establishment of national parks in Africa to the desire for nature tourism as a sign of civilization on the part of colonial officials and white settlers. There is a continued push for nature marketing and commodification in Africa as some argue that the old world drew their strength and legitimacy from history and the ‘New World’ can likely invest in nature (Neumann 1998). Therefore, within the context of aesthetic dimension of nature as a driving force behind national park ideal in Africa, it is fair to argue that colonialists combined the economic and aesthetic values of nature to satisfy their economic interests through ecotourism and their emotional desire of ‘back-to-nature’.

4.1.2.2. National Parks as Instruments of Control

Another possible explanation for the exportation of national park ideals to Africa was for its instrumental purposes enabling colonial authorities and settlers to exert control over the social, cultural and economic spaces of Africans. Through protectionist approaches of protected areas management, colonial powers controlled resourceful territories from which local communities used to draw different kinds of resources for their livelihood needs as well as cultural and spiritual purposes. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, “colonialism and the global expansion of European economic and cultural hegemony involved the transformation of vacant wilderness into productive fields, factories, and cities” (Neumann 1998: 29). Conventional conservation discourse is a form of hegemonic environmental control that puts resources, territories and the people who inhabit the territories under the control of powerful actors – the state and non-state actors (Robbins 2004). For the sake of understanding, I analyze the “conservation and control thesis” (Robbins 2004: 150) from three mutually interrelated areas of arguments. Broadly speaking, the notion of national parks was a form of asserting hegemonic political, economic, cultural and knowledge control and imposition over indigenous peoples in creating a system whereby the colonial powers and later post-colonial states have asserted their authority over the society.

In the context of the colonial system in Africa, the very idea of a national park is anchored in different dimensions of notions of power relations. The first dimension, as elsewhere in other parts of the world, is that notions of national parks have placed humans above other species to legitimize resource expropriation (Ramutsindela 2004). Through national parks, humans assert control and authority over other species by restricting their movements and putting them under human surveillance and exploitation. National parks put animals under human gaze, constrain their movement/migration, change their behavior and adjust them into objects of consumption. The second dimension concerns the idea that national parks create asymmetrical power relations between humans – those who have right of access into the parks and those who are restricted from access. As colonialism created racial and class boundaries, national parks also contributed to
ongoing boundary construction processes because park legislations and policies privileged colonial officials and white settlers whereas native Africans were excluded from their traditional rights.

Indeed, it is very important to note the differences between the objectives and approaches in the establishment of national parks in the colonies of the two major colonial powers – the British and French. In British colonies, national parks were largely extended from the models of the Yellowstone national park as expressions of national identity, markers of class and racial boundaries between colonialists and the subjects and as forms of exclusive rights for colonial hunters. Tourism was also part of the objectives of setting aside land as protected areas in British colonies. On the other hand, the French loosely adopted the Yellowstone national park model and rather focused on forest reserves for preservation and scientific purposes (Ford 2012). In both cases however, eviction, relocation and restriction of indigenous communities from their ancestral lands were common practices.

At this point, I would argue that although the colonial powers did not always and not everywhere succeeded in imposing territorial rule, they attempted to implement territorial control as a mechanism of control over the economic, social and cultural spaces of Africans. This colonial project had multidimensional consequences. It disrupted human-environmental relations by dispossessing Africans, criminalizing customary practices of resource utilizations and detaching the people from their cultural and spiritual connectedness to their land. For example, among many pre-colonial societies in Africa hunting was practiced not only for subsistence but also for its symbolic representation in signaling local elites’ dominance over the environment and as means of asserting territorial control (Adams and McShane 1996). Thus, the destruction of African hunting rights following the imposition of colonial hunting laws had disrupted economic and social relations as well as broken up the bonds between people and the natural environment. As Ingold (2000) states, individuals’ engagements with the natural environment enable them to socialize with environmental elements because through hunting, people would interact, communicate and develop sense of trust and reciprocity with the animals and the environment at large. By disrupting African customary rights, the colonial system had transferred the right of resource ownership and utilization to a new emerging class – the white colonial ruling elites and white settlers – who happened to become at a privileged position to exercise power over the people and their land.

In contrast to the general portrayal of the struggle between natives and colonists during the colonial encounters and all throughout the colonial era as if it was a mere competition over control of resources, there are evident cases that most conflicts were mainly results of ontological
contradiction on human-environmental relations (Mitchell 2012). However, simplifying the struggle to resource competition blurs the complex ideological and cultural contradictions between colonial powers and the Africans. Rather, the struggle revolves around control over space, territories and meanings inscribed in elements of nature (Brownwell and Falola 2012). It was a struggle between forces of domination and resistance. By setting aside large tracts of land such as the Kruger national park in South Africa, Serengeti and Ngorongoro national parks in Tanzania and Maassai Mara in Kenya, the British exerted domination under the guise of nature conservation. Restricting the natives from access to their traditional land was meant to make the people dependent on colonial administration and prompted them to engage in labor economy or cash crop production for their livelihood sustenance. In other words, control over economic schemes, cultural spaces, sacred sites and socio-political affairs of the people are tantamount to getting the monopoly over their entire life. The third dimension of national parks in Africa was related to its representation of nationalism and control over nature. Like the conquest of the American West, which was described as part of nation-building, national parks in Africa were also strongly related to sense of nationalism on the part of the colonial powers (Brockington et al. 2008). I would reiterate that despite differences between settler colonies and extraction colonies in terms of their the objectives and approaches in the establishment of national parks, such territorialization, compartmentalization and enclosure of land entailed the restriction of indigenous peoples from their customary resources. Whether they were established for the purposes of tourism, game hunting or scientific research, preservation of fauna and flora, national parks in Africa enabled the colonial powers to exert their hegemonic forms of colonial rule over the subjects.

According to Mitchell (2012: 43), the establishment of farming settlements by the Dutch speaking settlers in southern Africa in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had disconnected the Khoisan, not only in terms of access to material resources (water, grazing land and hunting grounds), but also detached them from their sacred ritual spaces. For the indigenous communities, cutting off access to their ritual spaces was "comparable to capturing a church, synagogue, or mosque". Mitchell (2012:43) argues that, "the fundamental tensions between Khoisan and settlers were rooted in different ideologies of nature and conflicting notions about the utility of natural resources." Despite direct competition for land, the intensity of the violence was fueled more due to competing meanings ascribed to nature by the two societies as it was to the struggle over the material aspects of the land. Mitchell (2012: 46) further argues that the "Settlers’ ideas about nature, people’s place in the landscape and the appropriate use of resources stem ultimately from a Christian logic."
In terms of their relationship to the land, the settlers viewed it from a material perspective as an object to be owned, controlled, exchanged and commoditized. In contrast, the Khoisan inhabitants of the region understand nature as inextricably linked to humans. Africans’ dependence on their natural environment for food, rituals and other aspects of their life entrenches their connectedness to nature. Therefore, the difference between colonists and Africans in their relation to the natural world was a fundamental point of contention during the colonial encounters. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the inheritance of similar dualist notion about nature-society relation by post-colonial states had also contributed to the continuation of the conflict.

4.1.2.3. National Parks as Markers of Identity

The third argument behind the motives for the establishment of protected areas, specifically national parks in British colonial Africa was related to its role in serving as maintaining class and racial boundaries of difference between colonists and native Africans. This dimension of national parks was mainly true in settler colonies. We have seen earlier that the countryside ideal (nature tourism, mountain trekking, hiking, vacation retreats to countryside and in general landscape consumption) was used among the middle class people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Europe as markers of class boundary (Bunce 1994). Likewise, designating land in the form of protected areas created lines of categorization between colonialists and Africans but in this context drawn based upon racial and class membership and assigned differential rights and obligations on access, utilization and ownership of resources. Boundaries between Europeans and native Africans were subjectively constructed partly drawn from the images of Africa among European popular imagination and partly as a result of early encounters which provided the European audience scanty information about the people and the land at large. For instance, British colonial officials and missionaries constructed a sharp racial boundary between themselves and native Africans drawing the lines based upon civilization. In some cases, the people, territories and wildlife were commonly lumped together as “nature” in contrast to the civilized “self”, which was represented as culture (Curtin 1973).

To elaborate further on how sense of nationalism and identity construction informed control over spaces in colonies, colonial nationalists have been intent to annex the homelands of others in their identity myths as mechanisms of reconstructing imperial national identities (Daniels 1993). Images, landscape iconographies, myths and narratives of landscape transmit sense of human history and thus contribute to production of national identity. At the same time, landscape iconography depicts boundaries between human and nature, as well as between different human groups (Ramutsindela
2004). For example, in the Yellowstone national park case, the landscape painting of the park partly depicts American national identity but it masks the history of indigenous peoples in the region. By annexing the homelands of others, colonial settlers worked hard to deconstruct the attachment of the natives to the landscape and sought to inscribe their own identity myth. The example of the conquest of the American West and the establishment of the Yellowstone national park is always illustrative because it has become a founding model for most national parks across the world. The conquest and the establishment of the park was symbolized in American national history as a process of victory of ‘civilization’ over ‘backwardness’, which implicates indigenous people and their home as adversaries of civilization against which the conquerors waged relentless war (Brockington et al. 2008). In fact, national parks in Europe were more expressions of the aesthetic and pristine dimensions of nature than those in the United States, which were considered as symbols of national identity. Nevertheless, once they exported the national parks ideals to Africa, European colonial powers, and particularly the British, adopted the models from the United States in depicting them more as expressions of national identity and mastery over nature.

As I noted in this work, apart from being symbols of national history, national parks were also symbolized with victory of civilization over wilderness (Reichart-Burikukiye 2012). Backed by science and technology and inspired by capitalism and enlightenment philosophies of human dominion over nature, Europeans annexed the lands of indigenous peoples since the eighteenth century. For instance, in the late nineteenth century when a British company was constructing a railway in East Africa, one of the challenges railway workers faced was from lions that almost compelled the company to stop the construction. The British company and its Indian workers were in fierce struggle with man-eating lions that contested against the new technology that would inevitably threaten its territorial privacy and autonomy. In 1898, an Irish engineer, John Henry Patterson, killed two of the lions and was celebrated as a hero marking the victory of European technology over African wilderness (Reichart-Burikukiye 2012). Similarly, some of the national parks in British colonies were established as markers of British colonial victory in Africa, marking important landscapes in British colonial history (Ramatutsindela 2004).

