berkes 2008). Given that it builds on the argument of mutual or conjoint constitution of the human and non-human nature, mutualism thus considers indigenous peoples or local communities in general as potential agents in enhancing environmental conservation. However, this
argument tends to homogenize indigenous communities and simplify their livelihood practices to low-scale 'hunting-gathering', fishing, pastoralism and farming that were believed to be insignificant to harm the environment. Overall, both notions polarize our conceptualizations of human-environmental relations and do not comprehensively engage with how these understandings are culturally constructed and what value changes occur because of the interplay between competing notions of nature-culture relations. Nevertheless, these competing notions significantly influence practices of nature conservation. By discussing some ontological backgrounds on both paradigms, I will move to discussing how we should transcend the polarities in the following sections.

2.2.1.1. Nature-Society Dualism

At the center of the dualist paradigm lays the presumption that nature exists as an objective reality independent of human knowledge and outside the human realm. In traditional Western scientific thought, external nature was believed to be investigated, predicted, controlled and measured through scientific research that was taken for granted as the only ultimate source of knowledge (Descola and Pålsson 1996). According to the dualist perspective, the objective reality of nature can be revealed through scientific investigation rather than being constructed through human lived experiences, ritual practices and indigenous knowledge. This notion was deeply entrenched in Western philosophy of realism (Simmons 1993). According to the defendants of this paradigm, particularly the advocates of positivist perspective, humans' unique existence outside nature is a given reality due to distinct evolutionary processes and thus the most influential question is how to function within human uniqueness in order to fulfill humanitarian responsibilities to safeguard nature rather than attempting to abridge the human-non-human dichotomy (Willers 2001). This view is paternalistic in that it presumes humans as stewards or guardians of nature. The dichotomy places nature outside the human realm and presumes it as an object to be acted upon, yet subsumes any agency of the non-humans. This objectification of nature and more specifically the commodification of the environment through tourism can be identified as the ultimate foundation of power, repression and exploitation of local communities in many parts of the world by territorializing and enclosing their customary resource areas (Hornborg 1996). In the politics of environmental conservation, notions of dualism have been strongly linked to debates on 'wilderness', in an idea that presumes some territories as 'natural', 'uninhabited' by humans and devoid of any human influences (Cronon 1996; Callicott and Nelson 1998).
As a dominant perspective in the Western public and academic thought for long period, particularly since the era of enlightenment, dualism has constructed boundaries between ‘wilderness’ and culture, in the form of dichotomy between ‘primitive’ versus ‘civilized’, ‘savage’ versus ‘noble’ and later ‘sublime’ versus ‘polluted’ (Cronon 1996). This dualistic notion considers wilderness as an imaginary space separated from and ‘unpolluted’ by human cultural practices. So far, there is no clear and conclusive definition of wilderness at present, except the most commonly cited definition from the American Wilderness Act 1964. According to this definition, “a wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain” (Callicott and Nelson 1998: 121). This definition states that, “earth and its community of life are clearly distinct from humans” (Ouderkirk 2008: 441). Under circumstances of ‘wilderness’/nature conservation, human habitation was considered as an encroachment, whereas its socio-economic and cultural practices were portrayed as destructive and polluting the ‘purity’ of nature. In the Western popular imagination, wilderness represents the last remaining place where any form of human influence has not fully infected the Earth. Some presumed it as a place on earth that stands apart from humanity. This perspective advocates for the isolation of human beings from nature in order to keep nature pristine and in its natural settings. As Cronon (1996: 80) points out, “wilderness embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural.”

Some scholars link the genesis of representing wilderness as opposite to culture in Western culture with the Judeo-Christian tradition that labels wilderness as spaces of temptations, desertion and abandonment (Cronon 1996; Merchant 1996, 2003). According to this perspective, people linked wilderness with the place where Adams and Eve were tempted by the Devil in receiving orders to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. They also likened it with the arduous areas where Moses traveled for forty years with his people and worshiped the golden idol (Merchant 1996). This perspective presents the Fall from Eden as the separation between human and non-human nature, which created boundaries of hostility between the two. From this dimension, it was likened with places where one goes without his/her choices – “to be wilderness was to be “deserted”, “savage”, “desolate” and “waste”” (Cronon 1996: 70). In fact, some scholars trace the modern conceptions of nature in European culture to the eighteenth century following the industrial revolution when people began understanding nature and its relations to humans from economic, romantic, aesthetic and moral perspectives (Bargatzky 1994). However, I argue that the post-enlightenment transformations in Europeans’ understandings of nature-culture relations do not nullify the presence of dualistic
perspectives in popular imaginations before that period. Rather, the transformations introduced different dimensions of interpretation of nature and humans' place in it.

From the seventeenth century onwards, people began to change some aspects of representations of wilderness as part of Enlightenment rationalizations, from fear and abandonment to sympathy, enjoyment, relief and care. At this junction, it is important to pose the question of what brought upon this change. With the transformations in the dominant European worldviews from religious dogmatism to scientific rationalizations following the eras of renaissance and enlightenment, people began to re-conceptualize their notions of wilderness, albeit within the dualistic paradigm. Wilderness got a new dimension of meaning as a lost garden to be 'reclaimed' and turned toward human ends and thus was considered as a place deserving protection from human encroachment (Merchant 2003). It represented parts of the earth that were 'unspoiled' by human influences, particularly through effects of industrialization. This shift in the Western perception of wilderness from images of lost space and threatening to untamed natural space brought sympathy in viewing such territories or spaces as the last areas on the earth, which human beings should protect before being lost into the archives of history. At the same time, the rationalization that human beings can control, tame, exploit and domesticate nature was also introduced into the discourse of Western enlightenment. Since then, "European colonists of the 'New World' have undertaken the massive effort to reinvent the whole earth in the conquered places in the image of the Garden of Eden but this time with the view of protecting, conserving and controlling the biodiversity as museums in natural settings" (Merchant 1996: 134).

However, as a conceptual representation of natural spaces that "ignores crucial differences among humans and complex cultural and historical reasons why different peoples may feel very differently about the meaning of wilderness", wilderness has attracted a series of criticisms (Cronon 1996: 85). The debate is mainly between modernist discourses and post-modernist deconstructions, rendering the boundary between the two a contested interface (Pálsson 1996). According to Cronon (1996: 69), wilderness:

[I]s not a pristine sanctuary where the last remnant of an untouched, endangered, but still transcendent nature can for at least a little while longer be encountered without the contaminating taint of civilization. Instead, it is a product of that civilization, and could hardly be contaminated by the very stuff of which it is made. Wilderness hides its unnaturalness behind a mask that is all the beguiling because it seems so natural.
One important question to consider before delving into the details of wilderness and critics against the concept concerns whether wilderness is an idea or a place. If it is a place, what kind of place does it represent? Moreover, if it is an idea, what is the core idea embedded in the concept and whose idea is it? I argue that wilderness is both an idea and a representation of a physical place. It is an idea through which people conceptualize and give meaning to places. Wilderness represents an idea about an ‘imagined’ place on the earth where human influences, traces of activities and settlements are believed to be non-existent. This assumption had different historical roots beginning from Judeo-Christian tradition all through European Renaissance and Enlightenment eras to America’s nation-building projects and the European colonial conquest of Africa, up until the rise of global environmentalist discourses.

According to Proctor (1998), the idea of wilderness is not an innocent description or representation of nature, environment, landscape or piece of land; rather, it has political, cultural and economic undertones and meanings attached to it. As with the Fall from Eden, it was associated with negative connotations where one goes without his/her will. As a picturesque site, it was labeled as an aesthetic and original remnant part of the earth where humans can gain relief from urban, industrial and polluted environment to feel ‘back at home’. As a myth of frontier, it represented a boundary between the ‘primitive’ and the ‘civilized’, and particularly in the American myth of the frontier, it implanted memories of the birth of the great nation through conquest and mastery over ‘wilderness’ – despite of course being a home to indigenous Indians (Cronon 1996; Proctor 1998).

During the colonial era in Africa, colonial powers associated wilderness with ‘wild’ and ‘natural’ Africa, which also legitimated colonial intervention to ‘save’ the ‘Edenic’ garden (Neumann 1998). Proctor (1998: 356) further describes wilderness stating, “whether in a negative or positive sense, then, wilderness and civilization [nature and culture], have almost always been counterposed.” According to this perspective, the issue at stake is not only about an objective reality of nature versus a socially constituted and culturally grounded nature but also whether our ideas “point fundamentally to wilderness “out there” or to the cultural predispositions that accompany our concept of wilderness” (Proctor 1998: 357). Delaney (2001: 490) further contends, “the nature that is constructed is a concept, an idea, a category, a set of conventionalized metaphors, and a trope for differentiation.” This idea produced an understanding that wilderness not only existed apart from but also prior to human settlement in a particular territory.
On the other hand, wilderness represents places imagined as being devoid of human settlement, which were considered as 'unpolluted' by human cultural practices (with no traces of human socio-economic, cultural, and political exercises over the environment) – albeit the existence of such places is highly contested. In this context, the contestability of wilderness relates to the fact that areas such as national parks and game reserves, which are established under the assumption that the territories were free from traces of human settlement, for example, ignore human history by imposing the predisposition of human-nature dualism. In a similar dualistic position, Proctor (1998: 355) argues that, “wilderness is a real place, a compellingly beautiful place free of human imprint, an object of great worth precisely in having escaped human domination, where natural processes reign unimpeaded.” These assertions prompt us to raise some fundamental questions concerning whether or not humans were part of nature.

These notions of wilderness as an idea and imagined place were exported to other parts of the world partly through what Harmon (1998: 220) calls a “demonstration effect.” Although historical dynamics and transformations shaped and changed meanings attributed to ideas representing wilderness, nature-culture dichotomy remained common across its history of transformations. The deep-rooted implication of wilderness dualism becomes a practical challenge to indigenous peoples, pastoralists and agrarian communities when other actors like the state and conservationists label their ancestral land as wilderness and put it aside in the form of protected areas. Because of its consequences in negating customary rights, as the case in the Nech Sar National Park illuminates, researchers and practitioners alike should see notions of wilderness under critical scrutiny.

2.2.1.2. Mutualism: Nature and Society as Conjointly Constituted

Both the academic milieu and those who have been dispossessed and dismantled from their homes, ancestral lands, sacred spaces and spiritual sites due to the protectionist acts emanating from the dualism discourse have challenged the notion in the past few decades. Contrasting the cosmological views of indigenous Indians against the Western popular imagination of wilderness, Chief Luther Bear (1933 cited in Callicott and Nelson 1998: 201) poetically expresses his views as follows:

We did not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills, and winding streams with tangled growth, as 'wild.' Only to the white man was nature a 'wilderness' and only to him was the land 'infested' with 'wild' animals and 'savage' people. To us it was tame. Earth was bountiful and we were surrounded with the blessings of the Great Mystery. Not until the hairy man from the east came and with brutal frenzy heaped injustices upon us and the families we loved was it 'wild' for us. When the very animals of the forest began fleeing from his approach, then it was that for us the 'Wild West' began.
For the Indians, as is common among indigenous peoples elsewhere, there was no distinctively demarcated boundary between the human and non-human, the social and the natural, and nature and culture; rather, all were conjointly constituted as common family. A striking contrast in the above quotation is that wilderness is differently interpreted by the newly arrived white men and Indians – as a place ‘infested’ by ‘wild’ animals and ‘savage’ people, and as a home for a family (human and non-humans), respectively. From the perspectives of mutualism, which is self-explanatory to denote a mutual coexistence between different subjects or objects, it has been argued that plants, animals and other entities of nature are considered as societies of nature (Descola 1992).

Descola and Pálsson (1996: 14) conceptualize mutualism as constituting humans and non-humans, in which they all “belong to a sociocosmic community, subjected to the same rules as humans; any account of the social life must perforce include these components of the environment which are perceived as forming part of the social domain.” Some scholars move the argument further in depicting the conception of nature among indigenous peoples, pastoralists, hunter-gatherers and non-Western local peasant farmers as it is embedded and embodied in their cosmological schemes. According to this line of argument, the eco-cosmologies of most non-Western people holistically represent the human and non-human as inseparable (Escobar 1999). The perspective of mutualism traverses strict separation between the biophysical, human and supernatural worlds and considers the cultural practices in a dialogic relationship with nature (Braun 1997; Escobar 1999).

However, this perspective depicts ‘non-Western’ people as a homogeneous entity with common experiences, knowledge and ways of life. Besides blending diversity into an imaginary box of homogeneity, it mystifies the non-Western ‘Other’ as a ‘noble savage’ whose ways of life, modes of production, culture and knowledge are considered so ‘primitive’ that they cause limited damage on the natural environment (Berkes 2008). I depart from the above argument by Descola and Pálsson, because it blends humans and non-humans into the same rules despite the fact that the conjoint constitution of humans and non-humans is mediated through respect, reciprocity and trust, according to my empirical data from the Guji for example. I share the argument posed by Berkes (2008: 233) regarding the inadequacy of the dominant representation of indigenous peoples and their traditional knowledge as “noble savage”, “close to nature”, “communing with nature”, and “harmonious co-existence between people and nature”. This is because the understanding emanates from how Western culture has constructed dichotomies between the ‘West’ and the ‘Rest’ over time rather than reflecting the actual lived-in experiences of indigenous people. Despite superficially recognizing the nature-culture mutualism, such a representation is an artful cunning in
homogenizing indigenous peoples and masking any internal transformation that these groups have undergone across history.

I would like to take the debate in mutualism one-step further and argue that most indigenous peoples, due to their iterative interaction with nature, understand their relationship with their surroundings in the form of respect, partnership, reciprocity and trust rather than domination and separation or even integration. This entails a different level of conceptualization of the relationship in the form of mutual recognition of partnership on the part of humans and non-humans, rather than the inseparability of the two. Taking the experience of Cree hunters and their relationship with the animals that they hunted, Ingold (2000) makes a strong argument that the hunters and animals interact based upon partnership, built on elements of trust and reciprocity. Ingold argues that the prey has the power to withhold its body not to offer it to the hunter if the latter tries to coerce it. Humans’ knowledge and perception about their environment is also acquired through iterative interaction with the environment, as well as peoples’ perception of environmental ‘affordances’ (Ingold 2005). Environmental affordance is a concept that refers to something that the environment offers/affords human beings – something that is either good or bad (Chen 1993). People interact with the environment or parts of it in anticipation of reciprocity or infliction based upon the nature of their actions.

People’s understanding of environmental affordances shapes their behavior and builds their knowledge about the consequences of different aspects of engagement with nature. For example, drawing on the experience of Bhotiya people in India, Bosak (2008) argues that indigenous peoples’ perception of nature is built on reciprocal relationship through their physical and spiritual connection to their environment. Bosak further articulates that the Bhotiya do something good for the environment in expectation that their god will reciprocate by looking after their crops, multiplying and regenerating their seeds, as well as sustaining life. Likewise, the Guji Oromo in the Nech Sar area had traditionally considered the ‘Guji world’ as constituting the people, livestock, other living and non-living beings and the divine being (Waaqa) and human and non-human intermediaries – the ayvana (spirits) (Baxter 1991; Van de Loo 1991).

In the case of the Guji Oromo in the study area, mutual interdependence, balanced or bilateral reciprocity and trust are the basic pillars of human-non-human relations. These dimensions of the relationship mark their self-representation as part of the space in which they situate their cultural,
economic, political and social affairs. In this regard, it is not the physical landscape per se that is more meaningful, but rather the feelings, memories and meanings embedded therein. Likewise, these people represent nature as part of their culture. As a Guji elder once commented, “Gujummaan keenya aada keenya. Aadaan teenna waa mara. Looni, jila, safiu, gaara, lageen fi mukkeen tunillee aadaa gabbisan” (informant: Gagasa Adola, April 2012). This loosely translates as, “Our Gujiness is confirmed by our culture. Our culture constitutes everything. The livestock, sacred journey [ritual], customs, hills, valleys and trees [sacred trees] all contribute to our culture”. Such interdependence forms societies of nature, including the human, non-human and divine being (Descola 1996). Accordingly, this is why Ingold (2005: 502-503) argues that: “In reality of course, just as people have forever carried on their lives in the fields of their relations with others, so they always inhabited an environment including manifold non-human as well as human constituents. Social life has always been part and parcel of ecological life, if indeed the two can be sensibly distinguished at all.” Ingold’s argument is not more about conjoint constitution of the human within the non-human nature, but rather the interdependence between the two that manifests through important values of respect, trust, partnership and reciprocity.

Thus, it is sound to argue that both the dualist and mutualist perspectives depict nature-culture relations at two polar extremes by silencing multiple interpretations of ‘reality’. Thus, any attempt to conceptualize nature-culture relations without contextual interpretation of multiple voices (the dominant Western culture of dualism and the marginalized views of mutualism among indigenous peoples and their advocates) persists as a debate between binary oppositions. In such binary approaches, the recognition of one perspective marginalizes the other and thus impedes comprehensive understanding and partnership between different forms of knowledge (Merchant 2003). In the next section, I will discuss another alternative approach to understanding nature-culture relation that recognizes multiple interpretations of the theme, in an effort not to deconstruct the previous perspectives but rather to contextualize both views within their socio-cultural contexts.

2.2.1.3. Beyond the Dualism-Mutualism Divide: Nature as a Socially Constructed ‘Reality’

As I discussed earlier, since the 1980s, scholars in the fields of anthropology, environmental history and development studies have begun revisiting the old dualist perspective that dominated most of the Western academic and popular thought for centuries (Merchant 2003). As part of the global
Indigenous Peoples’ movement, scholars, human rights activists and environmentalists began a paradigm shift from the dominant notion of considering science as the ultimate basis of knowledge towards recognizing indigenous knowledge in the quest for sustainable environmental management. However, the seemingly ‘politics of recognition’ has also pushed the discourse to the other polar extreme, rather than creating a middle ground where the two perspectives could serve as complementary rather than competitive forms of knowledge. Descola (1996: 82) gives us some hints in this line of argument, “Many anthropologists and historians now agree that conceptions of nature are socially constructed, that they vary according to cultural and historical determinations, and that, therefore, our own dualistic view of the universe should not be projected as an ontological paradigm onto many cultures where it does not apply.”

There is a growing understanding among scholars of embracing an epistemological shift towards recognition of multiple voices, interpretations and meanings about a particular social world though debates on constructionism continue to be unsettled (Philipmore and Goodson 2004). There are also two competing views within constructivist camp. The first is the view that nature is a mere social construction and thus is meaningless without interaction with humans who construct meaning to it. Second, some argue that the meaning we give to nature, objects, and living and non-living things are informed by our cultural milieu (views, norms, historical and political traditions, beliefs, etc.) (Kindner 2000). In this work, I will take the second view as an important point understanding nature and the place of humans. I argue that it is not about the (non-)existence of nature as an objective reality per se, but rather that our ideas, meanings, knowledge and understandings of nature/wilderness are socially constituted and products of cultural, historical, political and religious dynamics in which we participate, all of which shape the meaning that people bequeath to nature. Along this line of argument, Cronon (1996: 25) notes that the perspective of social construction of nature “is not to say that the nonhuman world is somehow unreal or a mere figment of our imaginations – far from it. But the way we describe and understand that world is so entangled with our values and assumptions that the two can never be fully separated.”

The second line of argument is highly relevant in this particular study because it is not the objective phenomenon, absence or presence of events and things such as environmental degradation, enclosure and physical landscapes that are the subjects of contestation as such. Rather, as the empirical data on representations of the Nech Sar National Park among competing actors reveal, interpretations and meanings about the territory have been built on political, historical, religious and cultural underpinnings that shape their understandings and narratives. While the dominant
representation of the area by the Ethiopian state as ‘wasteland’ and ‘uninhabited wild’ was an extension of the historical north-south dichotomy, most of the local communities considered the land as their ancestral home in reference to history, culture and economic practices. Thus, the state builds its referents of representation on systematic historical and cultural dichotomy while cultural, historical and economic connectedness of the local communities to the land informs their understandings of their place in their surroundings.

The works of scholars in different fields in the late twentieth century have yielded abundant evidence that meanings ascribed to nature are profoundly human constructions. Some contend that, “our ways of thinking about the natural world are powerfully shaped by our time, our place, and our culture” (Cronon 1996: 35). Considering nature as naïve reality tempts us to presume that it had no cultural context, as if it were everywhere and always the same. Rather, one would argue that nature is culturally grounded, socially constituted, conceptually fluid and contested (Kindner 2000). Likewise, ideas about nature are “always constructed by our meaning-giving and discursive processes, so that what we perceive as natural is also cultural and social” (Escobar 1999: 2).

It is also essential to note that the existence of objective elements of landscape such as rivers, mountains, forests, valleys, rocks or plain fields are rarely contested. Rather, the representations, symbolic meanings and ascriptions attributed to these physical elements of a landscape are often the subjects of contestation. Slater (1996) describes such diverse ascriptions of meanings to a similar object by using the example of a forest, which stands for a timber in the eyes of a logging company, while the same object (forest) connotes a spiritual connection with God for indigenous peoples in Amazonia. While environmentalists might consider the same forest as wilderness that deserves protection, the indigenous people might see it as a home for people, animals, spirits and other non-human beings. In other cases, different actors interpret ‘natural’ disasters such as earthquakes, floods, droughts and epidemics differently in various contexts. While scientists might attribute the causes to geological factors or effects of climate change, indigenous peoples would see it as resulting from disruptions in relationship between humans, non-humans and supernatural power. Hence, all such instances hint at the socially constituted and culturally grounded notion of nature. In other words, nature embodies both natural and social characteristics as being “simultaneously real, collective and discursive – fact, power and discourse” (Escobar 1999: 2). In this sense, Escobar’s conceptualization of nature as constituting fact, power and discourse is analogous to what Cronon (1996) describes wilderness as, namely a conceptual and spatial discourse that has been used as a latent instrument of subjugation of indigenous peoples. This is central in my work because, as
political ecologists often argue, the perspective about wilderness imposes upon people an ideal form of nature that entails a construction of “nature without people” (Robbins 2004: 150).

At this junction, another profoundly important point to discuss within the politics of conservation is the discursive conceptual meaning attached to wilderness, which reflects the central theme of this research. During the European expedition to what they termed as the ‘New World’, as well as in the subsequent centuries of colonial establishments that followed, wilderness was used as strong pervasive instrument in legitimating European conquest and occupation by relegating indigenous rights of land and resource ownership (Merchant 2003). As I discussed in the preceding sections, European colonists portrayed the lands they encountered in the ‘New World’ as wilderness, although most of these territories were once homes for indigenous peoples.

Like the emerging epistemological and methodological recognition to research subjects in the social sciences, nature should also not be regarded as a passive object upon which humans could freely act. In the dominant Western notion of nature-society dichotomy, society’s progressive stage of development was judged by its capability to maneuver, subdue, domesticate, dominate and control nature through science, technology and capitalism (Merchant 2003). Despite the perspectives of social construction of nature that open the door for multiple voices and interpretations on nature-culture relations, the politics of nature conservation still mingles the old paradigms of human supremacy over nature with emerging attempts of partnership. In the next section, I will discuss the paradigms governing human-non-human relationships hinting at how they affect conservation approaches. In doing so, I will discuss the relationship between wilderness conservation, development and customary rights accordingly.