In this regard, park legislation and polices have been serving as instruments for administering the boundaries between parks and people as well as between different categories of people. Landscape enclosure in the form of protected areas were used as strategic impulses to draw lines or boundaries between areas accessible to Africans and those exclusively reserved to colonialists. It was a marker of power relations in which aspects of domination and subordination manifested which in turn implies asymmetrical class and racial relations (Neumann 1998). Hunting rights were best cases in
point where clear boundaries were made between Africans and whites regarding access to wildlife. Although most national parks in Africa, and indeed elsewhere, were presumably established for conservation reasons, European hunters negotiated with their colonial officials and obtained exclusive hunting rights. In some British southern African colonies for example, colonial hunters almost wiped out wildlife through hunting rights exclusively given to them (Ramutsindela 2004). Besides differential access to resources in economic terms, aspects of exclusion were parts of mental colonization of the colonial subjects aimed at producing a mental set up of generations who would accept the established ‘regime of truth’. The institutionalization of hunting right particularly in British settler colonies was adopted from the old tradition of hunting privileges reserved to the Crown that marked the king’s political and social status in Great Britain (Gissibl et al. 2012).

Regarding representation of Africa as ‘wild’ and ‘natural’ in Western media, academics and public discourses, I would like to make the following arguments. first, these representations were not innocent descriptions of African people, territories and natural resources, especially the wildlife but they were/are used as psychological and ideological tools of expressing the ‘civilized’ status of Europe vis-à-vis ‘traditional’ Africa. In addition to landscape consumption, I would argue that the representation of Africa as ‘natural’ and ‘wild’ had psychological dimension of empowering and maintaining Europe’s ‘modernity’ vis-à-vis Africa’s ‘traditionalism’. By establishing protected areas from which they either evicted or restricted natives from drawing resources for their economic and cultural purposes, the colonial authorities used national parks as markers of identity between themselves and the native people.

4.1.2.4. The ‘Environmental Degradation’ Thesis

Environmental issues were the fourth major arguments behind the exportation of national park ideals to Africa. Colonial and post-colonial states have brought discourses of environmental degradation, climate change and biodiversity depletion into policy agendas (Anderson and Grove 1987). It has become evident that international donors, environmentalists, scholars, politicians, civil society organizations and local people in Africa are all worried of changing environmental conditions and increase in adverse impacts of climate change (Adams and McShane 1996; Brockington et al. 2008). In Africa, as elsewhere across the globe, environmental problems are now evident and campaign to address these issues, although the approaches differ, are considered legitimate. However, one might wonder if the establishment of national parks during the early colonial period was genuinely based on environmental concerns. Positing the motivations of colonial conservation programs within the argument of environmental concerns or ‘environmental
degradation’ thesis, Grove (1990: 17) argues that:

One can now begin to expose the extraordinary vigor with which conservation programmes, in particular, were pursued after the early nineteenth century, and to understand the technical agendas and powerful motivations behind these programmes. Principal among these motives was a deep insecurity about the prospects for the long-term survival of the colonial state and a deep anxiety about consequences of climatic change and environmental deterioration.

Although I partially agree with Grove’s argument that deep insecurity among Europeans about the prospects for the survival of the colonial state could be a motivation for territorial control under the guise of conservation, the notion that Europeans were compelled by consequences of climatic change and environmental deterioration should be scrutinized. It is true that colonial powers imported their practices of private property ownership and management such as land, forest, pasture and water to Africa, and attempted to designate communal lands into private or state controlled system during the colonial period upon which post-colonial states effectively modeled (Grove 1990). Nonetheless, resource scarcity and environmental deterioration were not as such major problems in the nineteenth century. As Mitchell (2012) argues, resource scarcity was not the major source of conflict between the Khoisan indigenous people and white settlers in South Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Rather, according to Mitchell, the conflict was mainly a struggle over meanings of landscape and differences in understanding of property ownership as the settlers imposed private property regimes that were alien to the indigenous peoples. I also argue that most states and non-state actors used conservation as rhetorical tool to justify and legitimize state stewardship of the environment.

In the context of asymmetrical power relations that had already been constructed following the onset of colonial conquest, state conservation discourses were put in place by relegating customary rights. In doing so, colonial states were able to delegitimize indigenous knowledge of resource management and instituted scientific and ‘expert-based’ environmental knowledge as inalienable form of knowledge. To justify the rationale for the new form of conservation, they emphasized environmental problems and inadequacy or inefficiency of traditional African resource management systems. On the other hand, the colonial powers sought to assess and use indigenous knowledge and law by establishing dual regulatory system, even if this dual system was believed to enhance domination of the colonial forms of administration. The central point to note at this point is that it was colonialism by itself that intensified environmental degradation through commercial plantation, timber production, mining, hunting and infrastructure construction, all of which were part of colonial exploitation and suppression (Asebe 2011).
If fact, it should be acknowledged that Africans took part in practices that were environmentally destructive such as the aforementioned activities mainly introduced by the colonial system. For example, industrial revolution in Europe had increased the demand for raw materials, which made Africa the ideal source of such resources. In the process, Africans were engaged in trade, plantation, mining and logging within the system established by the colonial system. In this regard, the increased demand for wildlife products in Europe and the United States exacerbated wildlife hunting on the side of African and non-African hunters (Rich 2012). Nevertheless, ‘conservationists’ had put the blame on African hunters and traders, although the system that increased the scale of hunting and trade in wildlife was masked under the stereotypical representation of Africans as poachers.

Nature conservation in Africa was also part of Western representation of the continent as “Eden” that demands human stewardship. As Rich (2012) discusses in her study about Chimpanzee trade in Gabon, conservation discourses in central Africa were basically framed on Western imagination of the region in which apes and monkeys are central in the construction of ‘wild Africa’. Throughout the colonial and post-colonial periods, debates on conservation of wildlife in the region hinge on symbolic representation of these animals as nature that needs human stewardship. Since the late nineteenth century, local Gabonese hunters and merchants were engaged in primate trades with European merchants along the Western coast of Africa. Although the local people were encouraged by their economic returns obtained from the chimpanzee and gorilla trade, Europeans later began to label the hunters as cruel, despite the trade being hitherto considered ‘legitimate’. Some argue that ‘rational’ men began feeling paternalistic attitudes to protect the innocent animals from ‘backward’ and ‘cruel’ African treatment of the animals (Rich 2012). Wildlife conservation in the colonial context thus reflects discourses of European paternalism versus African ‘irrationality’ towards wildlife. As Rich (2012: 37) remarks: “Discourses of kind but powerless primates who required European masters matched the paternalism voiced by administrators and missionaries” in contrast to stereotypical representation of African hunters and traders as cruel and inhuman to the animals.

My argument is that notions of nature conservation in colonial and post-colonial Africa should be conceptualized within the complex economic, political and cultural matrix in play. Sense of insecurity to environmental deterioration, threat to wildlife through African ‘poaching’ practices, ‘unwise’ use of resources, ‘inappropriateness’ of indigenous knowledge to modern conservation visions and so forth were used by colonial officials to legitimize the dominant conservation practices that were alien to Africans. It has been portrayed in the broader conservation discourses that conservation of the African environment is an entirely apolitical affair. However, due to the
history of conservation trajectories in the continent, which has been full of agonies and tragedies of eviction, the criminalization of customary rights, denigration of indigenous knowledge systems and restriction of cultural and economic spaces of African people, backed by colonial and post-colonial state policies, "naïve and idealized apolitical conservation in Africa is absurd" (Grove 1987: 6). Rather, environmental issues were brought to the front lines of colonial policies to mask the economic, political and cultural motives and legitimize the imposition of scientific knowledge and notions of private ownership and state control on indigenous knowledge and communal resource ownership of Africans, respectively.

In this section, I have attempted to see the trajectories in the exportation of national park ideals to Africa during the colonial period. The countryside ideal that developed in Britain and later spread to North America could be understood from both landscape consumption and identity reconstruction. By offering opportunities for the middle class people to pass their leisure time in the countryside, the countryside ideal was believed to have put them ‘back to home’/nature, albeit it was difficult to claim that the countryside was ‘natural’ as it was presumed. Likewise, the middle class people also used the countryside ideal in their pursuit to construct spatial and social/class boundaries against the working class. When similar notions were exported to North America, they were first used by European settlers as liberation from European social hierarchy, political suppression and despoiled life in industrial cities. However, the conquest of the American West was later transformed into a national iconography of victory of science, technology and capitalism over wilderness and ‘savage’ people (Brockington et al 2008).

Despite diversities in arguments about the motives of Europeans in introducing the ideals of the national park to Africa, I would argue that national parks were forms of hegemonic control over African people and their cultural, economic and political spaces. It was a form of imposing colonial authority, scientific environmental knowledge and notions of private and state control of land, which were in sharp contrast to indigenous cosmologies of people-nature relations. The irony with conservation in the form of national parks in Africa is that despite its multidimensional social consequences in the form of eviction, restriction of customary rights and denigration of indigenous knowledge systems, post-colonial states modeled and even strengthened the protectionist conservation approach. The questions I will briefly discuss in the following few paragraphs are: why and how do post-colonial states maintained the dominant colonial discourse of nature conservation that excluded Africans from their customary land rights?
4.2. Colonial Legacies and Post-colonial Dynamics in Conservation Discourses

Nature conservation in post-colonial Africa is subject to different kinds of arguments and debates. Due to the complex historical trajectories most African states underwent during and after the colonial era, it has become difficult to discern underlying forces that compel African states to build upon the colonial approaches of national park ideals. While some scholars position the modern forms of nature conservation as colonial and neocolonial impositions (Anderson and Grove 1987; Neumann 1998), others position particularly wildlife conservation in Africa beyond the colonial and neocolonial influences. In this regard, Garland 2008: 52) argues that conservation discourses and practices in Africa should be viewed, “as a productive process, a means of appropriating the value of African nature, and of transforming it into capital with the capacity to circulate and generate further value at the global level.” Indeed, Garland (2008) argues that despite rich academic works on conservation discourses in Africa from colonial and post-colonial experiences, much of them emphasize two aspects of conservation. These include the impacts of Western conservation approaches on local livelihoods and the sensibilities and ambitions of Western conservationists, and to a lesser extent on Western conceptions of nature and its nexus with national park ideals in Africa.

However, according to Garland, emphasis on both these dimensions of conservation blurs our understandings of the interplay between Western notions of nature and local cosmologies in Africa, as well as how the two negotiate, contest and perhaps appropriate different values from one another. This is why Garland (2008: 61) observes in the following concerning the works of Western conservationists on the impacts of conservation and ambitions:

Left out are the shifts in desires and worldviews, new social identities and relationships, and forms of discourse and practice that conservation processes themselves bring into being, not only at the relatively localized level of rural communities displaced by parks, but also in the broader frames of reference represented by nations and the world system. Thinking of conservation as a colonialisat assault on the cultures or subsistence strategies of local people cannot, for example, explain the enthusiasm of many independence-era African nationalists for protecting wildlife, or the appeal of work in the fields of wildlife conservation and tourism for both rural and urban youth in many African countries today. Nor can such a framework address the kinds of global power dynamics.

I share Garland’s views, particularly concerning the need to move beyond the idea that considers national parks as colonial and neocolonial imposition to conceptualization of the perspective as a complex phenomenon that constitutes new forms of practice and discourse that emerge from the
interplay between European and African notions of nature. However, I further argue that conservation in post-colonial Africa should be analyzed within three broader contexts: colonial trends, post-colonial dynamics, and the subsequent results of both contexts. Therefore, local and global forces such as legacies of colonialism, issues of nation-building projects, influences of neoliberal economy, global environmental movements and emerging value systems among Africans, are some of the fundamental driving forces behind the continuation of colonial approaches of national parks in post-colonial periods.

4.2.1. National Parks as Colonial Legacies

Given that forms of colonial legacies continued to shape postcolonial economic and political orders in Africa, conservation discourses can be positioned within the broader institutional and ideological frameworks the newly independent African states inherited from the ex-colonial powers in the 1960s and 1970s. African elites did not rebuild the states as per the pre-colonial socio-political, geographical and cultural settings. Rather, they forged the state on the active ruins of colonial institutions, ideas and worldviews. In the process of crafting ‘nation-states’ in the postcolonial eras African elites who were one way or another shaped by the very colonial system and ideas they fought had played central roles. Despite African nationalism that flared up against injustices perpetuated by the colonial system, independence failed to dismantle colonial institutions that sustained the system. By introducing notions of scientific knowledge of conservation that legitimated European views of nature-culture relations on the one hand, as well as denigrating indigenous cosmologies and knowledge of resource management on the other, colonial system established ‘regimes of truth’ that were gradually institutionalized through scientific research, colonial policies and bureaucracy, public imaginings, narratives and rhetoric. As with many other institutions and ideas, post-colonial elites inherited these ‘regimes of truth’ and in fact used them within the new political and economic settings and interests. National parks and the ideals behind their establishment were part of colonial institutions and ideas that were passed-over to the newly ‘independent’ states and the elites that took state power in Africa.

I would also like to establish the nexus between colonization of Africans’ minds and the subsequent adoption of the colonial discourses of conservation by the postcolonial elites. In contrast to Fanon’s (1952 [1986]) aspiration of decolonization of the mind along with political decolonization, the political decolonization did not significantly result in the decolonization of the mind among most African elites, despite many attempts towards the re-traditionalization of African institutions (Mazrui 2002). The colonization of the mind entails institutionalization of different forms of
knowledge, values, beliefs and ideologies of the colonizer into the cognitive set up of the colonized. In the process of colonization of the mind, colonizers used different forms of power to transmit their values, norms and beliefs to the colonized by denigrating the knowledge and worldviews of the latter or accompanied by socio-economic rewarding or punishment. However, punishment and coercion alone would not successfully engender acceptance of the colonizers’ knowledge or ways of thinking. Rather, subtle but persuasive mechanisms had to accompany the coercive mechanisms. For example, one might ask why African nationalists emulated British and French styles of parliamentarian and presidential systems of government upon independence, despite having fought against the institutions set up by these colonial masters. Some might respond that the nationalists were not given any chance or freedom to choose between different options as the departing colonial powers imposed some conditions, such as the continuation of ‘partnership’. However, this argument is not convincing because history reminds us about some nationalist leaders and heads of states who defected from the so-called post-colonial ‘partnership’ and adopted socialist system.

Rather, the argument might go to the direction that most nationalists were products of colonial education and were brought up under the colonization process that controlled the mind settings of the people at large. They were educated either in Europe, USA or even in Africa under education systems crafted upon colonial curriculum. The education system was designed in a way that Africans would be socialized to accept the presumption of considering Western democracy and social ordering as utmost superior level of civilization than indigenous African governance and practices. It also represented European development trajectories as the right paths to be transplanted to developing countries and in general Western scientific knowledge as the ultimate ‘truth’. Do we expect these colonial ‘products/elites while drafting the new constitutions, to sit together and revisit how the Ashanti, the Kikuyu and the Zulu, for example, governed their people before the white men arrived? Mazrui (2002: 19) describes this situation stating that, “Institutions were inaugurated without reference to cultural compatibilities, while new processes were introduced without respect for continuities. Ancestral standards of property, propriety and legitimacy were ignored.” Likewise, postcolonial elites institutionalized colonial forms of resource management without looking back to their ancestral ecological wisdom. While this does not completely nullify the agency of African elites in articulating ideas, policies and ideologies that suited their interests, it underpins the conjuring role that colonial legacies played in the elites’ understanding of the complex political, economic and cultural circumstances in the continent during the transition from colonialism to independence.

The issue of nation-building project is closely related to the colonial legacies, albeit with some
forms of new internal dynamics that has been shaping discourses of conservation in post-colonial era. Like their colonial predecessors, the leaders of the newly independent African states had to struggle to gain legitimacy, authority and state power during the 1960s and 1970s (Herbst 2000). Resistance against the way in which colonial states were crafted and inherited, influences of ex-colonial masters, decaying social and economic systems, imported political and economic systems and so forth were among few of the challenges African states and leaders have been facing since independence. In order to assert control over the people and territories, as well as gaining legitimacy, governments continued similar notions of discrediting local resource use systems and institutionalizing the imported approaches of resource management as the ultimate conservation practices. In this regard, post-colonial governments not only adopted and modeled the notions of national parks but also continued with massive expansion of national parks in most countries since the colonial era (Neumann 1998; Brockington et al. 2008). Apart from its economic reasons, to which I will shortly return, the establishment of national parks was associated with nation-building projects in which nation states embarked on subjugating the homelands of indigenous peoples as a form of asserting state control.

It should be noted that most African states have rejected the call for recognition of indigenous peoples and their claim for land ownership, cultural distinctiveness, political autonomy and economic empowerment (Saugstad 2001; Asebe 2011). While questions of indigenous peoples for recognition, self-government and access to and ownership of resources were portrayed by the nation states as threats to national integrity and sovereignty of the states, actions against these groups were justified as part of nation-building projects (Stewart-Harawira 2005).

4.2.2. Global Influences

The second post-colonial pattern in the analysis of why national parks continued beyond the life span of colonial rule is associated to the influence of global economic institutions and ideologies. Since the 1980s, the influences of neoliberal economic paradigm in Africa were evident particularly in the form of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) through which powerful financial institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund exerted influence on economic and political policies in Africa. As part of SAP, these institutions prompted African states to diversify their economy presenting tourism as one of the major areas of possible investment. In this regard, while the ‘Old World’ countries rely on heritage, African countries were thought to invest in nature for their tourism economy. Investment in nature for tourism economy entails the establishment of national parks, which often excludes people from their homelands and dispossesses them from their
customary resource rights. Despite Africa being a home of charismatic animals, which would indeed boost the tourism industry, the approach used by global institutions such as the IUCN, World Bank and UNESCO in encouraging African states to invest on national parks was paternalistic.

The globalization of environmental movements and the role of conservationist NGOs, individuals and institutions in influencing international and national policy making processes have also been paramount in the post-1960s periods. Like the role of science in constructing ‘truth’ about nature-culture relations and conservation practices, these major international actors such as IUCN and UNESCO were able to mobilize resources and invest in discursive representations and narratives of ‘danger’ related to environmental change in their quest to craft international policies and programs along their own approaches of conservation. Owing to their strong economic positions to sponsor academic works and lobby governmental and other policymaking institutions, the influence of these actors in shaping global imaginations and policies has been strong (Garland 2008). For instance, the National Geographic Society and the World Conservation Society played fundamental roles in convincing the Gabonese President, Omar Bongo, to establish thirteen national parks in Gabon in 2002 and in the process lobbied the United States to donate a significant amount of money for the same purpose (Garland 2008).

Likewise, Wilshusen et al. (2002) argue that global conservationist organizations have begun working against the community-based natural resource conservation paradigm in developing countries, because such institutions criticize these approaches for failing to achieve the goals of biodiversity conservation. As the case in Ethiopia demonstrates, UNESCO sponsored the establishment of several national parks in the 1960s and 1970s along the classical protectionist approaches of protected areas governance. Similarly, the World Bank, IMF, IUCN and other international foundations working on ‘development’ and ‘conservation’ invested millions of dollars on the development of tourism industry in Tanzania in the post-1960s periods (Neumann 1995). The global political and economic ideologies of market liberalization that imposed different sorts of conditionality on African states had pleased international conservation NGOs by compelling the states to liberalize the market, including the privatization of land.