2.2.1.4. Dilemmas in ‘Wilderness’ Conservation, Development and Customary Rights

Human interaction with nature is informed by people’s conceptualization of the relationship from three different paradigms: orientalism, paternalism and communalism (Pálsson 1996). While the first two share common perspectives on human-nature dualism, communalism differs in that it rejects the radical separation of nature and society, and object and subject. It emphasizes the notion of mutual engagement between humans and non-humans in the form of dialogue. In environmental conservation context, orientalism promotes human dominion over the environment, which entails exploitation, control and manipulation according to humans’ economic, aesthetic and political
motives. Orientalism is fairly analogous to the post-Renaissance conceptions of ‘wilderness domestication’, which equate civilization to one’s skill, capability and power to explore, conquer, control, exploit and dominate the perceived ‘savage’ wilderness. The transformations that occurred following the eras of Renaissance and Enlightenment regarding human-nature relations brought the view of equating and evaluating human civilization to the degree of its mastery and control over nature. Building on some narratives from Christian tradition that bestows human supremacy over nature yet placing it within scientific ‘rationalities’, European colonists of the ‘New World’ backed their expedition of subjugating wilderness based upon orientalist paradigm (Pálsson 1996; Merchant 2003). The conquest of nature had been practiced in the form of protected areas, although the rhetoric of nature preservation was often portrayed under the guise of paternalism for the diverse purposes of consumption, production, sport and emotional display.

Likewise, paternalism bestows a responsibility of guardianship upon humans to protect, safeguard and manage nature and its constituent entities (Pálsson 1996). Paternalism entails usurping the choice of a certain actor or subject by another actor and reflects the imposition of the latter’s perspectives and interests upon the former (Archard 1990). While the practices of wilderness conquest, such as the case of European conquests of indigenous peoples’ lands since the fifteenth century, were driven by the paradigm of orientalism, the practice and rhetoric of wilderness conservation and protection can be considered as paternalistic, given that it considered humans – of course not all humans – as rational guardians of nature. Both paradigms consider humans as masters over nature, whereas they see nature as a passive object to be acted upon and lacking any agency in the interaction with humans. The establishment of Yosemite and Yellowstone National Parks in the United States in the 1860s and 1870s marked the commencement of domesticating wilderness in the form of setting aside portions of territories for touristic consumption (Brockington et al. 2008). The Yellowstone National Park was the first national park in the world that was purposefully reconstructed into wilderness by removing indigenous Indians for the sake of American urban aristocrats. Subsequently, it was inculcated into American popular imagination as a symbol of the nation’s conquest over the ‘savage’ (Cronon 1996).

However contested it might be, this notion of wilderness domestication and the representation of wilderness preservation as a sign of progress and humans’ capacity of putting nature under control has led to the establishment of protected areas in most parts of the world (Brockington et al. 2008). Indeed, some associate the diffusion of national park ideals as driven by aesthetic, economic, religious and political motives. While the aesthetic aspects and their economic implications through tourism have been widely addressed, the religious and political dimensions are not commonly
discussed in conservation literature. From religious dimension, some liken wilderness with the sublime – a rare place on Earth where people can meet God. Areas such as mountains, seashores, valleys and forests fall into the category of sublime nature (Cronon 1996).

The political driving force behind the establishment of protected areas beginning from the Yellowstone National Park all throughout colonial Africa, during which massive national parks were established intersected with powerful nation-building projects (Brockington et al. 2008). Moreover, national parks denote implicit and exclusionary sense of nationalism in which a certain territory is entangled with national identity (Haila 2012). Connotations of nationalism are embedded in the term “national” as used in national parks. For example, in some cases there are tendencies to use peculiar landscapes in national parks as symbols of national identity. As Haila (2012) mentions drawing on the Scandinavian case, fjords and mountains, and forests and lakes are symbolized as representing Norwegian and Finnish ‘national natures’, respectively. There are similar cases in the Nech Sar National Park, with the national park having been associated with identity of one ethnic group, the Gamo. As will be discussed later in the next chapters, the Gamo people proudly identify themselves with the national park and subscribe to it in giving names to hotels, university campus, colleges and streets in the Arba Minch town.

On the contrary, the notion of wilderness conservation contradicts the perspectives of non-Western societies who consider the land as their home. Cronon (1996: 79) clearly counters the notion of wilderness depiction as a reality stating, “the removal of Indians to create an “uninhabited” wilderness – uninhabited as never before the human history of the place – reminds us how invented, just how constructed, the American wilderness really is.” The establishment of the Yellowstone National Park on the ruins of Indian homeland hints at the convergence of both orientalist and paternalist paradigms, both of which disregard the human-non-human coexistence.

Central to both orientalism and paternalism views is the tendency to perceive wilderness as an object that humans could tame and control using science and technology, before subsequently changing it into a commodity through capitalist development. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the triad of science, technology and capitalism accompanied European expedition to the ‘New World’ and enhanced the subjugation of territories that had been homes of indigenous peoples for centuries (Neumann 1998).
In explaining communalism, Pálsson (1996: 74) states that, “just as a child may expect the care of its parents, the environment provides unconditional support, irrespective of what happened in the past.” It focuses on practice, reciprocity, trust and partnership. For example, the Guji Oromo in the research area believe that nature provides its bounty (fertility to people and livestock, rain, good harvest/yield, health and peace) in the form of reciprocity for the people’s good care of wild animals, sacred trees, rivers and spirits. More importantly, they believe that such reciprocity is maintained through their spiritual harmony with Waaqa (God), which is expressed in the form of relentless prayers and rituals. It is in line with the Guji conceptualization of their surroundings based on trust and reciprocity that Pálsson (1996) and Ingold (2000) argue that representations of non-humans among indigenous communities in different parts of the world are not based on systematic recordings of ideas, events or phenomenon, unlike in the Western scientific tradition. Rather, they are expressed contextually through practical lived-in knowledge, interactions and rituals.

The Guji people do not create boundaries of otherness between themselves and non-humans. In their day-to-day conversations, greetings and interpersonal communications, they give priority to peace regarding their livestock, children, their surroundings and all forms of living and non-living beings, including spirits (Ayyana). The Guji use a common phrase in interpersonal exchange of greetings as “alaa manni nagayada?” This literally equates to inquiring about the peace and wellbeing of the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’. The Guji do not use the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ as classificatory spatial locations; rather, they have different representations. In such interpersonal conversations, mana (home, the inside/indoor) includes human beings, livestock and the Ayyana (spirits). The alaa (outside) refers to wild animals, forests, rivers and other living and non-living things with which the Guji have direct or indirect contact. On the other hand, on a more abstract level, the Guji label the inside as invisible things such as spirits and internal peace of human mind, whereas the outside are visible creatures including humans, livestock, wild animals, plants and rivers. Nonetheless, both the inside and outside are equally important for the Guji in maintaining peace and harmony with Waaqa and other non-human beings.

At this point, it is important to relate how these paradigms influence conservation policies. For example, during the colonial era in Africa, the colonialists systematically constructed the dualist notion of human-environment relationship to justify land alienation, dispossession and displacement of the native people. In this regard, “the environment is separated out from human agents and perceived as an exterior non-human habitat subject to appropriation, domination, attack, conquest
and domestication” (Croll and Parkin 1992: 32). In such contexts, colonial agents used the systematic imposition of an ‘externalized identity’ upon nature to justify its subjugation by specialists who imposed outside distinctions and knowledge by relegating indigenous eco-cosmologies. By contrast, when the idea of the environment is recognized as “ontologically part of the people who give and draw sustenance from it”, neither the person nor the environment is privileged or suppressed in the mutual relationship (Croll and Parkin 1992: 32). Such a holistic perception of human-non-human relations recognizes the agency of both actors and thus gives recognition to both in any development or conservation planning and implementation.

Bosak (2008: 215) explains the impacts of dichotomizing nature as externalized and internalized, stating that, “in conservation context, the protection of nature is necessarily a social question, in which nature can be seen as externalized or internalized.” Externalizing or separating nature from humans entails seeking its protection from outside through scientific knowledge under ‘experts’ trained in modern science and technology. This often leads to ‘top-down’ conservation policies that privilege scientific knowledge over local expertise. Conversely, internalizing or considering nature as a holistic entity in which humans and non-humans are its integral part would enhance the recognition of local people and their knowledge as integral and essential components of the conservation endeavors. Indeed, this binary perception of nature significantly determines conservation policies (Bosak 2008).

It has been evident that the colonial system introduced the Western conceptions of nature to Africa, entrenching them into colonial policies of conservation by creating areas free from human influence in the name of protected areas. However, the notion of establishing protected areas through exclusion of human society should not be seen as a purely conservation scheme; rather, as will be detailed later in this chapter, it is highly intertwined with economic and political discourses on local, national and international scales. Political and economic schemes influence the relationship between humans and nature, particularly in the context of protected areas, embracing issues of rights and access to land and resources (Adams and Hutton 2007). Put briefly, the idea of pristine nature and un-peopled wilderness spread to Africa since the colonial conquest as an ideological framing of conservation, albeit implicitly as a mechanism of control of resources and the people. Accordingly, the conceptualization of environmental conservation in the form of protected areas as an instrument of control over the multidimensional spaces of local communities in Africa will be the subject of chapter four in this study.
Does Conservation Enclosure Enhance or Hinder Development and Customary Rights of Local Communities?

Protected areas in the form of wilderness preservation have been often in conflict with ideals of capitalist development on the one hand, and indigenous peoples’ customary rights on the other. In some cases, protected areas have been established to deter development programs such as oil exploration, logging, mining, dam construction and extensive mechanized agriculture. In other contexts such as the experiences of the San people in Botswana, the Inuit in Alaska, the Maassai in Kenya and Tanzania, among many more indigenous communities, the struggle was between conservationists and indigenous peoples, with the latter struggling to maintain their land rights (Brockington et al. 2008).

These three schemes – conservation, development and customary rights – often operate on opposing ends, while at times working in a sporadic state of cooperation. In cases where development projects deem threatening the livelihood of indigenous peoples and the survival of the biodiversity, indigenous peoples and conservationists create an alliance against capitalist actors, namely the state and/or multinational companies. However, “when the alliance is between development and conservation – powerful as it is – [it] can overcome local objections and protests” (Brockington et al. 2008: 6). One aspect of alliance between conservation and development is in cases where conservation projects seem to generate economic development, as in the case of tourism. Despite its severe impacts on local communities, tourism and the economic values attached to this industry are among the important reasons for which protected area conservation schemes have been ‘justified’ and ‘legitimated’.

The major justification for tourism promotion in protected areas relates to its convergence of development and conservation purposes, despite it often being at odds with indigenous values, practices and customary rights. It has brought together the neoliberal market oriented environmental management and local economic development. Neoliberal thought promotes economic diversification, which includes the tourism sector. Because of the North-South dichotomies and stereotypical representations of the global South as ‘close to nature’, “global financial institutions
such as the World Bank and IMF portrayed developing countries of the South as having ‘comparative advantages’ in offering pristine nature” (Brockington et al. 2008: 133). However, the applauded benefit of ecotourism in promoting local empowerment and creating livelihood options for the locals and as environment friendly enterprise often obscures the cultural and social implications of tourism. While it promotes cultural commoditization among indigenous peoples, particularly in the form of cultural tourism, this enterprise overshadows internal heterogeneity within local communities. In such process, discrimination, domination and exclusion are also evident in ecotourism sectors, as is common in any interplay between actors with asymmetrical power relations. Moreover, it also encourages the appropriation of land and resources by few social elites while at the same time relegating other sections of a community to the margin.

With reference to conservation enclosures and the infringement of customary rights of local communities, the very normative perception of nature-culture dualism has entailed setting dogmatic rules of what is right and what is wrong in human-environmental interactions (Haila 2012). In this context, conservation promotes the idea of defending nature from destruction by humans and drawing strict boundaries between the two to preserve the pristine character of nature (Castree and Braun 1998). As a result, it has become evident that nation states, multinational corporations and conservationist organizations have seized indigenous peoples’ lands under the guise of conservation, albeit mainly for economic and political purposes associated to it.

In a short-term ‘alliance’ in the 1990s, conservationists and indigenous peoples’ movements used the rhetoric of conserving the ‘world’s first peoples’ and the ‘world’s last places’ in their respective struggle against encroachment from development corporations and state backed large-scale development projects. However, the alliances did not last long due to the incompatible value systems between the two. Indigenous peoples’ ways of valuing and using natural resources, their ontological worldviews, cultural practices and beliefs happened to be in contrast to the expert-oriented scientific approaches advanced by conservationists. As a result, conservationists became skeptical of working with local communities and rather opted to what Adams and Hutton (2007: 165) called “back to the barriers” in the late-1990s. This term implies the resurrection of the strict protectionist approach of protected area conservation through the complete exclusion of people from ‘wilderness’.

Indigenous peoples across many parts of the world have been victims of competing perspectives.
These include ideals of developmentalism that encourage large-scale development projects such as mining, oil exploration, mechanized agriculture and logging on customary lands of local communities, as well as conservation projects (protected areas in the form of national parks, forest reserves, game reserves, and sanctuaries) that also restrict the customary rights of resource. In this regard, development and conservation projects have significantly restrained local communities’ access to their customary rights and have been instrumental in dispossessing the people from their land and resources (Brockington et al. 2008). Modernist discourses of development denounce and denigrate livelihood practices, local knowledge and eco-cosmologies of indigenous communities. As Harawira (2005: 108) claims: “In the newly created states, indigenous peoples’ traditional cognitive and social patterns, modes of governance and ontological world views were identified as ‘obstacles to development’ and at odds with those of an economically based society.” Despite development institutions such as the World Bank and IMF defending conservation by suggesting that it contributes to nascent tourism, it has apparently become an instrument of dispossessing people from their land. Nevertheless, I argue that nature conservation through enclosure is one of the ways in which states exert control over local communities. For example, according to Brockington et al. (2008: 125), “in Botswana, Ethiopia and Thailand, ongoing evictions or attempts at eviction are continuing to disrupt the lives of indigenous peoples.”

In the conservation-indigenous peoples’ rights nexus, the fundamental problems of wilderness relates to its exclusion of people from their homes, both physically and conceptually, because it “negates long histories of association between people and places and thus excludes them historically” (Brockington et al. 2008: 49). During the colonial period in Africa, such representations were adamant among colonial elites, who constructed a separate category between long resident natives and nature, thus portraying the people as destructive. Fisher et al. (2008: 18) argue that this assumption underlies the “colonial origin of conservationist belief in ‘wild Africa’.” According to Fisher et al. (2008), the representation of nature particularly by the social elites in the 1960s and 1970s as spiritually charged wilderness strengthened the preservationist approach to nature through national parks. Such a preservationist approach reinforces resettlement of resident communities for establishing protected areas, which in turn exasperates the livelihood insecurity of the people by limiting their access to resources. Resettlement induces uncertainty amongst local communities, in some cases instigating conflicts between ‘original’ inhabitants and ‘new’ settlers. For example, a violent conflict erupted between the Guji and Koore in the study area in 2010 over a contested farmland from where the Koore were relocated in 2004. The dispute emerged when the Koore attempted to return to their former settlements, which the Guji partly possessed since their
departure (informant: Gacha Atura, February 2012).

Put briefly, development and conservation persist as competing discourses, at odds with the needs and rights of indigenous communities unless both embrace issues of citizenship rights for the ownership of resources, as well as recognizing views and knowledge of local communities. For development, conservation and customary rights to go hand in hand, the rights of indigenous peoples to participate in decision making processes in matters that directly or indirectly affect them must be recognized. On the other hand, development and conservation schemes could become viable pathways towards ensuring sustainable environmental conservation and solving development questions of local communities or the general public if, and only if, development projects in particular recognize the intrinsic values of human-environmental relations. Unfortunately, the 21st century development path in developing countries is incompatible to the environment, as well as local demands, values and priorities. This is why Katz (1998: 45) states that peoples’ engagement and interaction with the environment under “capitalism have operated as if nature were given, a free good or resource of wealth, an unlimited bounty awaiting only the ‘hand of man’ to turn it into a bundle of resources.”

To summarize the discussions under the previous subsequent sections, there are different notions of nature and humans’ place in it. Apart from ontological debates concerning nature-culture relations, these competing perspectives are also embedded in political, economic and cultural views of social actors. Nonetheless, the way in which people understand human-environmental interactions fundamentally shapes approaches of environmental conservation, particularly in the form of protected areas. For example, debates on nature-culture dichotomy are expressions of asymmetrical power relations, knowledge and discourses, because they entail the nullification of the history of some groups, such as indigenous peoples, by inscribing the myth, narratives and knowledge of dominant actors such as states and business or conservation organizations. As a transition to the next major theoretical framework of this study, it is important to close this section by raising the following questions: Who represents a certain territory as ‘aesthetic’, ‘uninhabited’, ‘wild’ and ‘natural’? What does it imply to set aside portions of land as protected areas and other parts for human settlement, utilization and management? The search for answers to these and other interrelated questions prompts us to understand the politics of conservation and politicized environment in developing countries, with reference to Africa. This transitory reflective note takes us to my second theoretical conceptualization concerning the political ecology of conservation.
2.2.2. Political Ecology of Conservation

2.2.2.1. Why Political Ecology?

In the politics of nature conservation or what Bryant and Bailey (1997: 27) referred to as the “ politicized environment”, ideas, perspectives and discourses surrounding environmental problems, approaches of conservation and the status ascribed to some parts of territories should be scrutinized against the backdrop of competing forms knowledge, power and worldviews. In the quest to understand conservation trajectories in Africa and particularly to comprehend how ideals of national park were introduced to the continent and sustained thereafter, research in the field needs to transcend traditional approaches of studying environmental problems from apolitical perspectives. The traditional approach focused on land-based resources and its relations to land-based societies or livelihood practices (Bryant and Bailey 1997; Robbins 2004). Early works on environmental problems and ecological changes in developing countries emphasized investigating the issues mainly from apolitical perspectives, placing the blame on population pressure, poor technology and the inadequacy of traditional knowledge concerning environmental management (Peet and Watts 2004; Robbins 2004). Apart from casting the blame on local people who are often victims of environmental problems that are mostly not their own making, these approaches fail to address the intricate socio-economic and political aspects of environmental issues. As a result, the approaches paid less emphasis to local and extra-local political and economic forces, as well as different discourses, ideas, knowledge and narratives related to environmental problems in the processes of planning and implementing conservation schemes.

In response to incomprehensiveness of the works to address environmental issues, scholars began to acknowledge the need for understanding environmental problems (land degradation, deforestation, soil erosion and air and water pollution) beyond apolitical explanations in the 1970s and 1980s. According to Peet and Watts (2004: 6, emphasis in original), “less a problem of poor management, inappropriate technology, or overpopulation, environmental problems were social in origin and definition.” As early as 1980s, it became clear that local and extra-local forces have had significant contributions to environmental problems besides demographic, technical, skill and ecological factors. Thus, there was a call for a comprehensive and ample approach to understand the complex interplay between multiple forces, actors and processes. It has since become evident that political,
economic and social dynamics, processes and institutions at micro and macro-levels shape power relations, questions of knowledge and contestation among different actors. These constellations of forces at various levels and in different forms not only influence environmental conditions, but also guide our understandings about the phenomena. Thus, the approach of investigating environmental problems and ecological changes from economic, social and political dimensions as an interplay between local and global forces is a political ecology perspective.

As Gossling (2004: 10) states, “political ecology thus seeks to investigate the interaction of international, national, regional and local actors at the interface of environmental change, economics and politics.” It deals with how local resource use practices, environmental changes and ecological conditions are driven by and are products of political and economic motives (Robbins 2004). These explanations mainly draw on an actor-oriented approach of understanding competing perspectives, ideas and interests, framing the arguments around the centrality of political and economic forces at different scales in influencing how local resource ownership, utilization and management are defined, contested and negotiated.

Political ecology is a concept used in many disciplines, including geography, anthropology, sociology, development studies and environmental history. However, scholars differ in terms of their scope of usage and analysis of the concept. While some have focused on the dynamics of political power and resource distribution at local level, others emphasize analyzing macro level political and economic dynamics, paying little attention to localized case studies (Gezon 2006). Political ecology is thus as an approach of addressing environmental problems from political and ecological dimensions, bringing into the discussion the role different institutions play in promoting or curtailing environmental problems (Peet et al. 2011). Drawing on Blaikie and Brookfield (1987), Peet et al. (2011: 24) explain the concept that a “field of political ecology coalesced around investigations into: first the impact of capitalist development on the environment; second, the social and political implications of environmental protection, conservation and management; third, the political economy of the way new natures (species, landscapes and ecosystems) are produced.”

As an interdisciplinary concept, some scholars use political ecology to explain soil degradation and water management (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987), protected area management/conservation (Neumann 1998; Gezon 2006), as well as global economic and political dynamics (Peet et al. 2011). Political ecology emerged as a field of study in its effort to address land degradation by integrating
human and physical approaches to the problem. In its classical conceptualization, political ecology encompasses the interplay between society and land-based resources by recognizing internal heterogeneity within society itself on the perceptions of individuals or groups about environmental problems. However, the emphasis on local communities and physical elements in the analysis of environmental problems in the earlier works obscured the impacts of extra-local factors, political and economic systems and external actors in the understanding of environmental changes (Robbins 2004).

The major elements of analysis in the early studies on environmental problems drawing on the political ecology perspective were aspects of market integration, commercialization and dislocation of customary forms of resource management, all of which were treated as processes of transition to a capitalist mode of economy (Peet and Watts 2004). According to Blaikie and Brookfield (1987), political ecology builds on two essential assumptions: first, it presumes poverty and land degradation as mutually causal in such a way that poverty induces land degradation, which in turn deepens poverty. Second, it assumes that environmental problems are regionally chained and thus the analysis should consider these dimensions. Likewise, Peet and Watts (2004) emphasized the importance of a third dimension in the study of political ecology of environmental problems, which frames land management within the interplay between external and internal forces such as the state and world economy and local ways of interaction with the environment.

However, the assumption that attributes land degradation to poverty at local level and vice versa relegates the influence of powerful actors such as the state and business organizations, who significantly contribute to the environmental problems, yet bear minimal costs of their actions (Boyce 2002). Because it masks out the impact of dominant actors in exacerbating environmental problems, the notion of associating poverty and environmental problems as being mutually causal is close to blaming the victim by covering the villain. It is often due to the inadequate attention given to political and economic forces in the early works of political ecologists that brought the field under critique later in the 1990s. The other two assumptions in the early political ecology works became part of the major approaches of studying environmental changes under political ecology given that issues of human-environmental interactions constitute spatial and structural connections of power.

In response to such limitations of the works in the preceding decades, scholars began to
acknowledge the role of multilayer actors, forces and processes that directly or indirectly influence environmental changes. More importantly, issues of power relations between states, inter-state, multilateral institutions and local communities over resource control and the recognition of multiple ways of knowledge and practices related to environmental management and utilization were integrated in political ecology in the 1990s (Peet and Watts 2004). In this regard, political ecology scrutinizes the politics of environmental knowledge and practices by opening its areas of spectrum to multiple interpretations of reality. To understand competing narratives about environmental knowledge and human-environment interactions, one might ask the following key questions: whose knowledge prevails in environmental management? How do different forms of environmental knowledge interact? While this section only outlines background discussions on the questions, the subsequent chapters will present empirically supported discussions concerning power relations and interactions among competing actors, based upon the case of the Nech Sar National Park.

A critical aspect of researching environmental problems within the political ecology perspective began to challenge the human/nature dichotomy that until recently dominated most academic discourses. This is because nature conservation in the form of protected areas is highly entangled with issues of power, knowledge and representation, which entail the imposition of some actors’ narratives or perspectives by relegating the views of others. For instance, the eviction of over a thousand Guji and Koore households from the Nech Sar National Park (APF) during its transfer to the African Parks Foundation (APF) in 2004 was premised on the notion of delineating human-wildlife coexistence, although economic motives fundamentally triggered the Ethiopian government to take the actions (Dowie 2009). The APF aimed to ensure long-term economic and ecological sustainability in the park. However, “this framing of protected areas (PAs) in ecological and financial terms excludes any consideration of the social and political context of the establishment and management of PAs, despite the obvious importance of such issues” (Adams and Hutton 2007: 148). As I discussed earlier, the coalition between conservation and development often restrain local communities’ customary rights. Political ecology thus addresses the politics of conservation from multidimensional approaches by incorporating the economic, ecological, political and social aspects.