4.2.3. Changes in Value Systems among African Elites

In the preceding paragraphs, I have discussed how the bogus ambitions of ‘nation-building’ project, neoliberal economy and global environmental movements have contributed to the continuity and even expansion of national parks in Africa. However, these three arguments seem to have given the
agency to external forces and actors but portray African states and the people as passive recipients of external ideas and interventions. Nevertheless, African states, elites and ordinary people do play significant roles in conservation practices in Africa (Garland 2008). Garland observes that behind any successful conservation story in Africa are hundreds if not thousands of Africans who work day and night within the conventional conservation approaches, yet whose contribution towards the outcome has been neglected or consciously made invisible.

Indeed, Africa is a home of different charismatic animals and rich diversities of wildlife – lion and leopard, gorilla and chimpanzee, elephant, rhino, hippo, ostrich, zebra, giraffe, and more (McShane 1996; Garland 2008). The question will be who sustained the African wildlife? This dimension of the question is often ignored from most media coverage and academic discussions. The answer actually depends on different views. While some might applaud Western conservationists and donors who shower millions of dollars for conservation purposes, others might give credit to African elites who have enacted conservation policies and practices in line with global approaches. I doubt if mainstream academics and environmentalists recognize the role of ordinary African people and their knowledge in maintaining biodiversity in the continent. Nevertheless, it has been documented that most African societies had different aspects of ecological wisdom and systems of environmental governance that enabled them for centuries to maintain human-environmental coexistence (Igoe 2004). Conversely, different local epistemologies in Africa influenced the dominant protectionist discourse to undergo some fundamental paradigm shifts – a recognition and adoption of community-based conservation approaches during the 1980s and 1990s. Although debates on this kind of knowledge are significant, my argument in this section is different. It has now become clear that colonial encounter – for better or worse – introduced shifts in value system among African elites and ordinary citizens, in respect of their values to wildlife.

In the case of changes in value system among African elites, it is worth mentioning that wildlife began to possess economic values like minerals, oil and other natural resources (Garland 2008). The following case will further substantiate the argument that colonial system and post-colonial dynamics have introduced some changes among African elites regarding their views to conservation discourses. In 1961, the first Tanzanian president, Julius Nyerere, was invited to deliver a speech on a symposium organized in Arusha, Tanganyika, by the IUCN. On the symposium, Nyerere’s speech attracted the attention of conservationists because not only he declared his government’s readiness to implement conservation programs, but he also confirmed to the audience that conservation would contribute to the well-being of the future generation. The president remarked, “In accepting the trusteeship of our wildlife we solemnly declare that we will do everything in our power to make
sure that our children’s grandchildren will be able to enjoy this rich and precious inheritance” (Quoted in Neumann 1998: 40). Nyerere said, “The conservation of wildlife and wild places calls for specialist knowledge, trained manpower and money and we look to other nations to cooperate in this important task” (Neumann 1998:40, emphasis added). As a brainchild of colonial education, being the first Tanganyika to receive education in British University, it is not difficult to imagine that Nyerere was influenced by the ‘truth regimes’ constructed and implanted during the colonial era that made scientific knowledge, expert skills and Western values the superior forms of knowledge and legitimate approaches of conservation. Thus, colonial the encounter had impelled African elites to go through value changes in perceiving wildlife and nature in general as commodities.

It is again imperative to bring how Nyerere labeled wildlife as commodities putting them into similar economic packages of exchange like diamond and sisal when he noted, “I personally am not very interested in animals. I do not want to spend my holidays watching crocodiles. Nevertheless, I am entirely in favor of their survival. I believe that after diamonds and sisal, wild animals will provide Tanganyika with its greatest source of income. Thousands of Americans and Europeans have the strange urge to see these animals” (quoted in Neumann 1998: 44, emphasis added). In this context, Nyerere was in favor of the survival of wild animals for economic purposes in the form of tourism. This is consistent with Garland (2008) arguing that wildlife conservation practices in post-colonial Africa should be conceptualized as a productive process – a shift in value system whereby wildlife is seen as economic capital. Whether it is African elite with political position or those employed in conservation organizations, at least the economic values attached to wildlife have now being accepted in Africa. One would argue that Africans’ engagement with external forces and actors have transformed their value system and perception of wildlife and conservation practices over time.

In addition to its effect in transforming the value system among Africans towards wildlife, colonial encounter and post-colonial political circumstances in Africa have shaped the elites, particularly governments, to associate state control over resources with sovereignty. This means that while colonial governments used national parks as symbolic markers of identity, control, power/knowledge and practical fields of economic exploitation, post-colonial governments linked the authority of setting aside tracts of land as signs of sovereignty, which is often contested for several reasons. In other words, post-colonial leaders appropriated the national park ideals and systematically used it within post-colonial political circumstances. Besides their economic attraction, national parks in most African countries have been established in peripheral regions or
along borderlands as security zones. For example, the Ethiopian governments established most of the national parks along contested inter-ethnic boundaries mostly in pastoralist areas and used such territorialization to control the movement of people from place to place.

I would like to move further what Garland (2008: 62) describes, “The recent efforts of many African rural communities to assert their right to exploit wildlife through community-based conservation and tourism projects, often in the face of opposition from governments claiming state ownership of wildlife, may be understood as struggles over resource control in precisely these terms”. I argue that the struggle between local communities and states over territories and resources are manifestations of the formers’ resistance against the legitimacy of the state in asserting control over resources and the state’s claim and struggle to gain dominance over the society. Like other kinds of natural resources on which the state claims control such as oil, gas and precious minerals, wildlife in Africa have also become areas of state interest. This means that state initiatives of wildlife conservation are also economic and political. This is why political ecologists consider the apolitical conservation rhetoric as naïve and call for greater scrutiny because conservation in practice is a form of environmental control, which entails exercise of different forms of power among actors operating at different levels (Robbins 2004).

Overall, I argue for positioning the establishment and development of protected areas in postcolonial Africa within the complex and interconnected political and historical trajectories in the continent since the late nineteenth century. While most African states inherited national parks and notions behind these arrangements from departing colonial powers, global influences and internal demands have also necessitated and at times compelled African elites to expand protected areas. The expansion of tourism industry as alternative investment option, the support it received from global institutions and ideological frameworks like the ‘free market economy’ and increased involvement of African states in global environmental conservation forums have all contributed for the expansion of national parks in the post-colonial period. As mentioned earlier, Africa inherited not only the physical enclosure as national parks but they also adopted and widely emulated the models behind these enclosures. Although the resistance from local people and failure of the protectionist approaches compelled states and non-state actors to adopt the so-called ‘community-based conservation’ approach in the 1980s and 1990s, the dominant approach continued. As Adams and Hutton (2007) noted, despite some remarkable changes in terms of approaches and structure, the dominant discourse (i.e. protectionist conservation) continues to shape the management of national parks in Africa.
4.3. Center-Periphery Relations in Ethiopia and the Establishment of Nech Sar National Park

4.3.1. The Center-Periphery Relations in Ethiopia

In modern Ethiopian political history, state-society relations are more characterized by aspects of domination and subordination between the Abyssinian core (highland, Amhara-Tigrean, Orthodox Christians and Semitic language speakers) and the ‘periphery’, which encompasses all ethnic groups that were incorporated into the empire in the last quarter of the nineteenth century (Donham 1986; Markakis 2011). Beyond geographical dimension, the center-periphery dichotomy has cultural, political, economic and historical connotations that mark the boundaries, although it is often difficult to draw clear lines between the two. As Markakis (2011:7) noted, “What distinguishes the centre from the periphery is not simply geography, although this is often a salient feature. The locus of power is the most significant indicator.” In this context, what defines the periphery is its marginal position in power relations with the state, and how it is represented in economic, social, political and cultural schemes of the state. In the context of Ethiopia, the center-periphery relations should be understood as a continuum of power relations, in which elites from the Abyssinian core, mainly the Amhara, were in the core center, with their religious institutions/clergies, feudal lords, nobilities and peasants occupying the next space in the continuum of the center (Dereje 2013).

On the extreme pole of the continuum were those groups who were incorporated into the empire, with pastoral ways of life in the lowland areas in the south, east and west of the present day Ethiopian state. Religion, language and culture were also other markers of the dichotomy because most of the people in these regions were not in conformity with the Abyssinian narratives of “Great Tradition” (Donham 1986; Clapham 2002; Markakis 2011; Dereje 2013). For better understanding of the center-periphery relations and its relevance to the topic under discussion, it is important to give brief discussion on the cultural and ideological self-imagery of this in order to get an insight into how this group perceives the ‘self’ vis-à-vis the ‘other’ (people and territories in the periphery). By doing so, I will seek to establish analogies between the Abyssinian imaginations of the periphery and European perceptions of Africa during the colonial encounters and how such perceptions shaped processes of establishment of national parks in both contexts.
Three broad markers of identity are identified as distinguishing features of the Abyssinian core groups that also marked symbolic representation of the Ethiopian state. These were feudal modes of governance, property ownership and economy; ethnicity, religion and language; and the myth of ‘Great Tradition’. To begin with the first set of state representation, until the 1974 revolution, the Ethiopian empire was characterized by a long history of feudalism, which descended from the ancient core regions of the empire to the newly incorporated peripheries. Long history of hierarchical power structure marked relations between lords and peasants in which access to the ladders of power were mainly hereditary, both as right to land ownership, the expropriation of resources and assuming administrative power. Nobilities, feudal lords and their army had privileged social status with distinctive markers like the type of food, clothing, place of residence, number of servants they possessed, amount of land under their control and number of tenants they governed representing their social boundaries (Donham 1986; Levin 2000). These social strata represented typical practices of domination, discipline and constraint, vanquishing, governing, expropriating and inflicting pain on the lower social strata, namely the tenants.

In terms of property ownership, particularly the right to land, the Abyssinians had different structures that guarantee a person the right to land but commonly, private and hereditary land tenure system was common among these societies. In principle, all adult men were entitled to inherit plots of land from their parents, although the nobility and military officials held administrative rights over the land in extracting tributes in different kinds (Bahru 2002). In Abyssinia and still in modern Ethiopia, agriculture remained the central feature of economy, contributing nearly eighty-five percent to the national GDP (Markakis 2011). With their settlement in high plateau regions in today’s Amhara and Tigray regional states, the Abyssinians practiced the ancient plough agriculture, which sharply contrasted them with the livelihood styles of the people in the peripheries (Donham 1986; Turton 2011). They considered plough agriculture as stage of development and thus compared themselves in contrast to either the pastoralists or hoe cultivators inhabiting the southern half of the empire.

The second and perhaps strongest marker of Abyssinians’ self-image that still lingers among Amhara nationalists was the strong marriage between Amhara ethnicity, Orthodox Christianity, Amharic language and the Abyssinian state, which became the foundation for the architects of the modern Ethiopian empire to forge the nation-state along these lines. There is no doubt that Christianity entered the Abyssinian state in the 4th century A.D., making this part of Africa one of the ancient Christian states in the continent. However, this history has been used by ordinary people and state rulers to project their ‘distinctiveness’ and also as signs of civilization in contrast to their
Muslim rivals in the peripheries or those groups who practiced different forms of indigenous religion, whom the Abyssinians referred as pagans (Donham 1986). Donham (1986: 20) observes the dichotomy and Abyssinian representation of the people in the peripheries as analogous to European representation of Africa as ‘wild’ stating that, “According to Abyssinian ideology, the lowlands were to be avoided – they were wild and dangerous, infested with disease and inhabited by savages who did not acknowledge God” (emphasis added). The Abyssinians held competing perspectives about the peripheries: wild, savage, dangerous, desolate and hostile on the one hand, as well as reservoir for slave-taking, refuge for defeated lords and as economic paradise to support the pursuit of regional lords to the ladder of power, as happened during king Menelik’s campaign against these regions in his pursuit to accumulate wealth.

The long history of conflict between the Christian highland kingdom and the lowland Muslim states played a paramount role in shaping the self-representation of Abyssinians and the state itself as Christian island surrounded by Muslim states both locally and externally. Ethnicity, religion and language were the three central symbolic ascriptions forming the core constituents of the Ethiopian state until 1974 and implicitly continued to date. In this regard, the Amhara, sometimes partnered with their Tigrean junior partners, backed by Orthodox Christianity and making Amharic language and its writing script as signs of advancement, controlled state machinery with which they were identified. For instance, although ‘Amharization’ and conversion of peoples into Orthodox Christianity were major state policies until recently “‘assimilated’ individuals were barely eligible to enter the political, religious and social systems of the state” (Markakis 1994: 225). Markakis (1994: 225) further argues that:

The propagation of what might be called ‘state nationalism’ in the guise of ‘national integration’ was one political initiative taken by ruling groups in attempt to reinforce the shallow foundations of the state. Understandably, their [Amhara ruling elites] perception of national identity was the mirror image of their ethnic and cultural ego. Thus, the language of Amhara and Christianity became the salient features of Ethiopian nationalism and the Arab language and Islam of Sudanese nationalism. Consequently, integration was premised on assimilation into what was presented as the superior culture of the ruling ethnic group. In Ethiopia, no other indigenous language was allowed to be printed, broadcast or spoken in public functions, and attempts to study the culture and history of other groups were decidedly discouraged.

Narratives often support nation-building, nationalist projects and discourses that discredit counter-narratives of others in the pursuit of projecting a particular group’s vision of how the nation-state is ought to be crafted. In this regard, Abyssinians built their narratives upon a legend of ‘Great Tradition’ which chronicles of kings, church teachings, oral narratives and modern ‘historians’ constructed, reconstructed and passed down from generation to generation as ‘commonplace truth’.

170
The myth of ‘Great Tradition’ is an aspect of Ethiopian historiography that glorifies ancient Abyssinia and its Amhara and Tigrean peoples as civilized Christians with many more links to the Judeo-Christian culture than black Africa (Markakis 2011). It was used as a diplomatic tool in winning the support of Christian states in medieval Europe against their war with Muslim sultanates during the sixteenth century but later it carried cultural nationalism in internal power struggle between the Abyssinian core and the peripheries. It considered the Abyssinian core as the ‘true’ Ethiopians and carriers of historical civilization (Ullendorff 1965). They used the myth as a political and psychological mechanism of exerting domination and legitimacy of statehood over others.

By subscribing to the notions of ‘civilization’ and ‘modernization’ and tracing their descent to king Solomon of Israel, the Abyssinians worked hard to maintain their position in the center by repelling others further to the periphery. Among several titles of emperors, the common one with religious, psychological and ideological undertones was “Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Elect of God, King of kings, Emperor of Ethiopia...” Beginning from the first king in pre-Axumite period up to the last emperor, Haile Selassie (1930-1974), apart from a few periods of interruption, all emperors and kings in Abyssinian proper subscribed to this legend of the Solomonic dynasty – hereditary link to king Solomon of Israel through the legend of Queen Sheba of Abyssinia.

The Abyssinians’ image of the people in the peripheries was constructed in contrast to their own self-representation as ‘civilized’ people with plough agriculture, centralized governance, Orthodox Christianity, ‘developed’ writing system and more importantly the legend of ‘Great Tradition’ (Turton 2011). In contrast, pastoralists, hoe cultivators, Muslims and followers of indigenous religions, and non-Semitic groups were categorized as ‘savages’, ‘uncivilized’ and slaves, whereas the regions where these people inhabited were considered as wild (Ullendorff 1995; Donham 1986). Although dichotomizations between the peoples of the highland Christian kingdom and lowland states persisted for long before the birth of the modern empire, the conquest and subsequent asymmetrical power relations between Abyssinian rulers and peoples in the subjugated regions added to the divergence. Indeed, the nature of state-society relations varied within the subjugated regions based on the trends of the conquest (military conquest or diplomatic submission), religion and ways of life. For example, while Muslim communities and highland peasants were the most oppressed and exploited parts of the subjugated regions, pastoral communities in the peripheries were marginal to state interest and intervention.

Discussions on the birth of the modern Ethiopian state in the late nineteenth century that was crafted through relentless conquest under empire-building project of the Abyssinian kingdom (Donham
1986; Vaughan 2003) is not the central objective of this research. However, suffice to mention some underlying historical antecedents and their role in strengthening north-south or center-periphery polarizations. For the last over one thousand years in history, there has been southward expansion of Abyssinian kingdoms in different periods until the present day international border of Ethiopia was demarcated around 1900 with diplomatic agreements with European colonial powers (Donham 1986; Bahru 2002; Vaughan 2003). Prominent among these historical antecedents were first, the aggressive expansions of the highland Christian kingdom from the 14th to the sixteenth centuries mainly as competition against the westward expansion of the Muslim sultanates, and second, the late nineteenth century empire-building conquest launched in a process analogous to the European scramble for Africa during the same period. As Markakis (2011: 3) rightly argues, “While rebuffing imperialism in the north, Ethiopia successfully managed to practice it in the south”. Mainly motivated by lucrative resources in the south and partly intrigued by nationalist missions of colonial establishment in competition with European colonial powers and equipped with modern firearms imported from Europe, the Abyssinian kingdom launched its conquest from its administrative center in northern Shewa.

Scholars from different disciplines have discussed in depth the process of the conquest, which I will not repeat in this section (see Bahru 2002; Mekuria 2011; Donham 1986; Teshale 1995). What I would rather discuss is the forms of relations between Amhara feudal lords and the local people in the subjugated regions after the conquest. Based on the nature of reaction of the hitherto autonomous states in the southern, western and eastern part of the country, the imperial government had put in place different administrative approaches. For example, in regions where the local people encountered the conquering army with armed resistance and were eventually subdued by Menelik’s military force, governors were brought from the north and implemented harsh administrative measures, including the confiscation of land, abolition of traditional governance and forceful Amharization in the form of conversion to Orthodox Christianity (Mekuria 1996). On the other hand, in areas where incorporation was undertaken through submission of traditional leaders without armed resistance, there were some sorts of granting nominal ‘autonomy’ to the traditional chiefs, whereby elites were co-opted to facilitate resource expropriation and administration on behalf of the central government. This second aspect continued until 1930s when Haile Selassie’s centralization policy brought the remaining traditional rulers under full control of the emperor (Bahru 2002). This form of differentiated incorporation into the state, has led to significant differences in state-society relations, where the state was more predatory and oppressive in areas it forcefully subjugated.
In the Guji and Koore cases for example, two different forms of administration were put in place because while the Guji were subdued by force, the Koore chief negotiated with the invading army and later continued to serve the imperial regime as a local governor. Although state institutions of coercion (the army, police, security, court, prison, etc.) did not entrench well in pastoral and agro-pastoral parts of the Guji, the highland areas were put under heavy feudal administration, exploitation and repression like other groups in the conquered regions. Like settler colonies in other parts of Africa, massive influx of people who sought fortunes in the newly incorporated resource rich regions took place following the conquest and the trend persists due to land degradation in the northern highlands. Although many of the people who moved to the south were fortune seekers, they established higher social status in the new places partly because they had the backing of the state that used them as tax collectors, administrators and religious leaders, and partly nurtured by their self-image and pride as descendants of kingmakers. As Markakis (2011) observes, in the new power constellation that was created between the center and periphery after the conquest, which still continues regardless of regime changes, Amhara peasants identified themselves and were more close to the center than any elite from the periphery. In short, the Ethiopian nation-state has been built upon the cultural and ideological foundations of its constituent subjects, namely the Amhara ethnic group with their Orthodox Christianity, Amharic language, ‘great Tradition’ and sedentarizing principles (Turton 2011).