Many scholars now recognize that treating the human and non-human nature as distinctive and mutually exclusive worlds would curtail complexities embedded in the interaction between the two (Descola 1996). Therefore, it is towards this accommodation of multiple interpretations of environmental problems that political ecologists moved beyond the structural approach of
investigating the topic. On the one hand, recognizing the representation of local people’s voice in environmental problems has become central to the works of political ecologists. On the other hand, political ecology tries to address the major challenge that is “to integrate the structural focus on state, society, and industry, and the poststructuralist attention to how interactions between such actors co-construct environmental discourses and narratives about the environmental change, and who should be represented as victims and villains” (Forsyth 2003: 8-9). It is essential to situate the study of conservation schemes within broader power relations in order to understand how different constellations of power inform people’s narratives and practices of conservation schemes. In the Nech Sar National Park case, local people produced critical knowledge and challenged the state discourses of conservation and development. The interplay between such competing perspectives have produced different representations concerning environmental change or conservation practices in the national park, which are influenced by the nature of power (dominating power and resisting power) of the actors involved.

Despite different approaches to the study of environmental problems in developing countries, political ecologists agree on two major frameworks. The first framework attributes the problems to broader political and economic forces mainly manifested through capitalist intervention. The second is concerned with the impact of state intervention, which at times goes hand-in-hand with external forces, whereas in some other cases the state intervenes in local environmental practices as part of political control, national security and personal enrichment of government officials (Bryant and Bailey 1997). In other words, environmental problems in many developing countries are explained as functions of capitalist extraction in the form of logging, mining, fishing and cash-crop production, which was introduced during the colonial period and maintained thereafter. It has also been seen as a form of state exercise of power over its subjects through the control of their customary lands and resources. Moreover, due to their omnipresence and monopolization of coercive power, most states in developing countries promote environmentally destructive activities through different forms of natural resource extraction. For instance, large-scale agricultural investments, mining, logging and dam construction are among a few cases through which the state control of ‘development’ projects prevail; however, due to the limited recognition given to local voices, such practices often impede the customary rights of local communities over their resources.

By building on the second approach of understanding environmental problems, I will focus on the political ecology of protected areas conservation. Owing to its history as a field that emerged as a study of environmental problems mainly within the context of land degradation, political ecology
has given less emphasis to discourses of conservation, given that it is produced and reproduced from different perspectives through interplay of competing social actors who build their narratives on different ontological discourses. With the exception of a few cases (for example, Neumann 1992, 1998; Gezon 2006; Igoe 2004), works on the politics of conservation in Africa have not comprehensively addressed the issue from broader historical, political, economic and social frameworks (Garland 2008). Even the existing ones do not address the complex historical trajectories of nature conservation from its genesis as part of the European imagination of Africa to the adoption of similar perspectives and practices by postcolonial Africa elites. Some works have focused on the socio-economic impacts of conservation on local communities, while others strived to position the case within European colonial conquest and its implications (Igoe 2004).

While it is not possible to dismiss these consequences of protected areas management approaches, a comprehensive understanding of the topic is only possible if we look beyond the notion of ‘cause-effect’ relations. This is because positioning our arguments within the presumption that environmental degradation perpetuates loss in biodiversity and exacerbates rural poverty would put us in a trap of blaming rural communities for the cause of the problem. Such a perspective also promotes the idea of excluding rural communities from resource management practices because once they are portrayed as causes of the problem, the system does not allow them to be part of the solution. The gap is particularly profound in the case of Ethiopia, because no single research has been conducted in this field to date, despite the existence of protected areas in the form of exclusionist and fortress conservation approaches.

Thus, I share the perspective that despite apparent evidence for changes in the physical forest coverage in the Amazon, dwindling biodiversity in Africa and an increase in climate variability elsewhere, ideas and narratives about these phenomena are socially constructed and reproduced by actors with dominant voices (Peet et al. 2011). Thus, a land-degradation perspective curtails actual environmental dynamics, for example, by relegating why powerful actors advocate for enclosure of resourceful territories. In response to this gap, some scholars have attempted to contextualize conservation enclosures as a focus of investigation, taking the impacts, logics and operations of conservation and environmental protection itself from multidimensional perspectives. In this regard, I use the political ecology of conservation as an appropriate theoretical framework because it probes into conservation politics by recognizing the issues of power, knowledge and discourses espoused by competing actors in the struggle over environmental resources.
2.2.2.2. Conservation Enclosure as a Form of Hegemonic Control

Moving the argument further beyond the classical political ecology perspective of studying environmental degradation, I argue that conservation is a form of hegemonic control over the social, economic, political and cultural spaces of resource owners, and thus, we should understand the politics of conservation as political inasmuch as it is social, economic and environmental (Adams and Hutton 2007). Within such a framework, the study focuses on the idea that, “conservation, purportedly an effort to create better conditions in the world [for the humans and non-humans] can frequently be a mechanism for (or more cynically a “cover” for) powerful players to actually seize control of resources and landscapes, and the flow of values that issues from these” (Peet et al 2011: 27, emphasis added). More specifically, this research applies the ‘conservation and control thesis’ (Robbins 2004: 150), drawing on the following four fundamental theoretical foundations: 1). conservation reflects a form of hegemonic governmentality 2). It depends on the growing understanding of traditional resource management strategies as institutional systems, where rules govern extraction without necessarily state intervention on individuated property rights 3). It draws upon the notion that wilderness – as imposed ideal and a produced material reality – is a social construct, specifically taking the form of nature without people; and 4). it reflects a prominent understanding of conservation territories as bounded, regular, polygons, as ecologically and socially problematic and inadequate to meet the goals of preservation of either wildlife or livelihoods.

In the preceding sections, I discussed the three theoretical premises of the conservation and control thesis but it is important to briefly discuss and contextually explain the issue of ‘conservation as a form of hegemonic governmentality’. In the politics of environmental management and governance, which has become a focus of political ecology, environmental governmentality refers to a circumstance in which hegemonic environmental governance is normalized within the life worlds of resource users, commonly local communities (Robbins 2004). It refers to acts, tactics and strategies that governments and non-governmental institutions use to create behaviors of ‘being governed’ on the side of their subjects through persistent discourses and narratives of rules, ethics and principles. Despite some scholars treating environmental governmentality different from coercion and sovereignty (Li 2007), it becomes a form of hegemonic exercise of power, particularly in countries with history of state violence. As (Peluso 1993) notes, states use coercive power in their efforts to enact their claims over particular resources particularly when other actors such as resource users or
non-state actors contest and challenge the states’ control over a specific resource. For instance, the state coerces conservation “when the resources are extremely valuable, and/or when coercion is considered either the last resort or the easiest means of establishing control over people and resources” (Peluso 1993: 201). Moreover, by institutionalizing different technologies of control such as the establishment of a local environmental regulatory community, environmental education and the so-called community-based conservation approaches, nation states and other environmental organizations often attempt to create “environmental subjects” (Agrawal 2005: 15).

In Africa, colonial and postcolonial states resorted to use coercion in the process of controlling resources that have been extracted through tourism, mining, logging, fishing and large-scale agriculture. It is hegemonic in many aspects, marginalizing local resource users from the benefit and management of resources, imposing elitist approaches of environmental management at the expense of indigenous knowledge and aiming at the physical and psychological domination of the subjects (Peluso 1993; Singh and Houtum 2002). For example, enclosing common resources entails setting mechanisms that justify and enforce control, as well as a form of governance that inculcates environmental law among the community who previously enjoyed free access to the resources. By doing so, environmental governmentality attempts to promote a culture of internalizing certain forms of control and authority as normal and natural within resource users (Peet et al. 2011).

Similarly, colonialism has introduced to Africa a system that disabled, dismantled, and denigrated “old forms of life by systematically breaking down their conditions, and with constructing in their place new conditions to enable – indeed, oblige – new forms of life to come into being” (Scott 1995: 193, emphasis in original). By emulating colonial notions of delineating humans from non-humans, postcolonial states in Africa also replicated hegemonic forms of environmental governance that were intended to legitimize state and non-state interventions under the guise of conservation and development.

Building on the conservation and control thesis, this work probes into how the conservation and ecotourism project in the Nech Sar National Park has been articulated, defined and negotiated among different actors. In doing so, the study investigates how competing notions of nature reinforce contradicting perspectives of conservation. It also looks at strategies the government used in channeling down hegemonic environmental control over the local communities under the guise of conserving nature and improving the people’s ways of life. Understanding the political and
material meanings and interpretations ascribed to a territory is sine qua non to comprehending the motives of different actors, because “any effort to environmental conservation in its many forms, for better or worse, is basically a form of environmental control” (Peet et al. 2011: 28, emphasis added). Environmental control entails control over the material, cultural, economic and political spaces of the people who inhabit or claim to have inhabited a particular territory.

As discussed earlier, local Guji and Koore communities were restricted in terms of access to their farmland, grazing fields and ritual sites following the establishment of the Nech Sar National Park. Through territorialization of the park territory, the state has exercised its hegemonic authority and power over the people by controlling their economic, spiritual and social spaces. In other words, evictions and resettlement programs have not only displaced the people from the physical space but also dis-spaced them from the places that symbolize different aspects of their lives, including their modes of spirituality, emotions and sense of belonging.

Here, it suffice to note that political ecologists criticize the notion of wilderness that is behind the establishment of many protected areas in developing countries, albeit not based upon a lack of concern for global environmental problems or change in local biodiversity. Instead, it is because such ‘conservation’ efforts serve the interests of the few by sidelining the knowledge and rights of local people. Peet et al. (2011: 27) have discerned between genuine conservation concerns and those who have used the discourses for different purposes:

While certainly the catastrophic decline in key species around the world is a matter of universal concern, it is notable that a generation of efforts to save animals (e.g. the African lions, Indian tigers, Chinese pandas etc.) have largely been built around the “fortress” model where urban elites call for the enclosure of lands long used and occupied by rural, indigenous, and local people, all in the name of protection.

In contrary to the accusations against indigenous people from conservationists, accounts of the local community rather emphasize that the traditional conservation practices of the local people have long provided a home for the animals that conservationists claim to protect, preceding the arrival of the conservationists themselves (Berkes 2008). The following statement from a Guji elder during my fieldwork illuminates this argument:

If our ancestors or we did not care for the animals, would not it be the case that they would have been perished long time ago? Who cared for these animals before the coming of the government? Was it not the people? Who cared for them 50 years ago? Was it not that we lived together hundred years ago? We did. Our grandparents, our parents and we took care of
them. However, these people [the park authorities] came yesterday and started to tell us what to do and what not to do. We rather know how to live with the animals. We care for the animals as we do for our cattle. We do that not because of the order from the government but because of the oath, we have with Waaqa [God] through our ancestors. We care for them so that our cattle would reproduce, we get adequate rain, our homes become peaceful and everything in our neighborhood stays safe and happy (interview with Gagasa Edema, April 2011).

Guji elders do not subscribe to modern conservation discourses and practices; rather, they inherently have values, beliefs, ethics (safiini) and ecological wisdom that govern their interaction with nature (uuumama). In Guji worldviews, their surroundings constitute the entire physical world and divine beings that Uuma/Waaqa/God created as he did with humans. Although conservation practices have globally undergone some changes towards an inclusive and decentralized approach since the 1990s, political ecology still suggests great scrutiny of the practices, given that power differentials at local arena might also lead to inequalities in access to resources. Local social differentiations in terms of ethnicity, religion, language, gender, education and age are important elements of investigation because these variables affect the way in which people negotiate local-global interactions (Gezon 2006). The so-called community-based conservation or the politics of participation masks local power relations under the ambiguous concept of ‘community’ participation. For instance, in the case of the Guji and Koore local communities, the park administration and respective district administrations have established local regulatory committee out of the local communities under the name of participation. Although the idea was to engage the people in the management of the national park, it has created decentralized form of hegemony. In practice, only a few local elites who had a strong network with government officials were handpicked and assigned as members of the local committee, while ordinary men and women remained marginalized. This is why the applauded community-based resource management is often criticized for its representation of ‘the community’ as a homogenous entity with similar interests, claims and history.

Considering local people as a homogenous community always obscures internal or intra-ethnic differences within an ethnic group itself. As Gezon (2006) maintains, there is a danger in assuming ethnic divisions in the case of conservation and development interventions from a fixed ascription of economic activity as a marker of a group. The simplification and complexity emerge when conservationists or state officials ascribe a certain ethnic group with specific ways of life and accordingly blame it as a cause of environmental problems. This obscures internal diversities within ethnic groups as well as the engagement of members of other groups in the way of life with which the other group is ‘identified’. It has predominantly been the case that the Guji were considered as
pastoralists and any cattle trespass to the national park has been directly associated to this group, although other neighboring communities also herd livestock. In this regard, a former park warden of the Nech Sar National Park who later worked as head of Culture and Tourism bureau of the SNNP regional state described the threats to the park by associating livelihood styles and ethnicity with environmental degradation:

You know, nomads are always nomads [referring to the Guji agro-pastoralist]. They move with their livestock. They are not worried about what will happen tomorrow. When they come with their livestock in a certain season, their cattle overgraze the land and move out to another location in search of another pastureland. This is their way of life but it is not a wise way of utilizing resources. This practice affects both the people and the park. On the other hand, agrarian societies [the Koore in this context] are much concerned about land use system. Their economic system favors resource management far better than nomadism. Of course, they also compete with the park over farmlands. That is why the government is concerned about both groups and the environment. We exerted maximum effort to improve the lives of the people, that of the wildlife and biodiversity in the park. The park is a national treasure. Both the local communities and the country at large would have benefited from tourism. Now the park is threatened because of overgrazing and encroachment from the people (Former Warden, April 2012).

Rather than ascribing ethnic identity to fixed markers such as economic activity and language, it is very important to look at how members of different ethnic groups tend to subjectively construct and contextually switch their ethnic identity, particularly within the contexts of contestations and claims over resources. In this respect, group members adjust their allegiance and membership flexibly based upon imagined or real material/objective advantages (Gezon 2006). For example, in the Guji-Koore relationship, the Koore often contextually frame their identity based on changing circumstances such as issues of access to resources. Both Koore and Guji informants agree on cases whereby the Koore switch their identity to the Guji through traditional rites of passage called ilmofacha (adoption). Ilmofacha literally means a process of being adopted as a son/daughter by a family other than one’s own biological kin. As the account from my Koore informants shows, their members have been going for the ilmofacha tradition for two major purposes. For economic reasons, as it ensures the Koore with access to land and livestock from the Guji territories; and as socio-political mechanism, because it served both groups, and particularly the Koore, in seeking shelter among the Guji during times of social and political crisis at the highland. Once a Koore individual is adopted into a Guji clan, he/she is equally entitled to resources of the Guji family or clan, and thus ascribing pastoralism to Guji does not necessarily mean that the Koore were not engaged in herding activities.

As it has discussed in the previous section, human perceptions of the environment, representations
of different landscapes, ascriptions of meaning and the conceptualization of the place of humans in nature are culturally constructed and shaped by socio-political dynamics and historical trajectories. Thus, political ecology challenges the radical separation of humans from the biophysical environment by identifying human systems of meaning and socio-political dynamics as they shape the material contexts within which people act (Gezon 2006). As an analytical approach, examining the political and ecological aspects of environmental issues such as resource use, access right and claims of entitlement also helps us to analyze how, when and by whom a particular territory came under possession/control. It enables us to know the contested nature of a space and unequal power relationship in the process of interpretation and ascription of meanings to a territory. Gezon (2006: 15) further argues that “a concept of the political as embedded in everyday interactions reveals the process through which elements of the biophysical environment become resources, per se, as well as how they become distributed and contested.” It is also possible to address contestation and debates between people of different interests and claims by assessing the dynamics of material and discursive struggle over power, entitlement and resources (Gossling 2004). Nonetheless, imposing a certain form of environmental knowledge upon another social group implies exercising a hegemonic form of knowledge that suppresses multiple voices and interpretations. For example, in the research area, the park authority’s attempt to impose scientific approaches of conservation by separating humans from the wildlife, and monitoring the movements, reproduction and behavior of animals is part of the state’s exercise of hegemonic form of knowledge that denigrates the indigenous eco-cosmologies of people-environmental interactions.

Ethiopian state officials, and particularly those in the SNNP regional state, used different rhetoric, accenting that the national park was designed for the benefit of the local people. The state presents itself as the only legitimate body responsible for safeguarding the people, the wildlife and the environment in general. For example, during the resettlement program of the Koore people in 2004, local government cadres were reported to have promised the people better living conditions (access to health centers, pure water, schools and roads) and the provision of production materials in the new settlement areas (informant: Shora Mamamcha, February 2012). However, the officials fulfilled none of these promises after relocating the people. This indicates the government’s reliance on narratives in order to translate its policies into practice without challenge. Therefore, an understanding of the link between local resource use policies and the political, economic and social institutions at national and international levels helps us grasp conflicts and motives surrounding environmental change (Campbell 2005).
Economic and political forces and contestations over environmental resources at different scales cannot be understood without a thorough understanding of the life worlds of local communities and their environmental narratives. As Campbell (2005: 296) argues, in the study of environmental change, “place-based livelihoods need to be understood through accounts of life histories, social change and aspirations, rather than being slotted into the naturalistic narrative box of communities geared to ‘survival’ or simply replicating traditional values.” Indigenous people’s life worlds are built based upon the engagement, interaction, participation, experience, memories of past activities and the “perception of human and non-human life process in contexts of relational ways of knowing” (Campbell 2005: 299). These are important in understanding different discourses, contestations and claims of entitlement among social actors and institutions engaged in the struggle over environmental resources, such as the Nech Sar National Park case.

Political and economic forces that operate in local and extra-local arenas often influence the rules of the game in contested social spaces by creating an unequal power relationship in the process of interpreting and ascribing meanings to a territory (Gezon 2006). While the meaning people ascribe to biophysical environments largely depends on their economic, cultural and social interests and transformations, the process of distribution, ownership, control and management of resources reflects political forces and the power relations between actors who are involved in the contestation. As has been discussed in chapter one, actors of different power positions, agency and network define a particular territory based on their worldviews, economic motives and political aspirations. Under such a context, “the physicality of space should not be radically separate from the metaphorical space of human interactions” (Gezon 2006: 21), because it is through engagements and re-engage-ments that people make meaning and create their sense of identity, building on the past memories of landscape that are embedded in their culture.

In addition to cultural dimensions of a place, the very physical element of a place in the form of topography, geographical properties, the species of plants and animals and the distribution of its resources add to its significances. However, the question remains as to whose representations and interests of the space prevail in conservation schemes. Based on the meaning conferred to a particular physical space by individuals or groups, “elements of biophysical environment become resources as people appropriate them as means of subsistence and as commodities” (Gezon 2006: 85). To understand the process of conferring meaning to biophysical environments, material and discursive struggle over power, resource and entitlement reflect important elements of analysis to disentangle political and economic forces from environmental concerns in conservation politics. It
is difficult to isolate local resource use practices, access rights, distribution patterns, customs and governance at the local level from national and international political, social and economic institutions, given that national institutions, which are influenced by global discourses and practices, significantly influence the mode of human-environmental interactions at local level (Gossling 2004).

The following three different narratives from a representative of the Ethiopian state and members of the Guji and Koore people hinge on how a particular phenomenon – in this case, the establishment of the national park – is presented differently by the actor groups. A former head of culture and tourism bureau of SNNP regional state claims that the territory was uninhabited during and before the park was established:

When the territory was reserved for a national park in the 1960s, there was not any trace of human settlement except some nomadic people who used to come to the Nech Sar plains during rainy seasons. Apart from this, it was only a home for the wildlife. As you might have seen, the landscape is beautiful for tourism. According to our information, the government wanted to conserve the biodiversity and simultaneously generate foreign currency through tourism. The national park was established for the benefit of the local people, the biodiversity and the country at large (Almaz Beyero, April 2012, Hawassa).

Furthermore, the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA) has posted a kind of business advertisement, depicting national parks in the country as wilderness. The main page of the EWCA’s website states: “Come and See the Real Wilderness in Ethiopia” (http://www.ewca.gov.et/). Beneath the surface, this advert implies the official notion of the organization about national parks in the country, portraying the territories as wild and empty. We noted earlier that knowledge about the environment is produced through combinations of such narratives, discourses and frameworks that are invented by a particular social actor to legitimize a particular form of knowledge and suppress counter narratives.

By contrast, the Guji consider the territory as their ancestral home, having lived there for several generations. A Guji elder shares the opinion of many other members of the group in stating:

Our ancestors lived here since time immemorial. This is our home. From generation to generation, we inherited the tradition of herding. We keep our livestock and make rituals of thanksgiving, prayers and blessings through which Waaqa [God] would reciprocate us with nagaa [peace]. Whenever there is nagaa in our homeland, we will get everything. Rain comes; cattle and people reproduce, and animals and plants get their food and water. However, we lost nagaa when those people of the government came and chased us from our home. They suddenly came and told us the land belongs only to the animals. They told us that we were not
allowed to live with animals. However, how did we live together before the government came? Since the Haile Selassie period, and particularly during the Derg and the current government, we have been denied access to our homes. All ritual and burial places of our ancestors, malkaa [gate to a river for cattle] and pastureland were all included into the park. Before the park, the entire territory was our customary land. It included the present day Singalla [Arba Minch town]. They chased our people and now we are placed between the park, the Amara [Koore] and the two Lakes (interview with Ararsa Gumi, May 2012).

The Koore people, who are the rivals to the Guji over the contested farmland along the eastern border of the park share some of the aforementioned state official’s positions, yet also produced their own version of the story. Both Koore state officials and local peasants share similar views in claiming the entire part of the park as empty except the lowland called Tsalke/Golbo during the park’s establishment. According to a Koore informant:

The entire Nech Sar was under Koore administration during Haile Selassie era. We lived in the highland and seasonally moved to Tsalke for irrigation. However, except few nomads in the desert [Nech Sar plains] there were no people. Only the Koore lied in Tsalke. These Guji nomads came to Tsalke after they learned agriculture from us. During that time, they used to pay government taxation to Amaro Awuraja [province]. Our land goes far up to Sanxaqa Dingay [Bonke Hills close to Arba Minch Forests]. During the last years of the King [Emperor Haile Selassie], the park issue came. Initially they did not come to our agricultural areas but the Derg destroyed our property and removed us from our home in Tsalke. By that time the Guji were also chased out (informant: Gudo Mamacha, February 2012).

From the three aforementioned versions of the story, it is clear to comprehend how the competing groups produced diverse narratives and the referents that the actors brought aboard to justify their claims. Apart from the construction of competing narratives over environmental resources in the Nech Sar National Park, there is also evident competition over forms of knowledge regarding conservation approaches and the place of humans in nature. Given that they were built upon the dominant Western discourses of knowledge that privilege science over indigenous or ‘traditional’ knowledge, conservation practices and policies in colonial and post-colonial Africa are noted for promoting the former at the expense of the latter (Peluso 1993; Gezon 2006). For a better understanding of why customary resource use approaches were criminalized following the introduction of colonial conservation practices, one should position the discussion within the broader debates about the representation of environmental problems and how we come to know these issues. Who defines the status of environmental conditions? Who holds the power to categorize societies as victims and villains?

It has been a common trend in capitalist economy that access to environmental resources or the bounty of nature is filtered through political and economic institutions in which, “those people who
are relatively wealthy and powerful generally reap more of the benefits from uses of the environment, and bear fewer of the costs from its abuse, than do those who are relatively poor and powerless” (Boyce 2002: 1). The irony is that environmentally destructive economic activities produce powerful groups who reap the benefits of such destruction, while it produces losers who bear the costs perpetrated by the wealthy and dominant groups. In other words, the wealthy and powerful sections of the populace (multinational corporations, businessmen/women and states) control knowledge over environmental problems that are often reproduced through discourses, narratives and practices (Peet et al. 2011). By associating environmental degradation to poverty, much conservation literature in developing countries has continued to cast the blame on poor local communities. Although the reliance of the poor on environmental resources in their quest to survive is undeniable, particularly in developing countries, such an argument overshadows the strong link between wealth, power and environmental degradation (Boyce 2002).