In Ethiopia, the north-south dichotomy or asymmetrical center-periphery relationship has been built upon questions of power and cultural assumptions that inhibited patterns of social relationship and smooth upward mobility of the people in the periphery to the center in terms of assuming political power and socio-cultural integration. As Donham (2002: 11) observes, “although individuals from these regions [peripheries] could fairly readily associate themselves with the state tradition through the adoption of Orthodox Christianity, the Amharic language and Ge’ez/Amharic names – and a great many did so – their cultures and societies were condemned to subordination by the nature of the state itself.” As a result, the Ethiopian state and its constituent subjects continued to represent the center while other diversified nations and nationalities in the country occupied peripheral positions, although there were different levels of the peripheries within peripheries and centers within the center.
4.3.2. The ‘Natural’ South and the Establishment of Nech Sar National Park

4.3.2.1. The ‘North-South’ Dichotomy

In Ethiopian studies, it has been a common trend that historians studied the northern societies focusing on their state structure, wars, church history and plough agriculture, among others, whereas anthropologists studied the culture (rituals, customs, kinship, marriage, initiation rites, etc.) of the people in the south (Donham 1986; Clapham 2002). This is why some scholars tend to argue that while the Amharas and Tigreans had their history, others have their anthropology (Ullendorff 1965; Donham 1986). The myth that civilization originated in the north and drifted to the south (if at all it was there) had shaped the nature of inter-societal relations between people from the north and south, and influenced how the state perceives the south. Describing the competing images of landscape representation in the lower Omo valley among different actors, particularly on how the state perceived the territory, Turton (2011: 164) summarizes as follows:

The physical, climatic and cultural conditions of the Abyssinian center, with its mountain ranges, heavy rainfall, Christian tradition and plough cultivating peasantry, contrast markedly with those of its hot, dry, lowland periphery, inhabited mainly by pastoralists. This contrast has dominated the process of Ethiopian state building to this day. Viewed from the centre, the lowland periphery was seen as a wilderness, not in the sense given to that word by European Romanticism but in the earlier sense of “a waste or desolate region of any kind” or “a tract of solitude and savageness” (Oxford English Dictionary). The Abyssinian soldier-settlers who followed the armies of the Emperor Menelik II into the Omo Lowlands, saw themselves faced, like the seventeenth-century Puritan settlers in New England, with a “wild, untamed landscape, a savage howling wilderness”, where no recognizable imprint of civilization had been left by the local inhabitants. They saw it above all as dangerous and threatening a chaotic, disease ridden and unproductive tract of land, inhabited by anarchic and violence-prone “nomads”.

From the above excerpt, I would like to draw two arguments that I will later link to the internal ‘exportation’ of national park ideals to the peripheries. Firstly, there were cultural and ideological assumptions that shaped the popular imagination of the center about the peripheries. It was a self-centric imagery of the ‘Other’ through which the people from the center contrasted the peripheries. Secondly, center-periphery relation was/is not a matter of geographical location as such, although distance from the geographical center also contributes to the further marginalization of the peripheries. Rather, it is more of an aspect of power positions of both the center (a group who dominated the political, economic, cultural and social positions of the state) and the periphery in the state. The asymmetrical power relations particularly under circumstances where the center subscribes to cultural and ideological domination in addition to political power are analogous to European representation of Africa as wild, untamed, pristine and ‘Edenic’. This analogy links the European representation of Africa to Abyssinian representation of the south as natural, wild,
savages, wasteland and uninhabited (Turton 2011; Donham 1986; Markakis 2011). It was within such context of north-south dichotomy that discourses of national parks were imported by the Ethiopian state in the 1960s and were systematically ‘exported’ to the peripheries, mostly located in the south. With this understanding, I will posit the historical trajectories of the establishment of the Nech Sar National Park within the north-south dichotomies that were developed following the conquest. More specifically, the argument is that the Ethiopian state considered the landscape in the south as ‘natural’ to be converted into consumable commodity through national parks so that it would render economic benefit through tourism.

The history of many national parks in Ethiopia was part of the country’s projection of its self-image to the outside world, particularly to the West as part of the global movement for environmental conservation. Since the Second World War, Ethiopia increased its alignment to the global North in areas of diplomacy, development cooperation, education and environmental conservation schemes (Clapham 2006a). The periods 1941-1950 and 1950-1974 were commonly termed as the British and American eras in Ethiopia, respectively, when the two global powers influenced the socio-political and economic dynamics in the country (Bahru 2002). During these periods, Ethiopia became strategically important for the USA and its allies. From the part of the Ethiopian government during the period of Haile Selassie, ambitious modernization programs were designed to attract Western aid and diplomatic supports. Despite its feudal orientations, the imperial regime appropriated some aspects of capitalist development models in areas of agriculture by giving large tracts of land for private investors and introduced state farms, which the communist regime later intensified (Clapham 2006a).

The disillusioned feudal regime began amalgamating capitalist notions of development (such as granting land to multinational corporations for agricultural investment) with a feudal ethos, neither of which ultimately benefited the society as a 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 government established the first large-scale commercial farms such as 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 ‘modernist’ approaches of development, which valued sedentary life style over pastoralism and state farm over peasant agriculture, denigrated the local livelihood conditions of the people and neglected their views of development.
4.3.2.2. Ethiopia's Partnership with UNESCO

Ethiopia's importation of Western models, ideas and practices was also evident in areas of conservation, particularly the establishment of national parks. Before the mid-1960s, the country had only one officially designated national park – the Managasha national park that was officially established in 1958 (Huxley et al. 1963). However, in the 1960s and 1970s the government established all the major national parks largely based on the Yellowstone national park model – the exclusionist and protectionist approach. Before proceeding to the central theme of this section – namely, the establishment of the Nech Sar National Park – I will briefly discuss some historical antecedents that made the 1960s unique in the country's history of national parks. In 1962, the Ethiopian government sent a delegation to attend the UNESCO 12th conference held in Paris. The Ethiopian delegation led by the then Minister of Agriculture, Akaleworld Habtewold, finally submitted a request to UNESCO Secretary General seeking support in the process of surveying, planning and establishing national parks in Ethiopia. During its 12th session (9 November to 26 December 1962), the UNESCO General Conference adopted two important Resolutions, which I will discuss in this section. These were the resolutions concerning "Economic Development and Conservation of Natural Resources, Fauna and Flora", and "Recommendation Concerning the Safeguarding of the Beauty and Character of Landscapes and Sites".

The first Resolution emphasized the economic values of natural resources (flora and fauna) for economic development, particularly in developing countries. It announced this emphasis as:

The General Conference, conscious of the extent to which economic development, especially in developing countries, requires that attention be paid to their renewable natural resources, particularly flora and fauna, in some cases, may be irreplaceable if such development is pursued without due attention to their conservation, restoration and enrichment, and to their increased productivity, [...] Calls upon the Secretary-General, the specialized agencies and other interested international and national organizations, in support of the above mentioned-resolution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, to continue to give the fullest co-operation and to provide technical assistance to the developing countries, at their request, in the conservation and restoration of their natural resources and their flora and fauna (Huxley et al. 1963: 41).

I draw some interpretations from the above statements. Although many African countries had gained independence by the time, UNESCO continued advocating for the commoditization of nature in Africa regardless of the decolonization rhetoric. More importantly, the resolution gears towards encouraging developing countries to invest in nature (flora, fauna and landscapes) in their attempts to gain economic development through tourism. It is also important to critically investigate the technical assistance the UNESCO promised to provide to developing countries in the process of
conservation and restoration of their natural resources. What kind of technical support would UNESCO provide? Whose knowledge would be central in the process of surveying areas for national parks? As has been practically evidenced in the case of Ethiopia in 1963 and subsequent years, the team from UNESCO undertook the survey and proposed to the national government and other organizations on areas to be protected as national parks or game reserves based on their own conceptions of protected areas. UNESCO’s commitment to provide technical assistance to developing countries shows the paternalistic views ex-colonial powers and their institutions continued to project upon the developing countries.

The second Resolution was specifically “Recommendation Concerning the Safeguarding of the Beauty and Character of Landscapes and Sites” and aimed at encouraging member states to take corrective measures against practices, which, according to the conference, destroy the beauty and character of landscapes and sites (Huxley et al. 1963: 6). As a point of departure, I will focus on the following recommendations of the general conference that stated:

Considering that at all periods men have sometimes subjected the beauty and character of landscapes and sites forming part of their natural environment to damage which has impoverished the cultural, aesthetic and even vital heritage of the whole regions in all parts of the world. [...] (recommends among other things that), when conditions are suitable, Member States should incorporate in the zones and sites to be protected, national parks intended for the education and recreation of the public, or natural reserves, strict or special. Such natural reserves and national parks should form a group of experimental zones intended also for research into the formation and restoration of the landscape and the protection of nature (Huxley et al. 1963: 5-6).

Since the mid twentieth century, the impact of capitalist encroachment on the environment had been pronounced partly due to the post-War economic rehabilitation programs and partly as a response to global political and economic forces. From this angle, UNESCO’s conference was likely influenced by the environmental movements of the period, although it sought to homogenize actors responsible for the destruction of the beauty and character of landscapes and sites. In a critical analysis of the content, however, one can easily understand the continuity of the notions of national park ideals that presume landscapes in Africa as pristine, aesthetic and untamed wilderness. Since the late nineteenth century, this notion dominated the advocacies for national parks. Besides its recommendation for the establishment of national parks and reserves, the UNESCO General Conference adopted what it termed as “protective measures” in which it suggested the application of traditional “fence and fines” approaches stating that:

The fundamental norms and principles governing the protection of landscapes and sites in each Member States should have the force of law, and the measures for their application should be entrusted to the responsible authorities within the framework of the powers conferred on them by law. […] Violation of the rules governing the protection of landscapes
and sites should involve payment of damages or the obligation to restore the site to its former condition, as far as possible. Administrative or criminal prosecution should be provided for in the case of deliberate damage to protected landscapes and sites (Huxley et al. 1963: 48-49).