By contrast, it is evident that knowledge about conservation practices in Africa has been co-produced through interactions between the Western forms of scientific knowledge and African responses to the external impositions building their critical knowledge on their culturally embedded belief, values and ecological wisdoms (Garland 2008). For instance, local conservation schemes, values, norms and knowledge that are embedded and embodied in people’s beliefs, culture and worldviews (sacred indigenous cosmologies) informed the dominant conservation paradigm to adopt what has been called community-based environmental management approaches (Adams and Hutton 2007; Berkes 2008). Despite the continuation of asymmetrical power relations between the local communities and state or non-state actors, even within the so-called community-based conservation practices, it has at least brought a recognition that indigenous approaches of human-environmental relations would contribute to the global endeavors to ensure sustainable environmental conservation.

2.2.2.3. Conservation Enclosure-Domination/Resistance Interfaces

The establishment of national parks and other types of protected areas in Africa has criminalized the utilization of customary land and natural resources (Neumann 1998). Enclosures of common resources under conservation schemes have instituted new forms of compartmentalization and territorialization by reinforcing check posts, patrols and surveillance, ultimately enhancing categorizing territories as ‘accessible’ and ‘inaccessible’ and introducing regulations concerning
“who is legitimate to enter the territorialized space and on what conditions” (Campbell 2005: 294). Enclosure has also entailed the imposition of scientific knowledge upon local communities through the externalization of nature from those who hold the knowledge – in this context the local people. As I discussed earlier, the dominant academic and popular imagination of considering scientific knowledge as a superior and the only legitimate way of knowing environmental problems has continued to marginalize other means of knowing. Thus, it is partial, reductionist and ultimately instrumental in achieving and maintaining control over nature and the people who traditionally inhabited a particular territory (Peet et al. 2011).

As Bosak (2008) articulates, environmental conservation is a social question in which nature is labeled as internalized or externalized from culture. Such categorization places the state or non-state environmental managers in opposing camps with local communities in the process of implementing conservation programs. This happens because the externalization of nature entails the employment of modern, scientific and expert-based knowledge rather than giving responsibility of conservation to the representatives of nature, namely the indigenous peoples (Bosak 2008). Evidently, historical trajectories in the conservation of protected areas in colonial and postcolonial Africa depict the domination of scientific knowledge over indigenous forms of environmental management. As a result, most protected areas in the continent became arenas of struggle over perceptions of nature-culture relations, questions of customary rights and forms of knowledge. During the colonial period, the European appropriation of African territories took place partly for the purpose of aesthetic consumption and political control, which in turn enabled the colonial powers to strengthen their control over different resources. The postcolonial African states inherited most forms of the colonial system in the run for ‘nation-building’. One such inheritance was the continuation of the protectionist approach of conservation, which presumes people as threats to the environment, especially to the wildlife. By contrast, local communities in many parts of the continent exerted relentless efforts to curtail external interventions as part of their struggle against the colonial system, which continued also in postcolonial eras. Accordingly, it is sound to argue that protected areas in Africa have become arenas of struggle over conservation discourses between traditional and scientific knowledge.

At this point, it is important to raise a fundamental issue pertaining to the nexus between enclosure and domination/resistance. Conservation enclosures are arenas in which different actors exercise various forms of power. The interest of state or non-state actors to dominate or subjugate the environment entails stifling or controlling resistance from the part of local communities who rise
against the costs of environment-related development projects or conservation activities (Peet et al. 2011). While such practices of domination can be termed as dominating power, local communities also respond to the dominating power by exerting different forms of resisting power (Sharp et al. 2000). Against the general assumption of equating power with acts of the dominant characterized by domination and control, Sharp et al. (2000) urge us to pay attention to both entangled forms of power, namely dominating power and resisting power.

Although power in environmental management is crudely understood as a polity’s capacity to control the actions of others, such as local communities, organizations and firms, it is also imperative to understand power as possessed by the subjects who are the targets of dominating power (Peet et al. 2011). Thus, the sources of power, resources actors use in the exercise of power and strategies they design in the process ultimately shape the outcome of the interplay between dominating power and resisting power.

Various actors with competing perspectives articulate their own narratives about a certain phenomenon to substantiate their claims of entitlement to knowledge, resource and territories. However, the power over influential narratives is not evenly distributed among social actors. Based on their capability and knowledgeability – the agency to articulate narratives – competing social groups accumulate power over influential narratives, myths and resources, which in turn changes the game to their advantage (Stott and Sullivan 2000). Such influences often stem from actors’ economic and political power, because it has been noted, “political influence on environmental policies tends to stem from economic interests which are able to translate their needs into political outcomes” (Stott and Sullivan 2000: 59).

I have discussed how conservation enclosures enhance hegemonic control over resource users from the part of the state or non-state conservation or business organizations. This is why political ecologists call for great scrutiny of any form of conservation, particularly those enacted through establishment of protected areas, because it disempowers traditional resource users by dispossessing them from their socio-cultural and economic spaces. In this regard, conservation policies are often seen as political endeavors that produce winners and losers (Neumann 1992). Understanding questions of power and forms of rule/governance is important in terms of comprehending how certain sections of population become winners while others become victims of the politics of conservation (Robbins 2004; Peet et al. 2011).
Given that power is not uniformly or evenly distributed among competing actors, there is no doubt that hegemonic discourses of conservation and development are imposed on actors whose power constellation does not counterbalance that of the dominant actors. Simultaneously, the exercise of dominating power nurtures and endures resisting power on the part of the subject(s), upon whom the dominating power is exercised, prompting them to take different forms of resistance, in what Scott (1985) calls ‘everyday forms of resistance’. Despite its suitability in explaining hidden forms of resistance from below, Scott’s ‘everyday forms of resistance’ puts resistance within binaries of power: domination versus resistance. Moreover, it also considers covert resistance as a trivial practice by peasants who cannot change the course of action by the dominating actor(s). On the contrary, it has become evident from historical experiences in developing countries that grassroots actors have been successful in halting or undoing the implementation of hegemonic development and/or conservation practices in many instances (Bryant and Bailey 1997). As will be detailed in chapters seven and eight regarding the Nech Sar National Park, local resistance has been nurtured by acts of domination from the state and non-state actors, enabling the local communities to succeed in disabling hegemonic exercise of power by the state. Therefore, I share Long’s (2001) argument that it is difficult to imagine a smooth translation of hegemonic discourses, ideas and practices into the life-worlds of local actors within the contexts where grassroots actors can mobilize different forms of resources (social capital, networks, knowledge and agency). This is because external intervention often encounters critical knowledge from local actors who define, articulate, contest and negotiate external intervention based on their worldviews. Although local communities might not opt to overt resistance due to repressive actions from the states, everyday forms of resistance at times compel the state and non-state actors to come to terms with the demands of local people.
Chapter Three

The Study Area, the People and their Relations to the Land

3.1. The Study Area

As I outlined in the preceding chapters, the Nech Sar National Park has been contested from different dimensions. The physical settings, economic and aesthetic values ascribed to the space, as well as political, cultural and historical representations of the territory have been among the major elements triggering competitions over the territory. While all such characteristics of the territory will be discussed in this research, this chapter focuses on the geographical settings and some background knowledge on people-environmental interactions in the study area. The research project takes the national park as a core arena where multilayer constellations of social actors interact among one another and strategize different narratives, ideas, programs and practices related to the ownership, management, utilization and conservation of the territory and its resources. However, despite the park being represented as a central field of contestation among the actors, this study also pays due attention to the people who traditionally inhabited the territory or those who used to draw resources from the area for their livelihood, cultural and religious purposes. Therefore, the people and their land reflect the focus of this chapter.

The park is located in southern Ethiopia, at a distance of around 505km to the south of Addis Ababa (Briggs 2006). It is located within the administrative territory of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP) regional state. However, the region’s administrative authority over the park remains contentious because the park administration has been swinging between regional and federal states. Moreover, there is an ongoing claim between Oromia and SNNP regional states over its administration and ownership (Dessalegn 2004; Getachew 2007). In terms of geographical settings, the park is adjoined by Gamo Gofa Zone in the west, Borana Zone in the east and northeast, Amaro district in the southeast and the two lakes, Abaya and Chamo, in the north and south, respectively (see map below).

4 Since 2008, the Galana district of Borana zone (Oromia regional state) adjoins the park entirely along northeastern and eastern directions by disconnecting the Amaro district’s direct border contact with the park.
With a distance of only three kilometers from Arba Minch town, located to the west, the western side of the park is easily visible if one gazes to the scenery from the gardens of hotels and lodges such as Bekele Molla hotel and Paradise Lodge in the town. According to the official figure, the park covers an area of 514km$^2$ (Dessalegn 2004) although other sources argue that it has been ever-expanding since then and thus the area is estimated to be over 700km$^2$ (Taddesse 2004).

The park includes different ecological niches, ranging from a highland forested zone located close to Arba Minch town at an altitude of over 1650m to the lowland Tsalke/Golbo Valley stretching from northeast to southeast of the park, adjoining the western slopes of Amaro Mountains. This

Although this map shows some physical boundaries of the national park, it is highly controversial. A close insight into the map shows the contestability of the territory on the part of the actors involved. This map shows the ‘official’ depiction by the SNNP regional state and fully nullifies the territorial claim by the Guji Oromo by drawing the boundary of Oromia regional state outside the park territory. According to this map, Amaro district adjoins the park on the eastern and southeastern side, although it was actually the Guji village of Arda Guddina that adjoins the park in these directions except a narrow strip of land along southeastern side that connects to the Amaro district. This map does not show my position but I brought it here to show the complexity of the issues (Source: http://www.southtourism.gov.et/Home/Nature/NationalParks/NNPBigMap.html).
lowland area is located at an altitude of 1108m (Dessalegn 2004). There is the vast grassland plain in between the two ecological niches, traditionally called the Nech Sar plains or Ergansa, as the Guji call it. The peculiar feature of Ergansa is the white grass from which the park derived its name "Nech Sar", which literally means "white grass" in Amharic language.

Figure 5: "Nech Sar" (White Grass)

The Guji call the territory Ergansa, which means a land with abundant blessings (grass, water, fertility, etc.), although the new nomenclature is analogous to other areas in conquered regions where Abyssinians labeled Amharic names to places. For instance, the imperial regime changed the place names of Oromia towns such as Finfinne, Bishoftu, Adama and Ambo to Addis Ababa, Debre Zeit, Nazereth and Hagere Hiwot, respectively (Paulos 2011). Changes in place names or toponyms imply the denial of peoples' rights and their history related to the places. Place names have political orientations because changes are often undertaken in connection with nation-building processes (Horsman 2006). During the colonial periods too, colonial officials changed place names as a strategy of detaching the cultural, spiritual and historical meanings of the space from the people inhabiting the territory. This was why the Guji re-named their newly established village adjoining the park as Ergansa/Arda Guddina (a land of prosperity), as a mark of reclaiming their historical right to the park.
Returning to the discussion on the park, the local ecological zones constitute diverse fauna and flora specific to the topographies that have been used by local communities for different purposes. The dense forest covers the western side of the park and harbors the legendary "Forty Springs" from which the town derived its name in Amharic as 'Arba Minch'. These springs are the major sources of water supply to the town. Although the town is located close to Abaya and Chamo Lakes, it draws water from the springs due to lack of technology to purify (distil) water from the lakes. Its proximity to the town and absence of alternative fuel sources around the town made the forest to be the major source of charcoal and firewood for the town dwellers, organizations and service institutions such as hotels, colleges and University, hospitals (Freeman 2006). Low-income sections of the town population, mainly women and youth, depend on collecting firewood, charcoal and construction materials from the forest to sustain their livelihood (Bayisa 2011). Moreover, the forest is a home for arboreal animals and different bird species (Dessalegn 2004). The two lakes, parts of which were included within the park boundary in the 1990s, were fishing grounds for Arba Minch town dwellers and its surroundings. Thus, although quantitative figures are not available, these lakes remained the major sources of fish supply to southern Ethiopia and beyond.

According to the Guji oral tradition and other sources, the middle zone – the grassland plains – was a customary grazing land of the Guji Oromo. The Guji used this grassland for wet season grazing purposes by the time the Sermale Valley turned swampy following the commencement of rainy seasons. It also partially included the Bonke hills, where the Guji practiced rituals in the past. In terms of wildlife habitation, this zone was noted for its accommodation of diverse species of animals, including the endemic Swayne’s hartebeest. The major tourist attraction site of the Nech Sar National Park belongs to this ecological zone. As the myth of ‘wild’ Africa mainly resonated around the exoticization of African wildlife, the Ethiopian state also capitalized on the global trends of nature commoditization and marketing in the national park. The third important ecological zone, the eastern escarpment of the park that adjoins the Amaro Mountains, remained contested among the three actors, namely the park administration, the Guji and Koore people. Besides its economic significance as irrigation land for the Guji and Koore communities, this narrow corridor has also been part of the park administration’s claim for entitlement because the government considered the area as a dry season retreat for the wildlife.
3.2. The People and their Land

The park adjoins three different groups of people namely the Guji Oromo, Koore and Arba Minch town dwellers who traditionally depended on the resources from the park for different purposes. Although categorizing ethnic groups based upon their economic practices tends to overshadow internal heterogeneities, the first two groups traditionally had somewhat distinct livelihood engagements. The Guji in the study area have mainly been engaged in agro-pastoral lifestyle, where livestock herding constitutes their economic and cultural realms (Taddesse 2006). On the other hand, the Koore traditionally practiced peasant agriculture in the highland part of the Amaro district and some members of the group gradually moved down the slope to the lowland adjoining the park (Simeon 1995). The town dwellers in the Arba Minch town are multiethnic and their livelihood practices are diverse, as with elsewhere in towns in the country. Thus, this research only focuses on those people who depend on the national park for their livelihood sustenance.

For the sake of clarity, I discuss the socio-cultural history, livelihood practices, local conceptions of nature, and settlement history of the Guji and Koore communities within the subsequent sections. Moreover, changes in socio-political conditions in the area and their implications in altering people-environmental interactions will also be the focus of this chapter. It is evident that each group produces and reproduces different knowledge and claims drawing on different narratives. Although contestations among different actors for ownership, management and utilization of the territory and its resources will be the subject of a separate chapter later in this work, a brief outline of the settlement history helps us to reconstruct the roots of the claims.

3.2.1. The Guji: the People and their Economy, Settlement History and their Conception of Nature

3.2.1.1. The People and their Economy

The Guji people belong to the larger Oromo ethnic group and live in the southern part of Ethiopia. At present, the Guji live in Oromia regional state in Borana and Guji Zones with significant number of their members included in some zones and districts in the SNNP regional state (Dhadacha 2006; Taddesse 2006, 2009; Asebe 2010). The Guji in the Nech Sar area lived without any formal government administration from 1991 to 2008, until they were included into Borana Zone, Oromia regional state. During those years, the people were devoid of any social service from the government, apart from some sporadic vaccinations provided to their livestock by the African Parks
Foundation during its administration of the national park (2004-2007). Their common encounter with the state was through the park administration that often threatened to relocate them from the vicinity of the national park borders.

Two mutually reinforcing institutions, namely the *gadaa* system and *qaallu* institution govern every aspect of life among the Guji as a community and shape how their members interact with their surroundings. The *gadaa* system is a traditional generation set socio-political organization in which power is transferred to members of consecutive *gadaa* grades every eight years (see Hinnant 1977; Legesse 1973, 2000). Likewise, the *qaallu* institution maintains Guji’s spiritual wellbeing by serving as an intermediary medium between the people and *Waaqa* (God) through its leader, *abbaa qaallu*. These two institutions shape Guji’s internal relationship among themselves as a community, their interaction with their surroundings (humans and non-humans) and their spiritual connection to *Waaqa*. While the *gadaa* system ensures order through enforcement of customary laws and stable governance, the *qaallu* institution maintains the spiritual connection between the people and *Waaqa* and also guides the people’s moral and ethical values (*safiit*) in their interactions with other human and non-human neighbors (Asebe 2012a). For example, in human-environmental relations, Guji children are socialized into norms and values that regulate individuals’ engagement with nature. Moreover, at every *gadaa* assembly, convened every eight years, the *Yu’aa* council (general assembly of the *gadaa* officials) promulgates laws including environmental regulations that govern people’s ownership right, utilization and management of environmental resources (Dhadacha 2006). Due to the centrality of greenery in Oromo worldviews and the sacredness of different landscapes, both *qaallu* institution and the *gadaa* system contribute to Guji’s harmonious coexistence with their surroundings by providing the customary administration and spiritual basis of humans’ connectedness to nature. However, as it will be discussed later, this does not mean that the Guji fall into the classical representation of indigenous people as ‘close to nature’.

In terms of the economic dimension, the Guji traditionally practiced a pastoral way of life until the mid twentieth century, when they began combining farming with pastoralism (Hinnant 1977). Today, they are engaged in diverse livelihood practices (pastoralism, agro-pastoralism, farming, trade and other urban economies). However, regardless of such heterogeneity in Guji’s economic engagements, herding has continued to signify social, economic and cultural values among the Guji until present, particularly in rural contexts (Tadesse 2006). Livestock embody Guji’s social pride, self-esteem, worldviews, ecological wisdom and inter-societal relations, as well as shaping their relationship with their surroundings.
In Guji worldviews, everything is based upon symbolic and material representations of livestock. Cattle herding and the possession of large herd of cattle are associated with cultural pride, economic values (wealth), a sense of Guji identity and social privilege in marriage arrangements and inter-societal relationships. Taddesse (2006: 209) describes that although the Guji practice a mixed economy of animal husbandry and crop cultivation, “their real wealth consists of cattle, sheep, goats and horses. Emotions and pride are centered on stock. People who do not own cattle are not considered to be proper Guji.” In Guji culture, beyond their economic values, cattle are also used for rituals, transition rites, gift, and bride price, compensation during reconciliations and as symbols of social prestige. Therefore, the Guji count cattle not in terms of heads of cattle but rather moona (kraal), which ranges from seventy to hundreds. This means that the possession of large herd of livestock represents social and economic privileges. However, owing to enclosures of pastureland and due to overall change in climatic conditions, the stock, which is the source of wealth and reflection of Guji identity, has been under serious threat putting the people into dilemma of socio-cultural transition(Taddesse 2009).

For the Guji, livestock herding has been rooted in their culture and self-pride. Livestock possession and engagement in livestock husbandry mark a crucial representation of Guji’s social, economic and cultural capabilities/performances. The economic contribution of livestock among the Guji has both material and psychological dimensions. Livestock products are the major nutritional sources in the form of milk, yoghurt and meat. Moreover, the Guji exchange livestock and livestock products for cash with neighboring communities (McClellan 1988). The psychological empowerment that livestock husbandry provides to the people is related to how the Guji define poverty and wealth. Poverty is understood neither as a lack of food for daily consumption nor in monetary terms; rather, the Guji conceptualize it as an aggregate deprivation of a person from social, cultural, economic and spiritual involvements. In order to perform rituals or maintain inter-societal relations within the Guji and between them and their surroundings, possession of large number of livestock empower the owner with psychological capabilities. If a person does not possess over one moona (kraal) of cattle, he is not entitled to undertake rituals, prayers, blessings and sacrifices on behalf of their clan or village. The failure to undertake these culturally important practices impedes an individual’s social relations in the marriage arrangements of his children, spiritual capabilities and other inter-societal relations. Restriction from rituals deprives the person from spiritual connection to Waaqa that in turn the Guji believe in affecting the person by blocking him from the possible blessings he would get from Waaqa in the form of the reproduction of the cattle, the fertility of women and peace to the
people and the land. The Guji consider such deprivation as poverty. Thus, they understand wealth not merely from an economic dimension.

Moreover, cattle represent status symbols and serve as sources of social prestige. Therefore, the Guji believe that the possession of healthy, fertile and large number of cattle is a sign of blessing from **Waaqa**. It is from wealthy families that the Guji elect elders who undertake earnest rituals and prayers – which are paramount in maintaining a person’s identity as being proper Guji (Baxter 1991; Van de Loo 1991). As Van de Loo (1991: 209) maintains, “numerous forms of animal sacrifices constitute the means of establishing and strengthening the complex vital interconnectedness between Waaqa-deity, and men, between the living and the dead, between marriage partners, or between a household and its livestock.” It is in this context that a Guji elder, Danbala Badacha, described cattle as follows: “**Loon Gujiif waa mara. Loon jechuun jireenma. Loon kabaja, isaan waan jilaati, loon sagalee dha. Walumagalatti loon Gujummaadha.**” Loosely translated, he states, “Cattle are everything for the Guji. Cattle mean life. They are food, they are pride, and they constitute elements of rituals and part of sacred journey. In general, cattle represent Gujiness (Guji identity)” (informant: Danbala Badacha, May 2011).

The people broadly situate livestock herding and possession of large herds of stock in their creation myth as being born as herders with all rights and privileges linked to this way of life. Indeed, many pastoral communities in East Africa such as the Maassai consider themselves as the only people with the right to possess cattle (Igoe 2004). Likewise, the Guji also claim that **Waaqa** created them as livestock herders, but reserved the right to ‘herd’ other animals (i.e. these others consider as wildlife) for him. The people’s positioning of pastoralism in their creation myth has developed a view of inalienable right to pasture lands, including the Nech Sar National Park, among their members. A Guji elder of over seventy years remarked the following about the intricate relationship between the Guji, their livestock, the wildlife and **Waaqa**:

**Waaqa** [God] created us with cattle so that we look after them, care for them and use them for our needs. However, these other animals [wild animals] do not have shepherd except Waaqa himself. Waaqa gave us the responsibility to care for the animals on his behalf and he cares for our cattle, people. Waaqa gives us nagaa [peace of the Guji land]. If one kills those that Waaqa looks after, he would punish us by causing famine, drought, disease and instability that destroys our livestock and people. Nevertheless, when we care for the animals, Waaqa reciprocates us with fertility, abundance, rain, and peace. From our ancestors until today, we lived with these animals in peace. They are also peaceful to us. Our people know that taking away the life of these peaceful animals would invoke punishment. However, these people [the park authorities] came recently and began telling us not to live where we lived for centuries (informant Waaqoo Dhugoo, April 2011).
There are strong intertwining between the customary conservation practices and their cosmological schemes, which are in turn embedded in their culture, beliefs and norms. Like other groups of the Oromo, the Guji have a strong cultural connection to their environments (Van de Loo 1991). The people’s connectedness to their land is part of the complex eco-cosmologies and ecological wisdom in which the maintenance of peace and harmony between humans, non-humans and Waaqa is mediated and expressed through different rituals constituting their surroundings. Baxter (1991: 9) explains that, “Guji, like other Oromo, are keenly aware that the maintenance of their culture depends on the maintenance of Nagea: Peace, that is, amongst them as a community and between them and God. But, this Peace is not a free gift, its maintenance requires continuous, earnest application, and is never sure or certain.” Thus, the duty of maintaining peace rests on the shoulders of elders, requiring them to provide continuous rituals, prayers, sacrifices, blessings and obeying the rules of Waaqa. Guji elders provide rituals and prayers to Waaqa on behalf of all people, cattle and their environment at large. The Guji believe that a failure to maintain harmony with Waaqa might result in affliction, principally expressed in the form of withholding rain, upon which all animals and humans absolutely depend. For the Guji, the fertility, growth and (re)productivity of cattle and humans are highly dependent on whether the Earth, the cattle and women are all moist (Baxter 1991). As Guji elders maintain, the nature of the relationship between humans and non-humans shapes their relationship with Waaqa. For instance, calamities/misfortunes such as drought, famine, flooding, disease and war are interpreted as being invoked by God for people’s failure to maintain their ancestral covenants. Conversely, the people describe fortunes not as a random occurring phenomenon but rather as reciprocal provision from Waaqa for people’s good deeds. A Guji elder by the name of Galgalo Jilo expressed the dynamics of Guji’s relations with their surroundings and its implications as follows:

In the past when our people obeyed ancestral safuu [norm/ethics], everything was fine. We did not experience problems like drought. Guji did not know hunger. Everything was plenty in Gujiland. Rain used to come in its proper time and cattle were fertile, milk was abundant, children and calves chanted in every village. By those days, elders respected their ancestors’ customs, children respected the safuu of the Guji and women respected men. We practiced rituals according to specific customs prescribed to Guji tradition. However, now everything is changed upside down. As you observed along your way to our village [showing me the field], small rivers dried up, pasture degraded and now even big trees are dying. The rain did not come for two years. This is not natural; it is not normal occurrence. It is what Waaqa invokes as punishment of our people. I do not know how the future will be but if it continues this way, we are so worried. Something worse might come (interview with Galgalo Jilo, April 2011).