As I discussed earlier, scientific knowledge and expert based conservation approaches were modeled as the ultimate ‘regimes of truth’ in conservation discourses during the colonial period. In 1962, UNESCO advocated for inculcation of Western principles of conservation into education systems and educating the public about conservation values in developing countries. It was stated that “Educational action should be taken in school and out of school with a view to arousing and developing public respect for landscapes and sites and publicizing the regulations laid down to ensure their protection” (Huxley et al. 1963: 49).

At this conference, the Ethiopian delegation presented its request to the Director-General seeking assistance in the field of conservation and establishment of protected areas. As Huxley et al (1963:6) stated in their report after their UNESCO mission to Ethiopia:

The Ethiopian Delegation to the General Conference of the UNESCO, who had throughout the discussion given their fullest support to these motions, submitted to the Director-General upon their adoption, through H.E. Mr. Akalework Habtewold, Minister of Agriculture and Head of the Delegation, a request for assistance in this field. In his letter, the Head of the Delegation pointed out to the Director-General that “it is our wish to manage and develop (national parks and wildlife reserves) in such a way as to secure the preservation of their flora and fauna, provide centers of biological and ecological research, and contribute to the growth of the national economy, especially the development of tourism and game cropping.

UNESCO accepted the request from the Ethiopian Delegation and sent a team of high profile professionals to Ethiopia in 1963 to survey potential areas for national parks and wildlife reserves. As the report indicates, the government of Ethiopia was keen to ‘modernize’ its wild life conservation practices to increase solidarity with international conservation organizations and particularly to increase the economic benefit from the resources. The team was invited by the Emperor, who, according to Huxley et al. (1963) provided it with all necessary facilities including transportation, security and field guides during their extensive tour in different parts of the country. After the fieldwork in Ethiopia, the team produced a forty pages document and submitted to UNESCO and the Ethiopian government in 1963. Later, UNESCO adopted the document as “The Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources in Ethiopia” (Huxley et al. 1963). Given that the document shows how Ethiopia imported Western discourses of national parks and later internally ‘exported’ it to its peripheries, I will analyze few points from the resolution and the report that the UNESCO team compiled in 1963.

In the document, the team emphasized that Ethiopia has had immense resources (wild nature and
landscapes, as well as cultural and historical sites) but the country’s natural resources were under series threat from human and livestock pressure. This is the ‘environmental degradation theses that conservationists often emphasize while projecting their interests in Africa. By classifying conservation under three categories as conservation of wild nature, cultural conservation and general conservation principles, Huxley et al. (1963) underscored the urgent need for action in Ethiopia in these three categories to capitalize on Ethiopia’s wealth of wild life, wild areas, landscape beauty and forests and cultural, historical and archaeological sites. Apart from the general underlying question behind the motives of Western conservationists in conservation programs in Africa, it can be learned from the document that scientific research (zoological, botanical and archaeological), economic interest (in the form of tourism) and aesthetic (recreational) purposes of the areas were mentioned. To this end, the team proposed seven areas as potential protected areas in the form of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, one of which was identified between Lakes Abaya and Chamo – that means the current Nech Sar National Park. However, in contrast to the representation of the area by successive regimes as ‘uninhabited’ territory, the team noted its witness of heavy pressure from agriculture and pastoral ways of life:

The first site proposed for the field station was on Lake Awassa but a section of opinion now favors some place further south on Lake Abaya or perhaps between Abaya and Chamo. This latter area is said to contain a fair surviving assemblage of large mammals and its aquatic biology is interesting in that it contains the main ingredients of the Nilotic fish fauna which does not exist further north in the Rift Valley. However, the Lake Abaya area is said now to be under heavy pressure from both cultivators and domestic stock so that the best choice for the Park may ultimately be further north, in the more accessible area between, and if possible actually containing, Lakes Awassa and Shalla (Huxley et al. 1963: 25).

Like other conservationist predecessors and colonial conservation policy makers in Africa, the team not only proposed the establishment of protected areas, but also recommended the enforcement of fines and fences policy, as well as the eviction of indigenous peoples to keep the ‘natural beauty and character of landscapes’. For example, regarding the pastoral community around a proposed Matahara national park that later became Awash national park in 1966, the team stated that:

The question of 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, emphasis added).

Two central issues that later became the major problems of national parks management in Ethiopia, yet the UNESCO team did not recognize, were related to customary rights of local people and issues related to the recognition of their indigenous knowledge of resource management. This
entails participation in planning, management and benefit from national parks. As common elsewhere in protectionist conservation approach, the report paid due attention to scientific knowledge and ‘educating’ the local people on conservation ethics and significances of wildlife, landscapes and other cultural/archaeological sites. Nonetheless, how did these resources survive long before the advent of the state? Does it mean that local people do not have ecological wisdom? In the previous section, I argue that behind the spectacular imagination of Africa as “Eden”, there are African people who contributed through their indigenous knowledge for the preservation of the biodiversity. Although I do not subscribe to the stereotypical representation of indigenous peoples as ‘noble savages’, I would rather argue that most indigenous peoples have had culturally and spiritually embedded ecological wisdom. The Guji Oromo are the good case in point, in that the people’s relation with nature is mediated through different aspects of rituals, prayers and blessings enacted by elders (Baxter 1991; Asebe 2012c).

So far, I have discussed the involvement of Ethiopia in the UNESCO General Conference on nature conservation and its request for technical assistance in the process of establishing national parks in the country. The UNESCO resolutions and the report of UNESCO team laid grounds in terms of which national parks in Ethiopia were established. It laid the foundation for the management approach by introducing the protectionist conservation approach, placing the state and scientific knowledge as the ‘right’ paths to lead conservation. Based on the survey results and recommendations of the UNESCO team, Ethiopia established the major national parks such as Awash national park, Semien Mountains national park, Omo national park, Nech Sar National Park and Bale mountains national park in the 1960s and early-1970s (Dessalegn 2004).

With this in mind, I will discuss the practical establishment of the Nech Sar National Park and along my discussions, I will link its management approaches with the ‘conventional’ conservation discourse and how this eventually affected both the people and the wildlife alike. In addition to the UNESCO team who surveyed several places in the country and suggested the area that later became the Nech Sar National Park among other areas to be designated as national parks, few other British and American conservation experts suggested the area as a national park between 1965 to 1970. For instance, Blower, a British biologist had carried out a survey in the region about human habitations and the status of wildlife in 1966-67. Regarding human settlement, he recorded that:

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 seen on slopes of 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).

4.3.2.3. The Management Approaches of the Nech Sar National Park (1974-1991)

As has been discussed in chapters one and three, the area constitutes diverse fauna and flora. In fact, the big game animals such as buffalo, elephant, giraffe and rhino that Smith (1897 [2008]) mentioned as spectacular features of the territory shortly before the advent of the Ethiopian empire in the region were no more in existence in the 1960s. Above all, the territory was noted for the presence of the endemic Swayne’s hartebeest, whose number has dramatically reducing over time. According to some sources, the major objective of the establishment of the national park was conservation of this animal with tourism development as another motive behind the government project (Dessalegn 2004; Freeman 2006). As some argue, the scenic landscapes of the territory that includes the two lakes and different ecological niches were also among the major factors behind the establishment of the national park in connection to its importance for attracting tourism (Markin et al. 1974; Briggs 2006).

Depending on the recommendation from foreign advisors who surveyed the area in the 1960s, the Ethiopian government began the enclosure of the area before it formally designating it as a national park in 1974. For example, a document compiled by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office Overseas Development Administration states that the entire lowland areas around Abaya and Chamo Lakes, Arba Minch town and Nech Sar areas were proposed as potential development corridor for different sectors (Markin et al. 1974). Regarding the Nech Sar, Markin et al. (1974) suggested the establishment of the territory as a legally constituted national park, by prohibiting all cultivation and permanent settlements and restricting grazing in the enclosure. The team rather recommended a kind of community participation in the revenue sharing from the tourism industry.

According to Guji informants whose ancestors lived in the area for several generations, the restriction on grazing land in the Nech Sar plains was initiated during the last years of the imperial regime. Guji elders recall the early state intervention in the form of wildlife conservation when the government deployed police force, who were said to have been in charge of keeping the ‘security’ of the people and the animals from “criminals” – hunters and robbers in the Bonke hill forests. A Guji elder, Chari Galgalo who had burial sites of his ancestors in the Bonke forests, narrated the beginning of the government intervention as follows:

Some five or six years before the coming to power of Mengistu Haile Mariam’s regime [in 1974] the governor of Gamo Gofa province sent to our villages his lower administrators and
police force. They told us that the government wants to secure the area so that people would safely travel to and from Arba Minch town. Actually, there were sporadic conflicts and some people used to hide inside the forest and killed people they found along the way. It was either retaliation or motivated by looting. The government built three police stations in the center of what later became the national park. People did not oppose the establishment of police stations because the government did not tell us it was for the park. After they finished the construction of police stations and staffed it with police forces, road construction was started from both Gamo Gofa and Sidamo provinces directing to our homes. We were told that the roads would connect Dilla town [some 60km to the East] with Arba Minch town [some 20km to the west from the center of the park]. The road destroyed our ancestors’ burial sites and sacred spaces but it was not completed. Towards the downfall of the king [Emperor Haile Selassie], they stopped the construction of the road but began telling people not to graze and hunt inside what they called wildlife reservation area. It was not all part of the park but included all the forest area and portions of the grassland. People who had settlements inside the restricted area were told to move out. That was started during Haile Selassie period. The Derg came and strengthened the restriction. It actually took strong measures and evicted our people at gunpoint in 1982. We first thought government does not lie. But they deceived us first by telling it was for our security, then telling us they were building roads for us and later they told us that we would get benefit from tourism income. Still they are telling us this for now over one generation. They pushed us gradually and we have now nowhere to go except to perish (informant: Chari Galgalo, April 2011)

Restrictions and criminalization of customary practices of the local people should also be contextually seen within broader ideological and political changes in the country in the post-1974 period. Soon after it assumed state power, the military junta introduced a national policy regarding land. After the 1975 Land Reform Proclamation that transferred land ownership right to the state, Ethiopian peasants faced once again the century-old dispossession of their customary rights over the land (Markakis 1981). This was rooted in the military regime’s socialist ideological orientations that reinforced state command of the economy and sources of production. As Dereje (2011) argues, the socialist military regime in Ethiopia had crashed traditional values, customs and practices and worked hard enough to abolish them. In doing so, the government nationalized rural land and introduced scientific and expert-based resource management systems.