In contrast to views from Guji elders who believe that maintaining ancestral covenants, customs and values is vital in seeking blessings and other forms of reciprocity from Waaqa, most Guji youth
hold somewhat different views. The youth focus more on the utilitarian purposes of the environment rather than its cultural or spiritual values. While this hints at the internal heterogeneity within the Guji, such disparity also cautions us that issues of human-environmental relations are complex and cannot be understood through an ‘all fits one’ approach.

3.2.1.2. Settlement History, Livelihood and Conservation Practices among the Guji in the Nech Sar Area

Drawing on Guji oral tradition and other historical sources, some scholars trace back the group’s settlement in the area to the sixteenth century (Dhadacha 2006; Getachew 2007). McClellan (1988) also mentioned the presence of the Guji Oromo around Abaya and Chamo Lakes prior to the period of the Ethiopian imperial conquest in the late nineteenth century. Guji elders trace their ancestors having settled in the places currently included into the park territory and far west up to Ganta hills to the west of Arba Minch town a long time before ten generations. Place names in the Arba Minch town such as Siqalla, Seecha and Bishaan Harre are all Oromo names and remain in use. The Guji used these places as ritual, sacred and burial sites, as well as for herding and farming purposes (Getachew 2007).

According to a European traveler who traveled from the coast of Somalia to Port Mombasa across southern Ethiopia in the late nineteenth century (1894-1895), the Jam Jams – as their neighbors called the Guji – were inhabitants around Galana Valley to the east of Lake Abaya (Smith 1897 [2008]; Briggs 2006). Although Smith did not mention Guji’s presence in today’s Nech Sar plains in his travel notes, their presence in the lowland part of the Galana Valley could be an indication that they used the pastureland around the Abaya and Chamo Lakes during their seasonal movement with their livestock. Lewis (1966) takes the history of Oromo settlement in the area further, arguing that the areas around Lakes Abaya and Chamo were part of the original homeland of the Oromo, from where they gradually expanded to other directions from the sixteenth century onwards. This argument seems convincing because most references to the Oromo history mention areas around Lake Abaya as part of the Oromo homeland.

The Guji were the only pastoral people in the area until they adopted a mixed economy of farming and animal husbandry in the mid twentieth century. Oral accounts from the Koore, Gamo and Burji people to some extent confirm Guji’s presence in the Nech Sar area before the imperial conquest, but contradict with Guji’s claim of settlement since the sixteenth century. Guji elders trace the
original settlement area of their ancestors to Girja, a place located near Bore town in the present day Guji Zone (Dhadacha 2006). In a report submitted to the Ethiopian government in 1966, Blower, a British explorer, clearly indicated that the Guji pastoralist people lived in the area now designated as the Nech Sar National Park, stating:

There were a number of small temporary encampments of cattle owning Guji people throughout the Nech Sar area. No permanent habitations were seen though it was understood that there were permanent villages in the hill to the east and signs of cultivation could be on slopes of the Amaro Mountains. There were several thousand cattle in the area belonging to the Guji, though for the most part these animals did not appear in very good condition and it was reported that mortality due to unknown disease was heavy (Blower 1967 cited in Getachew 2007: 48).

In the past, the Guji in the study area were a purely pastoral community and used the plain of the Nech Sar as wet season grazing land, whereas the eastern valley was used during the dry season. After the mid twentieth century, they began to cultivate crops and grow fruits in the Sermale Valley in the eastern side of the Nech Sar National Park. Areas such as Golbo/Tsalke, Gashe, Hituu and Mi'o have been cultivated throughout the year by irrigation and rainfall. While the Koore moved down from their permanent settlement areas in the highland villages of the Amaro district, the Guji also moved to the Golbo/Tsalke valley during their seasonal encampment, practicing agriculture along the way. Apart from herding and farming, the Guji traditionally produced honey from the forest now included within the park boundary (Taddesse 2004; Abiyot 2009).

The geography of daily routines of individual peasants and pastoralists helps to illuminate how the people contest, negotiate, and challenge state intervention vis-à-vis their livelihood conditions (Neumann 1992). While the analysis of such negotiations and contestations forms the subject of chapters seven and eight, in this section I will outline some livelihood practices and pathways of the Guji between their seasonal encampment sites. Guji’s movement between wet season and dry season encampment sites were fundamentally informed by two aspects of their ecological wisdom, namely Guji’s knowledge of seasonal distribution of animal parasites and diseases, as well as their concerns of environmental conservation.

Regarding their knowledge of animal disease, Van de Loo (1991) acknowledged that herding has equipped the Guji with skills and knowledge of parasites, diseases, symptoms and prevention strategies. One of the major challenges that the Guji often faced was infestation by mosquito and tsetse fly, which cause malaria and sleeping sickness to the people and animals, respectively. In order to avoid such infestations, the Guji had to move from the Sermale Valley, which turns to
swamps during rainy seasons (April-May and September-October). In the past, the people moved their livestock to the Nech Sar plains using mobility as a strategy of disease prevention.

In those early times before the enclosure of the territory by the government, the Guji on the western and eastern side of the two lakes converged at Bonke hill — traditionally called Riqicha Waaga (God’s Bridge), given that it creates a land outlet between the two lakes — to perform sacrifices and prayers for health and fertility of livestock and people. Rituals were made few weeks before the Guji moved back to their wet season campsites in April and September and were considered as rituals of purifying the land from possible infestation by different types of diseases and bad spirits by the time they were away to Sermale Valley in the previous season. They purify their surroundings in order that water, pasture and hayaa (mineral salt) suit the cattle, as well as ensuring the safety of their cattle from predators. They believe that predation on livestock is a sign of disruption in the human-nature relationship (humans, non-humans and supernatural power). For the Guji, any kind of cattle death is interpreted from cultural and spiritual perspectives, particularly in terms of their relationship with nature. This is why, as Baxter (1991) stated, Guji elders and religious leaders relentlessly invest their knowledge and wealth in rituals, prayers and blessings to maintain harmony with Waaga-deity and ancestral spirits.

However, access to seasonal grazing lands and some sacred spaces was restricted after the enclosure. The people subsequently settled in temporary sites adjacent to the park boundary along the eastern side, from where their cattle would gain access to pasture in the de facto park territory. Children between the ages of 10-18 often tend cattle in the buffer zones between human settlement and park boundaries, from where they push their cattle to the Nech Sar plains by closely inspecting the whereabouts of park scouts. Their daily encounters with park scouts reinforce the children for further cattle trespass as signs of retaliating against the fierce measures they face from the state agents. A young herder by the name of Danbala remarked on the challenges that he and other herders encounter on a daily basis, as the park scouts often punish them both physically and in detention. He also mentioned that the reaction of the scouts to cattle trespass depends on their networks with the local people. The boy described his experiences with the scouts as follows:

My grandfather told me that in the past they used to graze their cattle in all parts of Ergansa [the Nech Sar plains] including Bonke, Dhakaa Bule, Maddoo, Golbo, and Gode and as far as Gaattira and Mi’o. Now the government people, I mean these park people, confined us to this narrow land. Our cattle do not get enough pasture and access to water is limited. Sometimes they block the malkaa to the lakes. When they find us close to the park boundary, they chase our cattle, beat us, sometimes capture children, and take them to jail in Arba Minch. However,
it is not all of the scouts who are cruel. Those from Amara [Koore] and Gamo do not tolerate us. We have few Guji scouts. We check whether the scout is a Guji or other and then decide whether we let the cattle into the park or not. Our Guji scouts do not chase our cattle. They do not capture the herders either (Danbala, May 2012).

In times of drought such as the 2010/2011 event that ravaged the Horn of Africa, Guji boys took the risk of herding cattle in the park at night (often from 9pm-5am). The boys never sleep because they have to watch over their cattle from predators. Another major tactic the youth skillfully design is how to herd their cattle without being detected by the park scouts in order to escape the risk of detention and punishment. While there is no fixed amount of payment for trespassing cattle into the park territory, Guji households are sometimes asked to pay 50 birr (about 2.5 Euro) per animal. This amount is huge for a household with over hundred livestock. Apart from formal payments in the form of fines, relatively equal amount goes to the hands of individuals who pretend to intervene in their case to minimize the level of fees imposed as a punishment. The worst aspect is that such charges of cattle trespass, hunting or farmland encroachment are made in district courts in Gamo Gofa zone, which the Guji always complain about lacking impartiality in the process of handling their cases. The people have to pay for translators in order to present their cases, because the court language is Amharic or Gamo, neither of which the Guji understand.

After three to four months of uneasy encounter with the park and its authorities, the Guji move fully or partially to the second encampment site during the dry season from November to March and again in June. Unlike those in the wet season encampments, huts in these sites are used only for another three or four months, after which they are fully vacated due to the danger of mosquito infestation. Some households move fully with all their family members and belongings vacating the wet season huts, whereas others maintain the one close to the park boundary as permanent site of settlement. In the latter case, only young girls and boys move with the livestock to the seasonal encampments. In this case, some members of the family bring milk, butter and cheese to the family who remain behind.

In order to ensure the health, reproduction and growth of their cattle, the Guji pay due attention to maintaining the normal flow of the life cycle of everything in their environment, which they believe highly depends on the myriad of relations between the people and their non-human surroundings, as well as the spiritual power. Besides the cultural and spiritual dimensions of maintaining the fertility and health of the stock, indigenous knowledge of resource management is integrated into their livelihood. Access to water and pasture is an essential aspect of pastoralism, demanding the proper management of the herd, pasture and water wells, which are all governed by local norms and
customary laws. The Guji use three major strategies to ensure that a pastureland sustains the livestock throughout the year and continues without depletion for the future. The first is seasonal mobility during dry and wet seasons. At times when there is no drought, the mobility covers 15-20km between the Nech Sar plains and Sermale River valley that adjoins the Amaro Mountains in the eastern side. The people noted that remaining in a single location for more than a season affects the regeneration of pasture. Like fallowing and crop rotation techniques used by peasant farmers as mechanisms of maintaining soil fertility, pastoral communities also consider seasonal mobility as an alternative way of conserving pastureland and water wells (Igoe 2004; Berkes 2008). Guji elders were cognizant of the fact that fresh grass regenerates until they bring back their livestock from another seasonal encampment sites.

The second strategy the Guji use in maintaining the health and reproduction of their cattle is the use of local knowledge of conservation, specifically burning old and dry grass to ensure regeneration of fresh grass, as well as cleansing the pastureland from parasites such as mosquitoes and ticks. When asked why they burn the pasture, which the park administration considers as an illegal act, a Guji elder from Maddo village explained: “Marra gubuuun balleessuuf miti. Akka sonaan marguun malee. Ennaa marra gubnu, isa misha ta’etu bigila. Sababni marra gubnu garabiraan immo binnii fi silmii akka hin horreef. Amma garuu warri paarkii kuni erga gubuu kana dhoggani marri bade, dhukubni looni fi bineesota fixe” (informant, Chari Gamasa, June 2012). Translated, the elder stated that, “Burning is not to destroy pasture. Rather, it is to enhance the regeneration of fresh grass. When we burn old grass, new and healthy ones grow. However, after the park people banned burning, pasture has been depleted, and disease infested cattle and other animals.” In their limited pastureland adjacent to the park territory, the Guji still practice controlled burning (see the picture below). Guji informants explained that herbivores wild animals often move out of the park and compete with their livestock over the limited pastureland adjacent to the park boundary, because they get fresh grass once the old grass has been burned. On the contrary, the park administration considers burning as one of the causes of environmental degradation and punishes the local people in for setting fire to the park territory.
The third strategy of ensuring the sustainability of their resources is through local resource management ethics and frameworks. As indicated above, institutions of resource governance and ethics pertaining to the utilization and access to resources among the Guji are entwined with their cosmological schemes. From religious dimensions in a traditional context, the Guji holistically understood their surroundings as part of their connection to Waaga. The Qaalluu institution, the gadaa system and other social norms and values are important local frameworks that guide the nature of resource management among the people. Besides such normative prescriptions inculcating environmental ethics into beliefs, the Guji exercise resource utilization and access rights within locally defined frameworks. In principle, a Guji individual is entitled to access pasture and water for his livestock anywhere in Gujiland, although in practice access to ‘common’ resources is subject to local regulations. Local elders, particularly clan elders, oversee all aspects related to the utilization and management of pasture. In case disputes erupt between different clans, gadaa officials adjudicate the case and resolve before it turns into conflict. There is no private ownership of land; rather, households have small plots called kaloo, reserved for calves. Even these areas are not exclusive for private ownership. Against the Western notion of ‘tragedy of the commons’ that presents commons as being threatened by the irrational utilization of local community members who strive to maximize their utilization beyond the carrying capacity of the land (Hardin 1968), the Guji had traditional governance of the commons. Because pasture and water are life streams for the
Guji, like any other pastoral communities in arid and semi-arid regions, the misuse, destruction and breach of locally defined rules are not tolerated, even among children (Tache 2013).

Any clan member who is accused of transgressing customary laws, for instance by killing wild animals, cutting trees from sacred spaces or cattle trespass into another clan’s kaloo without permission, would be brought to the elders’ Ya’aa (council). If they found the person guilty in violating local rules and norms, they would excommunicated him from social affairs in the community through local decree until reconciliation and dispute settlement practices will be undertaken. Once the Ya’aa issued the decree, even close relatives would restrain themselves from collaborating with the person. However, the people would not deny him access to common pasture and water, given that this would lead to the death of his livestock. In order to avoid the punishment, the transgressor pays fines in kind based on the degree of the crime. Sometimes, the person might be asked to pay the fines in terms of cattle (the number depends on the wealth of the person) to the Ya’aa, who conduct a feast of reconciliation, purification and blessing of the person in order that he will be morally and spiritually reintegrated to the people and reconciled with Waaga.6 This ritual is mainly performed not as a punishment but rather as a restoration of peace between the people and their surroundings, in cases of offenses such as killing wild animals and cutting sacred trees.

On the other hand, the Guji consider granting water wells and pasture to members of other clan or ethnic group(s) as an investment for times of uncertainty, resource scarcity, drought and war. Moreover, other social networks such as marriage and trade necessitate sharing resources. The Guji say that allowing livestock to die by blocking access to water and pasture is transgressing Guji’s oath with Waaga. Such an act is believed to invoke infliction by Waaga, who would hold back rain or causes diseases.

By the time the horn of Africa was hit by drought in 2010 and 2011 (Tache 2013), the Guji around the Nech Sar National Park were prompted to move their livestock far south to a place called Gaattira, located between the Burji, Koore, Gumayde and Konso. Although the Guji claim that the land was traditionally under their ownership, it is now administered under the Amaro district. I interviewed a Guji elder, Danbala Badacha, who participated in negotiation processes with elders from the above ethnic groups to allow the Guji and their livestock to the area. He summarized the

6 Punishments and rituals of reconciliation to ensure sustainable resource management systems are similar to the gondoro tradition that is common among the Guji in inter-ethnic conflict resolution (see Asebe 2010).
discussion with the elders as follows:


The elder summarized the negotiation reads as follows:

Because the drought has become severe, we went to negotiate on possibilities of moving our livestock to Gaattira. Currently our livestock, specially the calves and goats are perishing. Children scream/cry day and night because they do not get milk. Now, we decided to search for a solution in order not to die out. Thus we moved to the Amaara [Koore], Gumayide and Konso. These Amaara people always block us from using the resources. The Gumayide and Konso are always our friends. They are ready to host us. We also went to the politicians. However, they returned our case to the elders. Now we decided to go and defend ourselves from any possible attack and try to prolong the lives of our livestock and our children at least for a short time. What else can we do? These years both the government and Waaqa seem to have turned their backs against us. My son! We live under such terrible condition.

Unlike their hostile relationship with the Koore, the Guji built a strong social network with the Konso and Gumayde people through intermarriage and trade. Inter-group networks with other neighboring groups are used as strong social capital that both parties utilize during times of insecurity such as drought, war and state eviction. However, any aspect of inter-group relation with the Koore is only practiced during peaceful times (Awoke 1985).

3.2.1.3. Guji-Park Relations: An Overview

Following the enclosure of the Guji customary grazing land as the Nech Sar National Park in the 1960s, which entered into effect in 1974, the people's access to the entire Nech Sar plains was significantly restricted. As the next subsequent chapters will discuss, successive Ethiopian regimes enacted similar policies in alienating the people from their traditional land in the process of establishing a human-free environment for the wildlife, thereby enhancing tourism development. As a background for the subsequent analytical chapters, it is essential to raise two fundamental issues in relation to Guji's relation to the national park. First, the Guji strongly depended on the resources in the national park for their livelihood, because it was part of their seasonal pastureland and access
to water. The people also cultivate food and commercial crops such as maize, sorghum, coffee, ensete (commonly called the Ethiopian false banana), banana, sweet potato and sugar cane along the eastern side of the park. Second, the Guji traditionally had a strong cultural connection to the land in terms of practicing different rituals at some particular sacred spaces.

The following piece of ethnographic note on a Guji man who was engaged in farming (subsistence and commercial crops), herding and other business activities illustrates Guji’s livelihood practices and their interactions with the national park. It also hints at how the park administration discourages development practices on the part of the local people. In April 2012, two school teachers in Ergansa village and I wanted to buy some foodstuffs from a weekly market located in Golbo/Tsalke, between the Guji and Koore communities. Because it was the beginning of the rainy season, the Guji moved their cattle to the highland areas bordering the park (to areas such as Gode, Maddo, Arda Guddina, Hiituu, Mi’o and Malkaa), thus abandoning their houses in Golbo/Tsalke areas. Unlike in the past, Golbo has now become an important area for two major livelihood purposes, in addition to being a seasonal pastureland of the Guji. First, it is used for cultivation of crops and fruit trees throughout the year along the Sermale River. Both Guji and Koore cultivate maize and grow avocado, mango, banana, coffee and sugar cane in the area. The Sermale River flows from the Amaro Mountains to Segen, passing through Golbo/Tsalke, Gashe, Gode and Xabala. Second, it serves as a market center where the Guji, Koore and people from the Arba Minch town come together to trade different items. Indeed, it is due to the economic significances of the valley that the Koore, the Guji and the park administration struggle over the control of the territory.
Along our way to the market, we found a man by the name of Ayano Guyo, weeding his maize field. We gave him the common greeting, saying “Yooyya! Buliin nagayaa? Ooliin nagayaa? Loon nagayaa, ilmooleen nagayaa, jajabooy?” The literal translation does not give what the Guji express in their greetings, but it roughly means, “Peace to you! How is life going? How are cattle and children? Are you strong?” Greetings have a strong place among the Guji, in which asking about the well-being of cattle and children is central. After giving us warm greetings, Ayano offered us to collect some mangoes and avocados from his field. He also gave us a stick of sugar cane to quench our thirst. Meanwhile, I had the opportunity to discuss with him about his livelihood conditions. It also gave me an insight into the trajectories of shifting economic practices among the Guji from pure pastoralism to agro-pastoralism and recently the introduction of a market-oriented economy. While we were seated under a Mango tree, Ayano joined us and we continued informal discussions on issues of living conditions, weather variability, relations with the park and inter-ethnic relations between the Guji and Koore people.

Ayano, who is a head of nine family members, lives in Arda Guddina/Ergansa village, which was established by the regional president of Oromia in 2008. The park authority still claims to include this village into the park territory. Ayano herds his livestock around the park, while supplementing his livelihood by cultivating maize and some root crops in Golbo where we found him. He also
harvests sugar cane, mango, avocado, coffee and banana and sells to traders who come from Amaro or Arba Minch. These are the major sources of Ayano’s income in terms of monetary form. However, due to a conflict between the Guji and Koore in 2010, traders rarely come from Amaro and Arba Minch because of security concerns in the last two years. As a result, it has become difficult for Ayano and other Guji individuals to sell their products. Since 2012, relative peace and stability has been restored and people resumed their business. Ayano plans to build a house in Golbo where he wants to begin a business. He has also prepared construction materials (wood and tin) to build a residential house in Arda Guddina, but he was skeptical due to frequent warnings from the park officials not to build permanent houses within the de facto park territory. Ayano was not the only one with this dilemma; indeed, I observed several people who had suspended building residential houses owing to tensions with the park.

Although the detail analysis of this issue will be discussed in chapters seven and eight, it suffices to mention here that the ethnographic note on the Guji individual demonstrates how the territory has been vital for the economic sustenance of the Guji as an agro-pastoral community. This is why the Guji consider the evictions in 1982 and 2004 as “common injustices by the governments because they [successive regimes] had given priority to wild animals than humans” (informant: Ayano Guyo, April 2012). Moreover, the Guji currently live under precarious circumstances because the park administration systematically blocked them off social services. In this regard, their efforts to tackle state imposed deprivation have been obstructed by the park administration’s persistent threats to relocate them.

Because of Guji’s diversification of their economic practices and sometimes due to sever food insecurity, trade relations between the Guji and other neighboring communities have become evident from time to time. During our visit to Golbo market – the only market where local products are sold and bought – we witnessed how the Guji and Koore people were interdependent, given that both were engaged in somewhat different economic activities. Guji women supply areera (cheese) and butter and buy in return warqicha (ensete) from Koore women. These are very important foodstuffs for both groups. Owing to ecological impacts and livelihood practices, neither of the groups produces what the other trade partner provides.
Another dimension of the people-park relations is related to hunting traditions, which has been one of the contentious issues during my fieldwork. The park administration accuses the Guji for killing the wildlife for food and business and thus considers as serious threats to the animals in the park. While the Guji mostly dismiss the state allegations, there have also been internal differences. While many Guji informants reject the state allegation stating that eating wild animals’ meat has never been part of their culture, others acknowledge the involvement of some of their members, particularly the youth, in the act of hunting. As a point of departure, it is imperative to elaborate upon Guji’s food culture in traditional contexts that contributed to the prohibition of killing wildlife for food in the past. In a traditional context and still in most cases, the Guji in the study area did not use meat as a major foodstuff, despite owning large numbers of livestock. In most cases, their food constituted barley, maize, ensete (false banana), milk and milk products. The Guji eat meat mainly on special occasions such as festivals, the reception of a special guest, weddings, and some specific rituals. In the forthcoming sections, I will discuss some aspects of restrictions, particularly regarding wild animals. While the reason for limited meat consumption culture in reference to livestock is related to the value they give to cattle, the Guji explain that traditionally they did not eat the meat of wild animals for many reasons. The prohibition was associated to belief, social
implications and health factors. In fact, there are changes regarding the tradition of meat consumption, with most of the youth said to have been involved in the act of killing wild animals for food and business.

The prohibition related to belief can also be analyzed from a cosmological dimension. The people conceptualize the world in terms of three parts, which are interdependent, reciprocal and entrenched in one another. The first is the world of the Guji, which constitutes the people and their livestock. The second category includes all non-humans apart from livestock, encompassing the living and non-living creatures. According to the Guji cosmology, these two components were created, nurtured and safeguarded by the supernatural power called Waaqa. While the first two again join a common category called Uumama (creature), Waaqa falls in to the category of Uuma (creator). According to Guji cosmology, Waaqa gave the people ethical restrictions called safuu, which govern their interaction with other creatures, humans, non-humans and Waaqa.

The restriction in terms of the consumption of wildlife meat comes from the relationship between the three and particularly from the belief that their ancestors made a covenant/oath with Waaqa regarding their relations with non-humans. As part of the covenant, the people believe that their ancestors made covenants with Waaqa to safeguard animals that belong to him. Thus, they traditionally considered killing wild animals as transgression of ancestral oath and that would invoke infliction in the form of drought, disease, famine, war and the death or sickness of people and livestock. For the Guji, their relationship with wild animals is part of their connection to Waaqa. In this regard, Guji’s worldview puts the biophysical, the human and the supernatural in one integral component of the environment, built upon interdependence, reciprocity, respect and trust.

While it is their deep conviction that they were born pastoralists to look after cattle, the Guji are conscious about the presence of other ‘cattle’ whose shepherd is Waaqa himself. These are what other people call wildlife. The Guji do not categorize “wild” and “domesticated” in the strict sense of the words; rather the dichotomy only prevails when it comes to the place of residence and ownership of the animals. Therefore, cattle husbandry is not only a livelihood style but also a marker of Guji identity as people, signifying their harmony with their God. At the same time, the Guji argue that they safeguard the life of the preys who seek refuge at their homesteads in fear of big predators. A Guji elderly woman said that, “We care for the animals by providing grass and water. For example, when we come across an animal that is giving birth or in case a predator attacks
it, we rescue it. We do this because we want to save the life of the animals. *Waaqa* loves them as we love our cattle” (informant Galgale Aga, March 2011).

Similarly, Ingold (2000) explains such a relationship as trust and reciprocity in human-non-human relations. Drawing upon examples of interaction between a hunter and prey, Ingold argues that such an encounter is essentially non-violent. Rather, it is built upon trust in the sense that the animals have the power to withhold what they could provide if hunters attempt to coerce in the process of hunting (Ingold 2000). The Guji describe trust and reciprocity in a broader context, including the people, wild animals, ancestral oath (a belief in connection between the people and their ancestors) and the supernatural power. According to the Guji, the prey trust the people and approach them, seeking protection against predators. During my fieldwork among the Guji who live adjacent to the national park, I observed that zebra and deer stayed close to Guji kraals and homesteads at night. When they were asked why the animals come to the homesteads at night, local Guji informants were unanimous in stating that the animals trust the people rather than other animals such as lion, cheetah and hyena.

During the eviction of the people from the park in 2004, several wild animals migrated with the people. Although the park administration attributed the incident to a shortage of pasture and water in the park territory, the people described it from a different angle. They believe that the animals not only seek the protection of the people but also keep the natural harmony that pleases the supernatural. According to the Guji, perpetrating any harm on the animals, particularly when they have sought refuge at one’s homestead, means transgressing ancestral oath and breaching the trust that has already been developed. The ultimate effects of such a transgression not only displease *Waaqa* but also create aggression of predator wild animals against humans, as well as their livestock. By contrast, maintaining the trust and covenant provides one with different forms of reciprocity.

Another restriction is related to the religious belief among the *Qaalhuu* clan – a clan from which *Qaalhuu* religious leaders are elected on hereditary basis. Among four major Guji clans – Uraga, Matti, Hokku and Alabdu – the latter is noted as the *qaalhuu* clan, because it has traditionally been from this clan that *qaalhuu* leaders assume power, while the other three are called *gadaa* clans (Dhadacha 2006). Traditionally, members of Alabdu clan subscribe to several food taboos. Due to their role as intermediaries between humans, non-humans and supernatural power, *qaalhuu* leaders
and clan members pay attention to ‘purity’, which includes the avoidance of poultry and all meat from wild animals, cabbage and some cereals, such as millet, *teff* and sorghum. Therefore, in the traditional context, they were prohibited from eating the flesh of wild animals. Social taboos also contribute to biodiversity conservation by imposing different levels of restrictions on members of a social group. Colding and Folke (2001) discussed that indigenous societies in different parts of the world subscribe to different types of social taboos. For instance, the avoidance of a specific animal or plant species is considered as specific-species taboo. Indeed, the Guji *Qaalluu* tradition categorizes the consumption of some specific-species as taboos. Moreover, the avoidance of specific food items, including wild animals, is meant to maintain their legitimacy as religious leaders. However, apart from religious restriction, Guji’s prohibition of the killing of all wild animals, apart from those used for cultural pride, can be related to general social taboo, regardless of species specificity. Colding and Folke argue that such restrictions are mainly associated with beliefs that “in some traditional societies taboos are enforced through beliefs that spirits will sanction violators by invoking illness upon people” (2001: 589).

The restriction in terms of bush meat also has a social dimension. A person who kills wild animals for food is categorized among the poor because killing animals for food is perceived as being derived from poverty. Poverty implies low social prestige, which in turn has consequences on marriage arrangements and other interpersonal relations among the Guji. An elder from the Ergansa village recalled the tradition that “if a person is once labeled as killing animals for food, people would not give him their daughters for marriage. He would be given a different name as eater of bush meat. But now, many people abandoned the safuu [norms]” (informant Jilo Shota, May 2011). Moreover, health aspects were also part of the prohibition of killing wildlife for food, because they Guji believe that wild animals’ meat spoils teeth and causes diseases (Getachew 2007). There is also a belief that if someone kills a wild animal, the infliction would be in the form of genealogical discontinuity. Among a patriarchal society such as the Guji, boys are considered as security for genealogical continuity in the kinship. They believe that killing wild animals induces punishment through the death of boys or the inability to create newborn boys. In short, whether because of the belief in ancestral oath, social taboo, health implications or a belief in its presumed consequences on genealogical discontinuity, the Guji had traditionally limited practices of killing wild animals. Nevertheless, as will be detailed later, there have been changes in the belief and practices regarding such restrictions.
3.2.1.4. Some Socio-Cultural and Political Changes among the Guji

The traditional livelihood styles and socio-cultural practices among the Guji that were characterized as fairly harmonious with nature do not necessarily place the Guji in the category ascribed to indigenous peoples by the dominant academic discourse as ‘close to nature’. In other words, the Guji were not conservationists in strict sense of the term. As Berkes (2008) discusses, there are economic and cultural factors that work against the dominant representation of indigenous peoples as ‘noble savage’, ‘close to nature’ or ‘communing with nature’. In many ways, indigenous peoples opt for utilitarian approaches in their interactions with the environment. Moreover, traditional ecological knowledge and cultural connectedness to nature do not necessarily guarantee that a certain group lives in harmony with the environment. Rather, the way in which the knowledge is translated into practice and the dynamism of traditional knowledge are important points of investigation, particularly in terms of understanding the political ecology of conservation. An important point to note here is rather how local communities respond to internal or external influences regarding their notions of nature-culture relations.

For example, there are apparent cases in which the Guji perceive the non-human constituents of nature as objects to be utilized for sustaining Guji identity, culture and economy. There were exceptions, changes and continuities in Guji’s perceptions of their surroundings, including their relationship with the wild animals in the national park. The cultural, economic, social and religious dynamics that the Guji encountered across time enhanced changes in Guji’s perceptions of their environment. Due to its centrality in analyzing changes and continuities in people-park relations, I focus my discussions on some exceptions in the restriction of killing wildlife, relating it to cultural diffusion, social implications of killing and the decline in Guji cultural and religious norms resulting from external influences. Traditionally, the Guji selectively killed the game for different reasons and motives. The first was killing wild animals for medicinal purposes, which targeted particular animals for specific diseases. In this category, they killed animals such as pig and porcupine for the purposes of curing malaria, cold, influenza and back-pain.

The second exception was when killing was practiced for midda (honor) tradition. Traditionally, the Guji celebrate killing big game animals such as lion, elephant, buffalo and rhino. The Abba midda (person of the honor) is respected within the community and thus gets higher social status and economic advantages (Taddesse 1994, 2006; Asebe 2010). The Guji interpret the act of killing game
animals for honor from a cultural perspective as a marker of identity, pride and greatness as a community that is given to them from Waaga. According to Guji oral tradition, they were given midda culture from Waaga and it is through this tradition that they reveal their pride, self-esteem, bravery and identity. They also associate the ritual performed during the midda ceremony with the continuity of the life cycle of the animal because it enhances the fertility of the animals that remain behind. Although the custom is dwindling mainly due to the introduction of Christianity and sanctioning by state law, the Guji still believe that rituals of midda tradition enhance harmony between the people, non-humans and supernatural power rather than distracting it. According to their perception, the midda tradition would please Waaga because it is through rituals associated to the tradition that the Guji display their cultural and spiritual connectedness to their surroundings. From modern conservation perspectives, the midda tradition might be blamed for the extinction of the big game animals (buffalo, elephant and rhino) from the Nech Sar area.

The third aspect of killing wildlife has been related to economic values associated with such practices, namely involving food and business. According to most Guji informants, cultural diffusion from neighboring groups has introduced a culture of eating wild animals’ meat, as well as the idea of killing animals for money. My informants explained this in two contexts. First, due to their closer interaction with neighboring communities such as the Gamo, Koore, Burji, Konso and Gumayde, for whom the meat of many wild animals was not culturally prohibited, Guji young generation began to question the traditional restriction. Therefore, interaction between the Guji and other groups has shaped some of the people’s values, norms and customs related to man-animal interaction. Guji youth who herd cattle with children from the neighboring communities have been ‘socialized’ to the meat eating culture of the ‘Others’. Moreover, there are also rumors within members of the Guji and Koore communities that the Golbo/Tsalke market is used as a clandestine business place for ‘bush meat’, in which women are at the forefront in the trade, although the killing is actually undertaken by men.

Secondly, the introduction of Christianity has denigrated and demoted the beliefs about infliction to be invoked because of killing wild animals. Some of my informants mentioned the verse from the Christian Bible stating, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Genesis 1:28). In people-animal relationship, Guji Protestants who are mostly the young generation emphasize the paternalistic and utilitarian notion in the Christian tradition. Informants in this category argue that God has given man the authority over all creatures on the earth, as well as those
in oceans/lakes.

This perception of the youth often brings them into conflict with elders, who consider themselves as guardians of Guji identity (culture, religion and ways of life). For instance, non-Christian elders complained that bad omens and misfortunes such as the flooding in 2009, drought in 2010 and 2011, and violent predation of predators over their livestock and fertility problems of cattle are partly attributed to the disrespect of the youth to traditional customs, norms and taboos. Elders mentioned cases in which the young people killed wild animals, roasted the meat and ate in the bush where they were herding the cattle. Besides the anger generated on the side of Waaqa, according to the elders, such practice also spoils the pastureland and water sources, which might in turn cause disease to their cattle. As Van de Loo (1991) states, the Guji are cautious of the natural order of things in their environment to the extent of considering even loud voices such as shouting at night would disturb the stability of spirits, wild animals and livestock.

Apart from specific exceptions in Guji’s restriction of killing wild animals, the change in their conceptions of human-environmental interactions should also be broadly positioned within some socio-political changes they encountered following the advent of the Ethiopian state to their land. The major political and administrative change was the incorporation of the territory into the Ethiopian empire and the subsequent imposition of Amhara/Ethiopian culture (McClellan 1988). Gujiland was conquered and incorporated into the Ethiopian empire in 1895 by the forces of emperor Menelik II (1889-1913) (Taddesse 2009). The conquest introduced Amhara/Ethiopian culture, religion (Orthodox Christianity), a feudal system of economy and oppressive political system to the subjected regions (Vaughan 2003). In his study of “The Gada System among the Guji of Southern Ethiopia”, Hinnant argues that the assimilative policy of the imperial regimes strongly worked towards eroding indigenous cultural practices and denouncing it as illegal and backward. They appointed their own patrons in place of abba gadaa and Orthodox Christianity and the priest instead of the great Qaalluu (Hinnant 1977). This dynamics had introduced new values and notions of people-environment relations among the Guji by denigrating indigenous ecological wisdom among the people.

Moreover, indigenous cultural practices, beliefs, governance, and livelihood conditions were denigrated as backward and obstacle to development during the military regime (1974-1991) (Dereje 2011). Referring to the ‘modernist’ discourses of postcolonial states in Africa, Stewart-
Harawira (2005) argues that these nation states adopted Western scientific knowledge and popular culture as reliable sources of knowledge, while indigenous knowledge, modes of governance and worldviews were identified as obstacles to development and at odds with views of the mainstream society. Although the Guji Oromo culture and traditional religion continued without significant change in terms of the Guji worldviews despite internal and external influences, the impacts of these administrative and religious influences should not be underestimated. People were discouraged to take their cases to customary courts and the Qaalluu institution. Rather, local state courts and the Orthodox Church adopted the role of these traditional institutions. Later on, Protestantism was also introduced and played no less a role in denouncing Guji traditional beliefs as ‘backward’ and devilish. For instance, traditional ritual practices were considered as worship to Satan/devil (Van de Loo 1991).

To summarize, the Guji Oromo around the Nech Sar National Park considered the territory as their customary land, to which they had strong cultural, religious, economic and historical claims of entitlement. Despite changes in their views towards wildlife partly due to external cultural impacts and partly because of internal transformations, the Guji maintain strong connection to the land, mainly because it is at the center of their pastoral ways of life. Pastoralism is much more than herding livestock and utilizing their products; rather, it has cultural, social, historical and economic purposes and more importantly has been considered as a reflection of Gujiness (Guji identity).

The livelihood of the people, which is often characterized by seasonal mobility, informs their land use system, traditional conservation practices and knowledge of the environment. As Van de Loo (1991) indicates, the Guji possess deep knowledge of the anatomy, disease and remedies that they acquired through religious practices, experiences and largely because of their strong attachment to the stock. For the Guji, the concepts of conservation and development are understood from cultural perspectives. For instance, while caring for the environment is part of their cosmological schemes of local knowledge and belief, what they consider an appropriate development scheme is something that is compatible to local values, customs and livelihood traditions. Despite having expectations of securing schools for their children, road connecting to the nearest markets, a health center for the people and livestock, flourmills and access to pure water, any ‘development’ program that disrupts their pastoralism is not acceptable to the ordinary Guji men and women. As stated earlier in this section, livestock signifies beyond mere economic purpose among the Guji. Thus, most Guji consider the state’s development conception, which places emphasis upon settled agriculture and ecotourism project in the area as a challenge to their livelihood and a restriction to their customary
rights of resource ownership and utilization.

3.2.2. The Koore and their Land

3.2.2.1. The Koore Settlement History

The Koore ethnic group belongs to speakers of the Omotic language family, who predominantly live in southern and southwestern Ethiopia along the Omo River. The Koore people speak Koorete language (Hayward 1982; Binyam 2010). The people prefer to identify themselves by the name of Koore, although different groups have given them various names across history. For instance, the Guji and Borana Oromo called them Baditu (highlanders or people of the mountain) and Amara in the past (Hayward 1982). Likewise, other neighboring ethnic groups such as the Burji, Gamo, Konso and Gumayde identify the people as Koyra, which is the name labeled to the Koore by Menelik’s soldiers after the conquest (Bediru 1986). Some still use the place name Amaro and the old name Koyra interchangeably while referring to both the people and the territory. During the imperial and military regimes, the Koore were administered under Sidamo Province, although they secured ‘autonomous’ self-government as Amaro Special District under the SNNP regional state in the post-1991 political and administrative reconfiguration.
Figure 9: Amaro District Map  
(Source: Abiyot Legesse, February 2014)

According to oral tradition from the people, the administrative jurisdiction of Amaro district during the imperial and military regimes stretched up to Bonke hills and included parts of the Chamo and Abaya Lakes. Accordingly, almost the entire Nech Sar National Park was under the Amaro district in terms of geographical administrative locations until 1991. This is why they maintain the view that Amaro district is entitled for administering the Nech Sar National Park because the territories up to Bonke hills were under its administrative jurisdiction in the past though the people did not settle beyond Tsalke lowland. The district adjoins the Borana zone in the north and east and the Burji and Konso in the south. Until 2008, it also shared borders with the Nech Sar National Park in the west, although the Koore were disconnected from direct border contact with the park boundary following the establishment of Ergansa village under Borana zone (Galana district) in the same year, with the exception of a narrow strip of land along the southwestern direction of the district.

Oral traditions and scanty literature available do not avail a concise account about the settlement history of the Koore people in the area. Despite such limitations, it is important to trace how the
Koore moved to the present day contested territory because the group's claim over the land and the conflict with the Guji over the same territory remains blurred, without a clear understanding of their historical process of settlement in the area. The origin and settlement history of the Koore people is contentious among both scholars and elders from the group. However, the dominant speculation refers their original homeland to north Shewa around Menz, from where they were believed to have migrated to the south sometime before the war of Ahmed Gragn (1529-1543) (Bediru 1986; Simeon 1995; Binyam 2010). According to this line of argument, political instabilities in northern Ethiopia during the medieval period might have pushed the people out of their original homeland. Moreover, some speculated the southward movement of the Koore might be part of missionary activities by Orthodox Christianity (Bediru 1986). The people were believed to have initially moved to Kaffa and Gamo Gofa, from where they gradually moved to the present day Amaro district. Some mentioned that the people were followers of Orthodox Christianity when they moved to southern Ethiopia. They came with 'tabot' (arc of the Covenant of God) and established three churches in Gamo Gofa and Amaro (Bediru 1986).

Although such long distance migration was difficult during those early times, given the inadequate transportation system and the fact that the highland Christian state did not have administrative influence over Gamo Gofa and Kaffa areas at the time, Levine (2000: 44-45) describes the persistent inter-societal relationship between different ethnic groups in northern Ethiopia and those in the south as follows:

More intimate relationships among different ethnic groups in Ethiopia have been formed through processes of migration and intermarriage. Settled or nomadic, the Ethiopians are great travelers. To find new land, go on hunting or raiding expeditions, seek fortune at royal court, escape enemies, study at religious center, carry on trade, or make a pilgrimage, Ethiopians have long accustomed to moving from one part of the country to another, in many cases settling there. The Amaro, Janjero, Konta, and other peoples have plausible traditions concerning the immigration of Amhara settlers who came from the north several centuries ago.

In terms of language and religion, the earlier immigrants were believed to have been speakers of Amharic language and followers of Orthodox Christianity, until they adopted traditional religion juxtaposed with Christianity following the destruction of churches and persecution of Christians by the forces of Ahmed Gragn in 1530s (Awoke 1985). The Koore people re-embraced Orthodox Christianity following the incorporation of the region into the Ethiopian Empire in the late nineteenth century. For those who support the story of immigration, similarities between the Amhara and Koore in terms of some religious practices, rituals, language and names given to crops,
animals and other objects are cited as plausible evidence of a connection between the immigrants and their Amhara tradition in northern Ethiopia. In this regard, the type of animal sacrifice and rituals practiced among the Koore, in which they offered sheep or goat (Simeon 1995), resembles what Levine describes about sacrifices and rituals among the Amhara in the north (Levine 2000). This includes animal sacrifice in connection to Christian tradition (e.g. sacrifice of a particular type of chicken or sheep on first day of a new year) being a typical cultural element among the Amhara of northern Ethiopia. However, according to the author, this practice is shared among other groups in the country including the Koore. Although Levine’s construction of homogeneity among diverse peoples in Ethiopia is a gross simplification of multidimensional meanings attached to such practices, some sorts of similarity can be drawn between the Amhara and the Koore in terms of the belief behind animal sacrifices.

In contrast to the above narrative, Awoke (1985) and some local informants associate Koore’s original homeland to Tsinki Korso in Gamo Gofa zone. This seems an emerging argument among the young generation and a few writers from the group. My field assistant, who was a native from Amaro, challenged the story of the group’s migration from northern Ethiopia. He studied Linguistics at a bachelor level and attempted to posit his argument from linguistic dimensions. Linguistically, Koorete language belongs to the Omotic (Ometo) language group, which is only spoken in the southern and southwestern part of the country (Hayward 1982; Binyam 2010). My field assistant once asked me: “If the assertion that the Koore migrated from north Shewa and were speakers of Amharic was true, how it could be that the people completely changed their language to non-Semitic language family?” Methodologically, I was aware that his position about the story of migration would influence the course of my inquiry by directing the informants to his views unless systematically resolved. Therefore, I promised him to consult professionals in the area and communicate back to him, but to suspend the question until then. Despite such ‘agreement’, he continued preempting the informants with some guiding questions that would lead my informants to the ‘Tsinki Korso’ story.

Shado Udado, a Koore elder in Darba Mamana village, strived to trace the original homeland of the Koore to Tsinki Korso in Gamo Gofa as follows:

Our grandfathers told us that our ancestors lived in Tsinki. You know Tsinki Korso in Gamo. They had churches in Tsinki. Birbir Mariam was our church. It is still in Gamo land. According to our elders, few people came to Amaro for hunting and gradually liked the place. It was good for human settlement. It was fertile, it had animals for hunting and the weather was good. Gradually, they settled on the highland of our Amaro land. Our grandfathers then
began cultivating maize, coffee, ensete and other crops. Actually, the people introduced coffee much later. After the highland was overused, we moved to the desert like Tsalke, Yero and Abulo (Informant: Shado Udado, March 2011).

Drawing on linguistic similarities between the Koore and its neighbors, Awoke (1985: 17) also argues that: “Besides the oral traditions of the migration of the Koore from Gamo Gofa or descent of Kore from Gamo, the linguistic and cultural similarities with other Omotic languages indicate that the Kore most probably migrated from Gamo Gofa not from Menz. However, the coming of few immigrants or group of families cannot be ruled out and these might have come to Korso as Orthodox missionaries, hunters or conquerors.” In fact, some Koore elders only recall the migration of their ancestors from Gamo Gofa, and thus attribute their origin to a place called Tsinki Korso.

It is neither my objective nor the scope of my research to deal with the controversy about the origin of the Koore. However, one important point to be noted is that, particularly within the current political articulation in Ethiopia, the people’s views of their original homeland is framed along regional or ethnic identities, which in turn imply issues of political and administrative entitlements. As Tadesse (2009) argues, the post-1991 political articulation along ethnic lines has redefined boundaries of alliances, with former enemies having become friends while ancient allies became foes in most cases. My major focus in this section is rather on two important aspects. First, however contested it might be, Orthodox Christianity had a long history among the Koore, thus influencing their worldviews and perceptions of nature and shaping their interactions with their environment. Secondly, their settlement on the highland part of the Amaro district gives us an insight into how the current contestation over the Tsalke/Golbo valley has gradually evolved. Many Koore elders agree that the people inhabited the Amaro highlands until some families expanded to the lowland in the second quarter of the twentieth century.

3.2.2. 2. Koore’s Livelihood

In terms of economic practices, the Koore traditionally practiced agriculture (crop cultivation) and were engaged in trade with their neighbors such as the Burji, Konso, Borana, Gamo and Wolaita (Smith 1897 [2008]; Bediru 1986). While the trade with the people to their south was easily conducted by caravan route, the trade with the Gamo and Wolaita across the semi-arid areas of the Nech Sar by crossing the Abaya and Chamo Lakes was neither secure nor easy. Their hostile relationship with the Guji, presence of dangerous reptiles and poor boat transportation over the lakes were major challenges limiting their interaction with the people to the west of the lakes. The only land transportation was through a narrow land strip between the two lakes called “God’s
Bridge”, which is now part of the Nech Sar National Park. According to a British traveler, Davidson Smith, who traveled in the region from Somaliland to Mombasa and visited Amaro and Lake ‘Abaya7 between 1894 and 1895, the Koore only inhabited the highland part of the district (Smith 1897 [2008]). Smith (1897 [2008]: 214) reported his witness about the Koore (he referred as Amara in his text), their livelihood and settlement as follows:

The Amara begged me to stay as long as I could among them, and promised to trade with me. The chief [Amaro chief] returned on April 25[1895], and with nice boys I accompanied him up the high mountain. I did not expect to be gone long, and took no provisions of any kind with me, or extra clothing; but the scenery became so interesting that I continued climbing higher than I anticipated. We could now see the Galana far below us, winding through a very wide valley, and then cutting its way through a great mountain range. [...] I was now three hours away from camp, but the Amara told me their village was very near, and I was tempted to go still farther. We pushed on over the undulating plateau, passing one cornfield after another, in which hundreds of natives were working away with their three-pronged hoes.

According to oral information from Koore elders, the people did not settle in the lowland areas for three major factors. The first was related to mosquito and tsetse fly infestation, which rendered human habitation impossible. Secondly, due to the low population density in the highland areas during those times, there was no demographic push factor. Thirdly, because of conflicts with the Guji, it was not safe for the Koore to settle in the lowland. During the period of Smith’s visit to the Koore land, the highland part of the district was sparsely inhabited. Smith witnessed the engagement of the people in the cultivation of crops such as Indian corn, durrha, beans, pumpkins, coffee, cabbage, cotton, tobacco and banana by terracing the mountaintops and its slopes. The traveler described that the Koore were confined to the highland areas (Smith 1897[2008]). Smith camped at a place he described to the south of Lake ‘Abaya’, which he mentioned as being uninhabited. Due to the timing of Smith’s travel in the region (i.e. during the rainy season in April and May), pastoral communities might have been at their wet season encampment far to the west or east. In any case, Smith’s account and some oral traditions from the group hint at the argument that the Koore did not inhabit Tsalke/Golbo lowland during the late nineteenth century. However, the people had a long history of contact with the Gamo across the two lakes through trade. Many interrelated factors reinforced the down-slope expansion of the group during the course of the twentieth century. The next section explores these trajectories as the background information for how the eastern part of the park became a contested space among the Guji, the Koore and the park administration.

7 The British explorer, Davidson Smith mentioned the Lake he visited as ‘Abaya’, although the lake he described was rather Lake Chamo (Briggs 2006).
3.2.2.3. The Downslope Expansion of the Koore and their Relation with the Park

Many interrelated socio-political encounters among the Koore shaped their relations with the environment, laid ground for their claims over the Tsalka valley and brought them in direct contact with the agro-pastoralist Guji Oromo, who inhabited the territory that later became the Nech Sar National Park. The incorporation of Amaro into the Ethiopian empire, the ‘reintroduction’ of Orthodox Christianity, the Italian invasion (1935-1941) and restoration of autocratic rule in the post-liberation period, as well as Guji’s shift to agro-pastoralism, had significant implications in influencing the Koore’s settlement history, environmental views and claims over the land. In this section, I will briefly discuss these issues as background historical antecedents for the current contestation over parts of the national park.

Historical antecedents of the late nineteenth century in Ethiopia that coincided with the European scramble for Africa drastically shaped the history of the peoples in the southern part of the country (Vaughan 2003). It was the period when southern Ethiopia faced what some historians call it as ‘internal colonialism’ under the oppressive and exploitative feudal system of the Amhara/Ethiopian Empire (Markakis 1974). Through alliance with Western colonial powers of the time, emperor Menelik II (1889-1913) managed to conquer the hitherto autonomous states in southern half of the country, thereby introducing a kind of ‘settler colonialism’ and in some cases indirect rule system by appointing local chiefs. The conquest and the subsequent introduction of hegemonic state power (culture, language, religion and economic and administrative systems) transformed the life worlds of the peoples in the subjected regions to dominant-subordinate relations. Land alienation in the form of transferring ownership right to the northern landlords or the locally appointed chiefs dispossessed the people, not only from their material landed resources but also detached them from their spiritual, cultural and cosmological attachments to their land.

Amaro, as the land is commonly called, was subjugated and incorporated into the Ethiopian empire in 1895 (Awoke 1985). As was common in areas where local chiefs submitted to the conquerors without fierce resistance, the Koore chief by the name of Kate Amole retained his traditional authority under the supervision of Amhara regional lords who oversaw administrative and economic matters in the district (Bediru 1986). Nevertheless, retention of traditional authority in the hands of the local chief does not corroborate with local autonomy. In the conquered regions of the south, local chiefs became autocratic over their subjects to convey loyalty to their Amhara masters
(Markakis 1974). As a result, the Koore ordinary people faced suppressive and exploitative political and economic systems under the imperial regime. The people lost their land rights, with land becoming solely the property of the crown and its feudal landlords who were appointed to a different state structure. In the context of investigating Koore’s relations to their land and the subsequent claim over the Tsalke/Golbo valley, which will be detailed in chapters seven and eight, some important consequences of the conquest should be singled out. The conquest dispossessed the Koore from their land and thus impoverished them through a tenancy system. Unlike Smith describing Amaro as a land of plenty few years before the full-fledged institutionalization of the feudal system, it turned to be a land of misery for the majority of ordinary Koore, as one informant noted:

Our land was known for its bounty of honey, ensete and all types of crops. Our grandfathers told us that the Koore never knew hunger before the Amhara came. After Haile Sellasie took power, we lost our land. The balabats [feudal lords] exploited our labor and harassed our women. We lost the right over our produce let alone over our land. Many people migrated to Kenya and others escaped to the desert to shelter among the nomads. It was the time when we produced and shared to the balabats who presided over us as cirri [a predatory bird that lives by sucking blood from cattle] (informant Gashe Bufa, February 2012).

It is common among many agrarian societies with landed economies that people interact and communicate with their environment in the process of cultivating the land for their sustenance (Escobar 1999). In the process of iterative interaction and communication between nature and society, people produce, articulate and transmit knowledge from generation to generation. For example, in the Koore case, they had developed knowledge of resource conservation through long engagement, particularly in mountain terracing (Smith 1897 [2008]; Bediru 1986). The Amaro district is mostly mountainous, steeply descending and rugged. Despite such topographical difficulties, the people were noted for their traditional knowledge of irrigation, and water and soil conservation practices. They grow coffee, ensete, banana, sugar cane, mango and avocado in their limited plots of land by irrigation (Smith 1897 [2008]; Bediru 1986). Nevertheless, once they were dispossessed from their material resource, which in turn dis-empowered them in all aspects of life, the people were disconnected from the process of knowledge production and transfer. The privatization of land rights through its allocation to local chiefs and settler landlords was a process in which the state enacted its power over the society.

In Ethiopia, the privatization and commercialization of local resources in the south during the imperial regime eliminated the subjected people’s customary right to their land and resources, as well as undermining indigenous practices of resource management. Due to the erosion of their customary rights, peasants in the south neither were encouraged nor had the right to manage their
resources. As Markakis (1974) argues, most of the fertile agricultural land in southern Ethiopia was under the control of absentee landlords and local balabats (feudal lords), whose primary objectives were increasing their personal wealth and satisfying their masters by extracting maximum labor and taxation from the subjects. As is common among most southern Ethiopian peoples, the Koore were exploited in the form of heavy taxation, providing labor for landlords, payments in kind (honey, coffee, butter, sheep, etc.). This leads us to the second consequence of the conquest, namely the administrative and economic burden that it perpetuated and the subsequent down-slope expansion of the Koore people to escape the heavy hands of the feudal lords.

In pre-colonial and colonial Africa, people in the peripheries of the state used strategies of escaping or exit as mechanisms of avoiding repressive regimes (Herbst 2000). This case was common in Ethiopia, where the people in the subjugated regions migrated to areas where the authority of the central state was limited, such as the arid pastoralist areas (Donham 1986; Markakis 2011). There were two major reasons for people’s choice of lowland or peripheral regions as exit zones. First, there were strong level of state presence in the highland, which made the people in these regions highly susceptible to heavy taxation and other forms of administrative oppressions. Second, due to dense population settlement in the highland areas, land remained scarce in these regions, although it was largely abundant in the lowlands. Because of land dispossession and the imposition of oppressive feudal system, the Koore were also prompted to move down slope to Tsalke since the 1930s. The downslope expansion of the Koore was a gradual process undertaken as a mechanism of escaping from the exploitative and oppressive system installed following the conquest. Interrelated with this, individuals along the adjacent villages such as Darba Manana, Tifate, Yero and Gumure expanded to Tsalke valley owing to land degradation on the highland parts of the district. According to local informants, the expansion was particularly accelerated following the restoration of imperial regime after the end of the Italian occupation in 1941.

Ayele Machamo, a Koore resident in Darba Manana described how his parents moved to Tsalke in the aftermath of the restoration of the imperial regime in 1941 as follows:

Life became very difficult in the highland. The government took almost all of what our parents produced. They also asked our people to work on the plots of the balabats [feudal lords]. People suffered a lot even to survive. That was why some households moved to Tsalke. Tsalke was fertile but life was again difficult there. Mosquito infestation was the serious challenge in the lowland. Conflict with the Guji was another big problem. This is still a problem. My parents and others moved down to Tsalke long before the park issue came. However, they actually went to work there during the seasons of cultivation by keeping part of their family on the highland (informant Ayele Machamo, March 2012).
However, Tsalke/Golbo was not an empty space waiting for the Koore. As both Koore and Guji informants agree, the latter used it as dry season grazing land for several decades before the expansion of the Koore to the lowland. Gradually, the Guji and Koore established inter-group networks through mutual interdependence, facilitated by trade, intermarriage and adoption (*ilmofacha*) by the Guji. The two communities exchanged livestock, livestock products and agricultural products at local markets located in Darba Manana (Amaro) and Tsalke/Golbo (now in Guji territory).

![Figure 10: Vegetable Market in Golbo/Tsalke](Photo: Asebe Regassa, May 2012)

The role of local trade in creating and enhancing inter-group interdependence among the Guji and their neighbors has been noted in other studies. For example, McClellan (1988) having once described that local trade interdependence was one of the major factors for harmonious relations between the Guji and Gedeo particularly because of their engagement in different economic activities. Likewise, the engagement of both Guji and Koore in different livelihood styles increased mutual interdependence between the two groups, although competition over land resources gradually triggered conflicts over access to resources, as in the case of conflict that erupted between the two over Tsalke farmland in 2010. Although intermarriage was limited from both sides, it is practiced specially during peaceful relations between the groups. The Guji complain about Koore’s expansion to their land that the latter came as guests, in-laws and adopted ‘children’ (*Ilmofacha*) before eventually settling in Gujiland. *Ilmofacha* involves a process through which Koore
individuals are adopted into a Guji family or clan and are thereby entitled to get land, cattle and considered as part of the Guji clan. Oral narratives from Guji and Koore recall that members of the latter sought asylum in the hands of the Guji pastoralists in the Nech Sar area who were marginal to state administration. As a result, the tradition of *ilmooffachaa* was developed.

It has been clear from some scanty sources and oral information that the Koore moved to the lowland adjoining the park during and after the Italian occupation. Administrative pressure from the central government, demographic factors and land degradation were the major factors for peasants in nearby villages (Yero, Tifate, Gumure and Darba Manana) moving to Tsalke for temporary encampment for agriculture, while keeping their plots and homes at the highlands.

Another historical incident that shaped the course of Koore’s down-slope expansion to Tsalke/Golbo was the five years of Italian occupation. However, the role of the Koore people during the resistance movement against Italians remains contentious. As some local informants and a study by Bediru (1986) under the then Ministry of Culture and Tourism describe, the Koore were determined to fight along with patriotic fighters, despite the history of oppressive system that they suffered under the imperial regime. In fact, local elders have memories about patriotic leaders such as Abebe Mengesha who used the mountainous Amaro topography as defensive spaces in their war against the Italian colonial invasion. When the rebels clashed in the Amaro highland areas, they escaped to the inaccessible lowland areas such as Tsalke, where they gradually established settlements in the post-liberation period.

By contrast, like most peoples in the subjugated regions, the Koore used the opportunity of foreign intervention to fight against the oppressive Amhara domination in their region and thus collaborated with the Italians (Awoke 1985). In any case, the Italian invasion and the subsequent restoration of imperial administration in the aftermath of the liberation in 1941 enhanced Koore’s expansion to the lowland. As it became common in the majority of the conquered south, where people mostly allied with Italians against internal Amhara domination, the imperial regime enacted cruel and exploitative economic and administrative policies in the post-liberation period in Amaro. As a result, the people were forced to move to the lowland to escape from the state or at least subsidize their production to pay the heavy taxation.
Another important point of discussion related to Koore’s relation to their environment is that of religion. The Koore people were followers of Christianity before they moved to southern Ethiopia. Like their Orthodox counterparts in northern Ethiopia, the Koore understand human-environmental interactions from ‘modern’ religious perspectives. According to this tradition, all living and non-living things were created by God, but human beings were given supremacy over other creatures to subdue, use, control and manage them. In a purely religious context, they have dichotomies of what are allowed for humans to eat and what are taboos. For instance, animals categorized as Equine or those without cloven hoofs and those that do not chew the cud were classified as unclean among the Koore. This goes in line with some prescriptions in the Bible that orders Christians to eat only from animals with cloven hoofs that chew the cud. The Koore people conceptualize their environment from an economic perspective, except in some cases where some members of the group turned to traditional religion after their arrival in the new place. Thus, the Koore dichotomously understand the human versus non-human relation in a similar way to the mainstream Abyssinian societies. Immediately following the incorporation into the Ethiopian empire, Orthodox Christianity was reintroduced as part of the state mission of conquering the people in the south through religion (Bedru 1986). It was also reported that the Koore people embraced Protestant Christianity in the early twentieth century (Simeon 1995). Therefore, both sects of Christianity have shaped the Koore people’s perception of their environment to a utilitarian approach more than the Guji, who traditionally understood their surroundings as conjointly constituted with the human nature.

3.3. The Establishment of State Farm and Arba Minch Town: State expansion to the Periphery

Two important developments that took place in the 1960s should be discussed in the context of people-environment relation on the western side of the Nech Sar National Park and in reference to the current contestations over the territory, namely the establishment of Arba Minch State Farm and Arba Minch town in 1958 and 1962, respectively. I discuss these developments and the subsequent establishment of the national park according to the central state’s continuous expansion to the periphery by seizing land from the local people in the form of development projects. Moreover, the state used the establishment of state institutions as a strategy of broadcasting its state authority over areas that it considered as nodal points of resistance against its presence. In such cases, the imperial regime established some towns to facilitate the administrative and economic purposes. For instance, towns in the south were established mostly in the form of garrison to enhance the easy pacification of resistance in the early twentieth century (Markakis 1974). Like the colonial conquests in other African countries, southern Ethiopia in the post-1890s encountered a massive influx of predatory
northern settlers who moved to the newly established towns in the incorporated regions as soldiers, administrators, feudal lords and businessmen. These settlers served as the core catalysts of administration on behalf of the central government. Roads were built, linking provincial towns to the capital city to facilitate administrative and economic purposes of the state (Markakis 1974; Donham 1986).

The second strategy of the state’s extension of its authority to the periphery has been through the so-called development projects. Since the mid nineteenth century, successive regimes in Ethiopia have been caught between emulating Western ideals of modernization on the one hand and maintaining local conservative traditions on the other (Clapham 2006a). Beginning from Emperor Tewodros (1855-1868), different governments have attempted to adopt different models of ‘modernization’ in the form of state structure, urban development, social infrastructure, economic system and, more recently, nature conservation. Analogous to the nineteenth century European colonialists who camouflaged colonialism by the so-called mission of ‘civilizing’ the ‘uncivilized’, the Ethiopian empire also launched empire-building projects and subsequently introduced new forms of administration, economy, culture and ways of life to the newly subjugated regions of the south under the guise of ‘modernization’ (Markakis 1974). Following the conquest of the south, the Ethiopian empire introduced extractive state machinery in different forms, with state institutions, structures and socio-political traditions of the Amhara/Ethiopian Empire systematically used to extract material and human resources in the subjected regions.

Agricultural mechanization under state-owned farms was sought as one of the ways to ‘modernize’ the country’s economy in the post-World War II period. Despite its feudal characteristics, the Haile Selassie regime began to amalgamate capitalist notions of development (such as granting land to multinational corporations for agricultural investment) with feudal ethos, neither of which ultimately benefited the society as whole. Rather, the emulated development model served the interest of the aristocrats, landowners and the nobilities, while exacerbating the destitute living conditions of the poor. For instance, the feudal regime introduced one of the first large-scale commercial farms in Awash Valley project and the Chilalo Agricultural Development Unit (CADU) in the 1960s. While the Awash Valley project led to the displacement of pastoralists, blocking their seasonal grazing land, CADU brought massive resettlement and displacement of peasants among the Arsi Oromo (Clapham 2006a). Such a ‘modernist’ approach of development, which valued sedentary life style over pastoralism and state farms over small-scale peasant agriculture, undermined the local livelihood conditions of the people and neglected their local perspectives of
Similarly, the government established Arba Minch State Farm in 1958 by confiscating land from Guji agro-pastoralists and some Gamo peasants (Getachew 2007). The farm, which covered over 97,000 acres, was initially established for cotton production by diverting Kulfo and Harre rivers, the two major rivers traditionally used by the Guji for their livestock. While it restricted the Guji from traveling between their dry season and wet season grazing areas, it attracted the Gamo people from the highland areas who moved down as daily laborers and gradually established permanent settlements in the area (Dessalegn 2004; Getachew 2007). Guji elders recalled the incident as a tragic denial of their customary land right and expressed that successive regimes in Ethiopia had followed similar approaches in displacing them from their homeland. A Guji elder from Abulo, a village close to Arba Minch University, exclaimed that:

All the land from Ergansa [Nech Sar plain] through Bonke to Siqalla, Secha, Shara, Abulo and Harre were our ancestral land. Our ancestors lived here. They died here. The Amhara government [Ethiopian state] came and first chased our people from the farm and then from the town. They took our land and established town. But, the life styles in towns do not suit the Guji way of life. The smoke and noise in towns were not good for our cattle. As a result, our people moved to Ergansa. This happened during the period of the king [Emperor Haile Selassie]. The Derg [military regime] came and introduced the park. Our Guji brothers in Ergansa were evicted twice. Then came Meles [EPRDF government] and he also continued what his predecessors did. The government pushed our people to a narrow territory between the park and the Amara [Koore]. Can you imagine? None of these governments thought of Guji’s right to the land. The prioritized the rights of animals than of the people. I do not know if they are governments of the people or of the animals (Informant Edema Aga, April 2011).

Like the state farm, the establishment of Arba Minch town also brought an influx of people from the Gamo highland and many other places. It created a new social setting and high demand for resource utilization, which was quite different from the past. However, I would argue political and economic interests were behind the establishment of most towns in the subjugated south. Such understanding helps us to single out territorial claims and environmental problems such as the Nech Sar National Park. Menelik’s administration of the South relied on a network of garrison towns, manned by northern soldiers (Freeman 2002). Towns including Dilla, Chencha, Yirgalem, Hagere Selam, Kibre-Mengist, Yirga Chaffé, as well as highways connecting these towns to other provincial towns or directly to Addis Ababa, were built for economic and administrative purposes. In Gamo Gofa province, the provincial town of Chencha was established in a similar manner shortly after the conquest by appropriating land from local communities. In Ethiopian history, Ethiopian Orthodox Church and garrison towns were the two major institutions enhancing the conquest and the administration of peoples in the periphery of the Abyssinian state and were used as extractive tools. The location of Orthodox Churches and garrison towns was often on hilltops for strategic
convenience and their symbolic representation of higher authority of the state. While garrison towns were residential areas for the northern settlers and local chiefs, the church was a basic institution that backed the conquest and administration through spiritual conquest. It taught the legend of Abyssinian “great tradition”, representing the old empire as the cradle of civilization and Christianity. By doing so, the church inculcated a culture of submissiveness, obedience and loyalty to the church and state. Through the progress of time, the town of Chencha lost its significance and thus the provincial town moved down to Arba Minch in the early-1960s for different reasons.

According to oral tradition from the area and some historical records, Arba Minch town replaced the former provincial town in 1962 due to three fundamental factors. First, the location of the new town was chosen for effective control of sporadic conflicts between the Guji pastoral communities and the Gamo peasants (Getachew 2007). As previously mentioned, the Guji inhabited the lowland parts to the areas east and west of Lakes Abaya and Chamo. During these early periods, their relationship with the neighboring communities such as the Gamo, Wolaita, Koore and Burji was often marked as the history of conflict, although there were also some aspects of harmonious coexistence in the form of trade, intermarriage and participation in rituals. The people from Gamo highland used to move down to the semi-arid lowland areas adjoining the Guji for hunting, fishing, trade, as well as collecting forest resources. Elders from Guji and Gamo ethnic groups recall memories of insecurity when they moved to the present day Arba Minch town due to the killings from both sides. Therefore, the state moved the administration much closer to the contested territory to contain inter-ethnic conflicts.

Second, the shift of the administrative center from the highland Chencha to Arba Minch was due to abundant natural resources near Arba Minch, in contrast to the overpopulated and over-exploited Gamo highland. The dense and impenetrable forest and the legendary ‘Forty Springs’ were the area’s major attractions, given that they provided fresh water and wood supply for the town dwellers. Moreover, Arba Minch is located at a distance of only 3-5km away from the two lakes (Briggs 2006). After the establishment of the national park, the scenery of the park also contributed to the development of the town following the building of hotels, lodges and other government institutions. As Briggs (2006) describes, Arba Minch town would have not attracted residents to the extent of its present status had it was not been for its location close to the Nech Sar National Park. Owing to the scenery of the national park, the forest and the two lakes, which are easily accessible from Arba Minch, Hotels, lodges and resorts, were built to attract tourists who stop overnight along their way to the most popular tourist destination in Ethiopia, the Omo valley. The third important
factor for the establishment of Arba Minch town was its location along the lucrative trade route, connecting the peripheral southwestern regions such as Jinka in South Omo to the central administrative and economic systems of the country (Arthur 2002).

In short, the establishment of Arba Minch State Farm and Arba Minch town had remarkable consequences in terms of altering the socio-economic and demographic settings in the area. Firstly, the two state projects brought the Ethiopian state close to the periphery, particularly to the Guji agro-pastoralists. Secondly, by enhancing a massive influx of people from Gamo highland and other parts of the country, these two state projects brought to the scene some demands for resources, which later happened to be included into the national park.

To sum up, I have discussed some background data regarding the settlement history of the people and their conceptions of human-environmental interactions. The chapter has brought to the forefront discussion that the Nech Sar National Park has become a field of contestation between the Guji, Koore and the park administration. Different historical references and claims of entitlement on all sides depict how social groups politicize environmental resources and employ different narratives and forms of power to achieve their interests or deter those of other rival actors. Moreover, the chapter has briefly positioned the discussion within the center-periphery relations, whereby the center encroached into the periphery through ‘development’ and ‘conservation’ discourses and practices.

The discussions on Guji and Koore local communities challenge the notion of homogenizing local communities because these two groups not only had different socio-economic engagements with their environment, but also were quite different in terms of their understandings of human-environmental interactions. While Guji’s understandings of their surroundings was traditionally based upon values of respect, reciprocity and trust between humans and non-humans, the Koore largely shared similarities with the followers of Orthodox Christianity in their understandings of the place of humans in nature, as a creature with uncontested power over nature. The state on its part used historical notions of north-south dichotomy in representing the space as ‘natural’ in justifying the establishment of the national park. Therefore, it is these kinds of competing narratives and claims of entitlement that made the contestations over the Nech Sar National Park more complex than a mere struggle over environmental resources for livelihood purposes.
Part Two

Political Ecology of Nature Conservation

Introduction

It has become evident that discourses and practices of environmental conservation constitute political, economic, ecological and ideological interests on the part of different actors at different levels. Since the 1980s, studies on environmental conservation entered a new phase of scholarship with political ecologists calling for the study of multidimensional aspects of the political, economic and ecological aspects in the study of conservation projects and a shift from the traditional criminalization of grassroots societies for environmental problems to a holistic and comprehensive study of actor-oriented approaches. In chapter two, I have discussed that the politics of environmental conservation entails the production of different narratives, knowledge and discourses by actors in the process of achieving their interests or in a pursuit of deterring other actors from the same environmental resources.

In this part, I will discuss the exportation of the national park ideals to Africa as part of the colonial project. Moreover, despite Ethiopia’s unique history as a country without external colonial experience, the importation of the national park ideals to the country makes it to share much in common with other African states and deserves critical interrogation. More importantly, the birth of the modern Ethiopian state through internal conquest and annexation in the late nineteenth century has brought the construction of center-periphery relations between the northern conquerors and the subjugated south. This historical incident introduced a north-south dichotomy where the north was represented as the source of history, civilization and modernization whereas the south was portrayed as ‘natural’ and awaiting the hands of ‘civilizers’. Based upon the clear analogy between the internal center-periphery relations in Ethiopia and the broader dominant-subordinate relations that were established following the colonial conquest in other parts of Africa, these subsequent chapters illuminate similarities and differences with particular emphasis to discourses of nature conservation in both cases. While chapter four deals with the exportation of national park ideals to Africa and how Ethiopia imported similar notions in the 1960s, chapter five exclusively situates the Nech Sar National Park within the post-1991 political reordering under ethnic federalism in Ethiopia.
Chapter Four

The Exportation of National Park Ideals to Africa

Introduction

In chapter two, I have discussed the debates on nature-culture relations where I presented that the perceptions of wilderness conservation are politically and ontologically loaded inasmuch as they seem driven by environmental concerns. Drawing on the theoretical conception of political ecology of nature conservation, I have argued that any attempt to set aside land in the form of protected areas should be analyzed within underlying political, ecological, economic, cultural and power positions taking the state as one of the major actors. It also goes that the way people define, conceptualize and articulate environmental problems largely depends on their ways of understanding nature and the place of humans in it. However, the chapter did not address some fundamental questions regarding why and how the Western notions of wilderness conservation were exported to Africa during the colonial period and why despite the long awaited visions of independence, most post-colonial African states maintained and even strengthened the colonial legacies of nature conservation.

This chapter addresses these questions on two levels. First, it seeks to establish a nexus between Western views of nature and its exportation to Africa. Second, by discussing how nature conservation in the form of protected areas was used during the colonial period as a form of hegemonic environmental control, the chapter creates a link with the continuation of the colonial conservation model to postcolonial periods, thereby hinting on the emulation of colonial models by postcolonial states. In this regard, it seeks to interrogate changes and continuities that prevailed in the representation of nature in Africa during colonial and post-colonial periods. In addition to investigating the process of exportation of ideals of national park to Africa, discussions will also focus on the features of nature conservation in the continent during the colonial period to probe into the motives behind colonial powers in championing for the project. Such understanding also provides some reasons on why postcolonial states maintained and built upon power, discourses and practices. The chapter builds upon the theoretical arguments of political ecology of nature conservation, specifically contending that apolitical positions to nature conservation are naïve as long as conservation functions within contexts of asymmetrical power relations. In addition, it builds on Robbins’ (2004) argument that modern environmental conservation discourses and
practices particularly through protected areas are forms of hegemonic control of people and their territories.

In doing so, the chapter specifically posits the notions behind the establishment of the Nech Sar National Park within the wider discourses of representation of Africans and their territories as wild. However, readers who are cognizant of the history of Ethiopia as a country never colonized by Europeans might wonder how the colonial experience can be applied to Ethiopia’s context. I would like to make two important points clear from the onset. First, Ethiopia had a history of emulating Western models of ‘modernization’ since the mid nineteenth century until present. As a result, its exposure to different models brought the country close to the colonial powers in shaping state-society relations (Clapham 2006a). In addition, independence does not mean isolation from global dynamics, given that different developments in neighboring African states and in the general world at large had their own influences on the country’s political, economic and environmental policies. Dominant colonial ideologies, perspectives and ideas traveled beyond national borders notwithstanding actual colonial practices.

Second, and perhaps the hidden side of Ethiopian history, which this chapter will attempt to unveil, is that the formation of the modern Ethiopian empire shares much in common with colonial establishments in other parts of Africa (Donham 1986; Markakis 2011). This second point illuminates center-periphery relations that were commenced following the birth of the modern Ethiopian empire in the late nineteenth century and hints at how the state imported the notions of nature-society dichotomy and then internally ‘exported’ it to its peripheries. Therefore, the Ethiopian experience is important in illuminating how the national park ideals were appropriated by the state, irrespective of the absence of presence of colonial rule in place. The fact that no research has been conducted on Ethiopia within these broader understandings of conservation discourses to date makes this particular study specifically important in bringing a different scenario to the discussions. It also depicts some features of similarities and differences between Ethiopia and colonial Africa in general in terms of how notions of national parks were articulated and used. As a point of departure, the chapter interrogates the question whether the myths of ‘natural’ Africa and ‘natural’ south (in Ethiopia) were the major driving forces behind establishing national parks or whether these narratives were used to legitimize economic and political interests of the state in these two different but interrelated contexts. In order to draw some lines of similarities and differences between colonial Africa and imperial Ethiopia, the chapter pays specific attention to how both represented their respective subjects and the territories under their control.
Chart 1: From Countryside Ideal to National Park Model in Africa
(Source: my own graphic)
4.1 The Countryside Ideal and ‘Wilderness’ Conservation

In an attempt to create a nexus between the establishment of protected areas in colonial Africa in the form of ‘wilderness’ conservation and its origins in Europe, I will discuss the dominant conceptions of nature in European academic and popular thought. The discussion concerning nature-culture relations has been given due emphasis in chapter two. However, European conception of nature was partly nurtured by dichotomous views concerning city-countryside relations, whereby the city was symbolized with culture, while the countryside was considered as nature. Following industrial revolution in Western Europe in the eighteenth century, Europe experienced massive urbanization, urban pollution and despoiled industrial cities that continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Thus, the commencement in advanced industrialism and accelerated urbanization had enhanced city-countryside dichotomy not only in terms of spatial differentiations but also in areas of social, emotional, spiritual and class representations (Bunce 1994).

In his seminal work titled “The Countryside Ideal: Anglo-American Images of Landscape”, Bunce (1994) illuminates the British and American images of countryside as ideal representations of human’s harmony with nature that was partly developed as escapism from despoiled urban life and partly as a discursive marker of class boundary between the middle class and working class. In fact, there were differences between the European and American imaginations of countryside. In Europe, and particularly in England, the ideal was more of preserving the aesthetic values that the countryside would provide and it was used as an identity marker between the middle class and working class following the era of industrial revolution. The transition from rural agrarian society into urban life disrupted old social structures, instead redefining new social orders built upon class relations. For instance, industrialism introduced hierarchical social relations between the bourgeoisie and the working class in which work ethics had become defining regulatory factor in the relationship between different social classes (Bunce 1994). On the other hand, countryside ideal in America developed more as a marker of national identity because conquering and ‘domesticating’ ‘wilderness’ were expressions of nationalism and the triumph of science and technology over ‘primitivism’.

In the context of emerging new social relations within the hierarchical structure, three broader factors enhanced the development of countryside ideal in Europe, which was later exported to North
America and Africa, albeit in different contexts and for various missions. The first was associated with some sorts of nostalgia among the people who moved from rural life but missed the kind of life they used to enjoy in rural areas at least in terms of social relations, family ties, rituals, festivals and so forth. Second, the process of industrialization had created a middle class who gained social prestige by virtue of education, wealth and political power. This class sought to establish boundaries between themselves and the working class in terms of both social representation and spatial areas of settlement. Their economic and educational status and later the transformation in transportation schemes enabled the middle class to enjoy leisure time in the countryside, which the working class people were unable to afford. Third, the development of countryside ideal in Europe was linked to Renaissance and Enlightenment thinking about nature and the place of humans in it. Enlightenment transformed how people related themselves to nature because the old taken-for-granted conceptions of nature were being questioned by science and technology. Thus, Europeans began to equate human civilization with mastery over nature and the ability and capability of human beings in controlling, domesticating and changing nature into a consumable objects (Merchant 2003). In this regard, people began setting aside parts of territories in the countryside for the purposes of sporting, hunting, nature tour and vacation. Bargatzky (1994) also argues that the modern concept of nature in Western culture was built upon the eighteenth century transformations that shaped philosophical orientations of Europeans from religious dogmatism to scientific rationalization. Nevertheless, this last argument does not trace the genesis of nature-culture dichotomy to the Judeo-Christian traditions.

In the next few paragraphs, I will discuss how the trajectories in the development of countryside ideals specifically shaped the popular imagination among Europeans in conceiving country-city relations. Before delving into this discussion, however, it is important to make clear what the countryside ideal meant at least in the context of European and American imaginations. Bunce (1994) states that in the European context, the countryside ideal was a perceived or real representation of countryside as harmony with nature, strong social cohesion and quiet and spiritually intact social life where the connection between human and supernatural power was enhanced due to its sublime nature. While agreeing with Bunce in the above characterizations of the countryside ideal, I would further argue that the countryside ideal had both emotional and identity undertones. It represented people’s sense of emotional attachment to nature and their longing for ‘authentic’ nature, which the European countryside could not provide. As a form of identity construction and boundary maintenance mechanism, the middle class people used the countryside ideal in their pursuit of self-representation as a higher-class vis-à-vis the working class.
Bunce describes the first factor as escapism from despoiled industrial cities where social relations, discipline, spirituality and work ethics were quite in contrast to the countryside. Although it becomes too simplistic to assume eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’ social structure in Europe as egalitarian, social cohesion in the countryside was stronger than the type of social relationship in industrial cities (Bunce 1994). The clear contrasting features of the emerging urban life and its rural counterpart in Europe during that period were that the machine replaced the human aspect of interpersonal and inter-societal relations. People had to conform to a new work discipline, time frameworks, hierarchical relations between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, limited cultural and social spaces of engagement and detachment from ‘nature’ that constrained their spiritual as well as emotional attachments to the land. ‘Back to nature’ took a form of social and cultural movements in Europe and North America later in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a form of environmental movement. Nonetheless, nostalgia concerning the countryside was partly a reaction against raising urban miseries, particularly in the case of working class, whereas it was partly a sign of leisure time escapism among the middle class. While the countryside ideal was initially exported from England to North America, it was adopted in accordance with the motives of the immigrants. Bunce (1994: 23) observes that:

Most migrants to the New World in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were seeking new beginnings; escapists from religious intolerance and political repression, idealists and adventurers looking for new ways of living and opportunities to make it rich, above all people seeking freedom from the social hierarchies of Europe. These values had to be adapted to a quite different geographical setting and accommodated within the broader mercantile and political objectives of the colonizing powers. The pattern of rural settlement and land use which emerged from this emphasized the virtues of individual freedom.

The settlers in the Americas encountered new ecological understandings and new perceptions of its inspirational powers, completing them to view the natural world as salvation for alienating conditions of industrialism. Partly inspired by the new liberating condition of nature in the newly conquered regions of the world and partly nurtured by enlightenment philosophy, the settlers emphasized countryside-city dichotomies but opted for the domestication, control and commoditization of nature for the maximization of human leisure. In both the British and American cases, countryside ideals have been socially constructed as physical and social spaces with meanings ascribed to them. As I described earlier, it has been ascribed with representations such as harmony with nature, people in strong social cohesion, sublime and pastoral landscapes, as well as health and quietness.

The second aspect of the countryside ideal that I will later link to its exportation to Africa was that
the middle class established lines of boundaries between themselves and the working class in the form of gentrification of residence patterns and by using landscape aesthetic as a form of class identity markers. In areas of spatial boundary formation, residence areas were sharply divided between the two classes, with all markers of social status and opportunities assigned to each settlement area in industrial cities. Access to education and other social services were differentially distributed among the middle class and working class settlement areas. Likewise, the rising middle class began to create another marker of class boundary by inculcating landscape aesthetic, countryside tours, summer vacation, mountain hiking and later nature tourism into its class culture. Backed by their class status in making use of wealth, social services and power, the middle class people were able to sharply construct a social-cultural and class boundary against the working class by subscribing to such practices, from which the ‘other’ was deprived.

Social groups establish boundaries of identification between their members and members of other group(s) by ascribing specific subjective and objective markers of categorization, which often constrain or enhance inter-group relationship (Barth 1969). Differences that are defining elements of group relations do not always constrain relationships but rather shape how members of the group perceive themselves and categorize the other. In this regard, the middle class built markers that put them at a higher-class status in relation to the working class and thereby defined the nature of class representation. Later during the colonial period, colonial officials and white settlers in Africa utilized this strategy of boundary formation, which postcolonial elites also adopted and used it as a mechanism of asserting control over the socio-political and economic spaces of the people. I will return to this discussion in the subsequent sections.

The third aspect in the development of countryside ideal mainly in the Anglo-American popular imagination was the notion of wilderness/nature domestication that was nurtured by enlightenment thinking that assumes nature as an object to be domesticated, controlled and consumed through science and technology. In chapter two, I have discussed the genesis of popular imagination of nature-culture dualism in Western tradition. The transformations in the representation of nature-culture dichotomy passed through different stages. It evolved from the Judeo-Christian tradition, within which nature, mainly represented as wilderness, was viewed as a desolate area where humans would enter without their will. Later, the enlightenment thinking transformed the perception to viewing wilderness as sublime, untamed and unspoiled territory that could be domesticated, controlled and consumed through science, technology, human rationality and capital (Merchant 2003).
Despite Bunce (1994), having treated the discussion of notions of nature in the British and American traditions within a common trend of development, these notions and the discursive representations of these notions were at times different. In the European context, particularly after the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, positive attributes were assigned to the concepts as areas of sublime characters, harmony between humans and God (spirituality), unspoiled by influences of industrialism and so forth. Once they settled in the conquered regions which the Europeans labeled the ‘New World’, European settlers forged and redefined their relationship with nature in a way that placed them at a dominant position over what they labeled as ‘wilderness’. This dualist and asymmetrical relationship between humans and non-humans had bestowed power upon humans to conquer, subdue and tame the non-human nature to use it for human needs (Merchant 2003). In all three different dimensions of countryside ideals discussed in this section, countryside-city dichotomies were constructed in similar ways as nature-culture dualism in Western imagination. While the countryside ideal was first exported to North America through European escapist settlers, it was later adopted by colonial administration and white settlers in Africa as a form of legitimating territorial appropriation, asserting control over the people, as well as maintaining Europe’s ‘modernity’ by capitalizing on African ‘traditionalism’. The following section will discuss how the model was exported to Africa, as well as how it was systematically adopted to fit the colonial contexts.

4.1.2. From Countryside Ideal to National Park Model in Africa

Since the era of colonial conquest, different development and conservation models, ideas and discourses have been experimented in Africa. In discussions concerning the success or failure of such experiments, points commonly missing are how discourses, models and ideals travel between different contexts and how such interplay between different ideas informs global and local discourses. Because the global is in the local and local developments and perspectives also inform global dynamics, it is essential not to treat the two as disentangled spatiality (Gezon 2006). In this section, I will briefly elaborate on how the national park models that were rooted in Western imagination of ‘wilderness’ conservation were exported to Africa during the colonial period and what underlying motives compelled colonial administrators and white settlers to introduce the model. The section also addresses how the interaction between different perspectives informed changes in value systems on both sides (Western and African actors).

During the early periods of contact between European explorers and Africans, the former were
confronted with different ambivalence about the people and territories in the continent. Among intriguing competing encounters were their images of Africa and their experiences that rarely conformed to the popular imagination that most Europeans held about Africa at home. More specifically, from the onset of early contact to the heydays of colonial rule, Europeans’ perception of Africa was a mixture of two different but not exclusive myths. These were the myth depicting Africa as “a land of pestilence and death and as a glorious garden of “Eden” in the interior” (Adams and McShane 1996: 6). Despite being seemingly contradictory, these perceptions were mutually complementary in the process of the conquest and later in shaping conservation policies in Africa. Whether it is used in policy articulation or narrated as a public discourse, the notion of wilderness is powerful because it implicitly constitutes the idea that “Man should subdue nature and that the world could be a man-made paradise” (Adams and McShane 1996: 6). Thus, both mythical representations of Africa were part of the driving forces for the conquest and later in shaping conservation policies in the continent.

According to Adams and McShane (1996), the establishment of protected areas and crisis related to nature conservation in Africa were rooted in how the West perceived the continent – its people and territories. In their book titled “The Myth of Wild Africa”, Adams and McShane (1996) illuminate a Western imagination of Africa that was built upon a mythical invention of the land as the ‘Dark Continent’. Based on scant information they got from early travelers and drawing on their own representation of Europe as a center of world civilization, Europeans invented a mythical Africa as wilderness. This soon claimed a place of privilege in the Western imagination of Africa. Such imagination prompted early explorers, missionaries, travelers and later colonial administrators to perceive and believe that there was a virgin Africa, although the continent had never been free from human influences. Later in the twentieth century, the role of media in portraying Africa as among few spots on the earth as the ‘Edenic’ nature has been paramount. For instance, channels such as “Nature”, “Nova” and “National Geography” repeatedly feed their Western audience with the images of lions, zebras, giraffes, rhinos and elephants in Serengeti, Maassai Mara and Kruger national parks – the process that reduces diverse ecological and biodiversity in the continent only to the ‘empty’ and vast plain fields of Serengeti style (Adams and McShane 1996). On the other hand, Africa is indeed the continent in which the big predators have survived and it was sparsely populated at the time of the colonial conquest. This self-contradiction of Africa – a continent that is considered as the origin of human species, yet is also linked with the slow mastery of humans on nature in contrast to Europe and the United States – has contributed to the representation of the continent as ‘wild’ and ‘natural’.
Although man has been integral part of African landscape, neither these media nor Western travelers recognized the presence of people in or adjacent to the areas later designated as national parks. For instance, to justify the myth of wilderness, European settlers, travelers, missionaries and explorers used the notion of ‘the noble savage’ thereby lamenting both the people and wildlife into similar categories. In other cases, humans were made invisible whereas ‘nature’, especially the wildlife has been magnified as a dominant image of the continent. In other cases, people were represented as cruel poachers, destroyers and threats to nature. For example, in the documentary titled “Serengeti Darf Nicht Sterben"8 or Serengeti Shall Not Die, the Maassai people who lived in and around Serengeti national park were brought to the scene only as poachers, while the spectacular wild beast occupied the full attention of the documentary. Thus European imagination of Africa as ‘Edenic’ garden and romanticized wilderness in opposition to the despoiled industrial metropolis in Europe underpins the historical development of national park ideal in colonial Africa (Anderson and Grove 1987; Neumann 1998).

Likewise, in his two volume books about historical reconstruction of encounters between British and Western African states from 1780-1850, Philip D. Curtin (1973) gives us a thorough discussion on how British image of Africa was constructed. According to the author, British image of Africa (its people, territory and wildlife) was informed partly by its contact with West Africa during the slave trade, ‘legitimate’ trade and missionary activities between the sixteenth and mid nineteenth centuries and partly by the mythical image of the continent based on ‘common knowledge’. Despite increased degree of contact, the popular British image of Africa during the nineteenth century was a general portrayal of the continent as ‘Dark Continent’ devoid of ‘civilization’.

According to Curtin (1973), drawing on the assumptions that civilization moved from Mesopotamia northward through cultural contact or diffusion, the British attributed African ‘backwardness’ to its isolation from centers of civilization. Although this assumption is wrong as ancient African civilizations were almost contemporary to Mesopotamian civilization and by far older than the European ones, the potency of the narrative in influencing British colonial policies in Africa should not be ignored. Thus, beginning from the era of ‘legitimate’ trade all throughout the colonial period, the British followed formal and informal policies of ‘civilizing’ the ‘uncivilized’ Africa mainly through cultural conversion in the form of Western education, Christianity and inculcating Western values in African socio-cultural life worlds (Curtin 1973). As it happened in North America during

8 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8PDX_lx6-rQ
the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, territorial conquest in Africa was also presented as a victory of ‘civilization’ (science, technology and capital) over ‘barbarism’ and ‘backwardness’. It also signaled the triumph of nationalism in the sense that empire-building was partly informed by nationalist orientations inasmuch as it was driven by economic motives of the imperial regimes.

As part of colonial control and expropriation, Europeans imposed the notions of wilderness conservation upon Africa that they earlier exercised on the indigenous peoples in North America. In the African context, Europeans had a presumed image of how Africa should look like. However, who defines how a certain place, territory and its natural environment should resemble? What does landscape vision mean for Africans and for European colonial settlers? The search for answers to these questions would take us to areas of power relations and ontological notions on nature-culture relations, and how these meanings and ideas were prescribed upon Africans from the Europeans’ perspectives.

In Neumann’s wordings, Europeans perceived that Africa should look like ‘natural’ – albeit this might again call for further discussion on what the ‘natural’ constitutes. In this particular case, however, the image of natural Africa was portrayed as wilderness where people were absent or if there existed, they were assumed to be close to nature, the landscape was aesthetic, sublime, and nature was presumed to be unspoiled by human influences (Neumann 1998). In this regard, the “Edenic” representation of African landscape had been an integral part of European imagination of the continent.

Nevertheless, one fundamental question worth addressing is the underlying motives of colonialists in introducing the national park ideals to Africa. There is no single and comprehensive answer as to why Europeans introduced the national park ideals to Africa, largely accompanying colonial administration. However, a set of possible arguments focus on the notions of aesthetic African landscapes (“Edenic” garden), conservation as a means of asserting control, protected areas as markers of class and racial identity and environmental concerns (Anderson and Grove 1987; Adams and McShane 1996). In the following sub-headings, I will attempt to discuss these prepositions.

4.1.2.1. **The Myth of ‘Edenic’ Garden**

The ‘Edenic’ discourse and the aesthetic dimension of landscape consumption have dominated discussions on national park ideals in Africa during the colonial period. According to this line of argument, Africa was among rare the places on earth where nature was believed to be unchanged by
human influences. In other words, Africa could provide the ‘authentic’ Edenic features of nature that Europe lost due to advance in industrialism since the eighteenth century (Adams and McShane 1996; Neumann 1998). As I discussed in the previous section, landscape appreciation or landscape consumption (countryside ideal) began in Western Europe and the United States during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a reaction against the despoiled life in industrial cities and as part of the class boundary. However contested the motives for the establishment of national parks in Western part of the United States might be, some would like us believe that the aesthetic aspects of nature and people’s desire for emotional attachment to wilderness – back to nature – profoundly contributed to the exportation of the national parks ideal in the ‘New World’ (Neumann 1998).

For example, despite his thorough work on contestations between local people and the colonial and post-colonial states in Tanzania over questions of customary resource rights, Neumann (1998:17) contends that, “Whether we argue for the pastoral or for the sublime as the primary inspiration for national parks, aesthetics remain central to our understanding of what constitutes nature and its preservation.” In fact, this perspective reduces the motives for the establishment of national parks as simplistic tourism attractions, which significantly blurs the inherent contradictions within the discourse of conservation. It is understandable that under capitalism, nature is packaged in the form of national parks and marketed through nature tourism or what some call ‘eco-tourism’. In the process of commodification of nature and its marketing, human history and agency has been curiously denied as a means to magnify the wilderness or pristine dimensions of nature. In this regard, the historical narrative in European imperialism in relation to wilderness conquest and conservation denies the role of human hand in shaping landscape.

Under the myth of ‘Edenic garden’, there were two broader dimensions of motives for the establishment of national parks in areas annexed by Europeans since the eighteenth century. These include emotional and religious motives. As Bunce (1994) explicates, romantic views of nature resulted in the desire to tame, domesticate and control it. Moreover, the religious perspective that depicts natural environment as a salvation for the alienating conditions of industrialism, had strong potency in shaping the European perception of nature, particularly in the worlds they annexed. In this regard, Africa was thought to offer wild and natural environment. Nonetheless, the emotional dimension was a response and reaction to despoiled environment Europe has been facing because of industrialism since the eighteenth century. Particularly among the middle class elites, nostalgia to the countryside style encouraged them to re-discover a lost harmony with nature and natural environment (Anderson and Grove 1987). From this angle of argument, some scholars link the