In the case of the Nech Sar National Park, the territory was administered by the central government and was included under the then Sidamo Province. Although it first strived to reveal its legitimacy as security provider and development agent, literally the state occupied the territory and asserted its control in the form of deploying hard power – deployment of police force and territorialization of the space. The military regime (1974-1991) introduced strict protectionist approach of park management by evicting local people at gunpoint in 1982 (Tadesse 2004; Dowie 2009). During the

---

9 In 1975, the military regime promulgated a land reform proclamation, which usurped the rights of land once again from the Ethiopian people and bestowed it upon the state. Although the central motto of the Ethiopian Student Movement of the 1960s and early-1970s that contributed to the collapse of the imperial regime was “Land to the Tiller”, the military regime that usurped the revolution paralyzed the tenets of the revolution and once again brought Ethiopia to seventeen years of dictatorship (see Markakis 1981; Teshale 1995; Bahru 2002).
eviction, over 2000 people from both Guji and Koore communities were removed from the park based on the ‘modernist’ discourse of the socialist regime that considered traditional practices, customs, values and religious beliefs as obstacles to development (Dessalegn 2004). Through the incident, houses, crops and properties were burnt to ashes. Many cattle died due to a shortage of water and pasture en-route to new settlement areas. Because the state did not prepare any resettlement area for the displaced people, they were prompted to compete over resources with other neighboring communities such as the Konso and Burji ethnic groups. This led to prolonged inter-ethnic conflicts that further destabilized the region and impoverished the people. It also restrained the local people from their economic and cultural spaces (sacred sites, ritual places, burial sites, extraction of medicinal plants, etc.).

The Guji people consider the eviction as a major social crisis because it exposed them to famine, diseases and inter-group conflict in the new settlements where they were seen as aliens. According to an informant, some clans perished due to famine and disease:

That period [the period of eviction] was horrific. They [government forces] came with heavy arms and gave us only two days to move out. If we refused to move, they would destroy our livestock and crops and kill us by tanks and bombs. That was what they told us. We responded that we had nowhere to go. We were born here; our ancestors lived here and were buried here. Where could we go? Our cattle could not adapt to other areas. But they were not ready to listen to us. On the third day, they came fully armed. Immediately, they began destroying our houses, burning all what they came across. They chopped down crops and burnt to ashes. They shot at people. There is a woman who lost one of her eyes during that incident. Then we moved to Oddoo Darba [some 15km to the east]. However, this new place was a disease infested area that killed thousands of cattle and many people. There was no road to medical centers. Even some clans were cut off their roots [perished]. Then we moved to Abulo Alfacho [to the south of the park]. Because it was adjoined by many other ethnic groups such as the Burji, Koore, Konso and Gidole, Abulo-Alfacho was not good either. There were conflicts over resources. We lost many people in the conflict. Then we returned to our home [the park] following the downfall of the military regime [in 1991] (informant: Dhugo Waqayyo, April 2012).

While the state claims control over the territory for conservation and economic purposes, the local Guji and Koore communities consider state intervention as a threat to their livelihood and cultural survival. As will be detailed later in this research, the Guji challenge the legitimacy of state approaches of conservation building their argument upon their local knowledge of conservation that is embedded in their cosmological views. For instance, a Guji elder argues that: “these park people came few years back and began telling us what to do and what not to do regarding wildlife. But we lived in harmony with the animals for centuries. Our fathers and grandfathers and our ancestors in general lived here with the animals. We care for the animals not because these people told us what
to do but we do so because we fear our creator, Waaqa” (Informant: Gagasa Dokale, May 2012).

The Koore people had also similar stories because the 1982 eviction displaced them as well from their farmland in the Tsalke valley. As a Koore woman from Tifate village recalled the incident:

Our people used to move to Tsalke for rituals in ancient times. It was called Tobbe ritual to get rain, good harvest and for other blessings. Later, people started going to Tsalke during dry seasons to cultivate cotton and maize through irrigation along Sermale River. But the park people came and first chased the Guji from the desert [Nech Sar plains] and then they evicted us. Koore people initially refused to move out of their land but the government used force. I was young by the time. My parents had plots of land here in Tifate and Tsalke. The Derg government took our land in Tsalke. Many people returned to the highland. Some people went back to Tsalke when the new government took power. We did not go there since then. There was conflict with the Guji and the park people. We wanted just to cultivate what we have here (informant Werkinesh Ware, February 2012).

It is also important to position the state intervention in the form of setting aside land as a national park from which people were excluded within the broader state conceptions of development vis-à-vis the livelihood styles of pastoralist or agro-pastoralist communities. Despite differences in political ideologies and economic policies, the last three successive regimes in Ethiopia share some common features in their views and policies towards pastoralist groups. While the feudal and the military regimes used to consider the pastoral territories as threats for national security but insignificant for the national economy, the current regime considers the pastoral territories as viable sources for investment in different sectors (ecotourism, agriculture, mining, dam construction etc.). However, in all cases, pastoral communities remained victims of state ‘development’ projects, resettlement programs and displacements (Hagmann and Alemmaya 2008). The military regime under Mengistu Haile Mariam introduced the villagization program in the 1980s, aimed at grouping together scattered farming and pastoral communities throughout the country into small village clusters to enhance land redistribution, resource conservation and provision of social services. The Guji, despite their agro-pastoralist life style, were forced to comply with villagization programs that entirely disrupted their socio-cultural structure and livelihood conditions (Taddesse 1995). In the post-1991 period as well, despite the government’s rhetoric of local autonomy, intervention from the federal state into the life worlds of people in the peripheries under the guise of development projects (dam construction, national parks and large-scale agricultural investment schemes) has been evident (Markakis 2011).

**Summing up**
In this chapter, I have discussed how and why the notions of national park were exported to Africa. To understand the motives behind the establishment of national parks beyond the ‘conventional’
arguments for biodiversity conservation, I have endeavored to observe the nexus between the post industrial revolution ‘countryside ideal’ in Europe and the national park ideal in Africa. The central argument is that the countryside ideal in Europe was informed by three developments related to industrial revolution. First, it served as a retreat from the despoiled industrial cities. Because of urban pollution, population pressure and stressful work ethics following industrial revolution, the countryside was considered an ideal place of ‘salvation’ where humans were in harmony with nature. Second, industrial revolution had created a social hierarchy whereby the middle class used landscape appreciation, countryside tour, mountain hiking, summer camping and in general landscape consumption as a form of drawing class boundary between themselves and the working class who was unable to afford for leisure time in the countryside. Therefore, countryside ideal was a form of identity/class boundary marking both spatial as well as social differentiations between members of different classes in post-industrial revolution Europe, particularly England. The third dimension of countryside ideal was part of the continuation of renaissance and enlightenment thoughts that encouraged human dominion over nature, which later complemented the developments after industrial revolution where people began to domesticate ‘nature’ for human aesthetic consumptions.

When early settlers and conquerors arrived in the Americas and other parts of the world, the notion of subduing ‘wilderness’, which actually constituted wild nature and indigenous peoples, became another marker of distinctiveness and was used as a triumph of the ‘civilized’ over the ‘primitive’ culture (Merchant 2003). Particularly in the United States, the conquest of wilderness and setting aside territories in the form of national parks became signs of national identity. In the long run, the Anglo-American imagination of ‘wilderness’ and its conservation was geared toward a nationalist and identity project through which human victory over nature as well as rights of some people to ‘privileged’ spaces were deemed to indicate racial as well as class boundaries. During the colonial encounter, Europeans brought with them the myth of ‘wild’ Africa, which was represented in ambivalent perspectives – the continent represented as wilderness, deserted, dangerous, ridden by diseases and death on the one hand, and as an “Edenic” garden on the earth, on the other (Adams and McShane 1996). Both perspectives complemented each other in the process of conquest because explorers, colonial invaders and missionaries were longing to reach the “Edenic” garden, along the way demonstrating their mastery over what they considered as wilderness.

Although there is no single and conclusive factor behind the motives of Europeans to establish national parks in colonial Africa, I argue that national parks were used as arenas of colonial control,
as markers of racial and class boundaries and as forms of resource expropriation in the colonial system. During the long periods of encounter between colonial discourses of nature conservation and different local ecological epistemologies among African communities – that in fact constitute human actors in the process of the interaction – there were apparent contestations, negotiations and appropriations of perspectives and practices on both sides. However, as discourses and their translation into practice largely depend on power positions of actors, the dominant exclusionist notions of nature conservation served as ‘regimes of truth’ during the colonial periods. This is partly why most of the post-colonial states maintained and even strengthened national parks for economic, political and environmental reasons. Today, the environmental/conservation discourse is used mainly to draw financial aid from international donors under the pretext of ‘biodiversity crises’. Nevertheless, protected areas conservation in Africa adopted the so-called community-based conservation programs since 1980s because of two major reasons. First, it was owing to local communities’ resistance against the dominant exclusionist conservation practices and the failure of the ‘fortress conservation’ approach to serve the missions of biodiversity conservation and local development. Second, different actors began to recognize some success cases of indigenous resource management approaches in contrast to the scientific approaches. Nevertheless, as I have argued earlier, the rhetoric of community-based conservation programs have often served as mechanisms of creating environmental subjects and as forms of establishing local regulatory community where local elites would get privileged positions to get access to environmental resources.

Within the local context in Ethiopia, the establishment of national parks in the historically subjugated regions of the South shares much in common with similar phenomenon in colonial Africa. In this regard, the cultural and socio-political identity markers of the Ethiopian state (derived from its core centers) – Amhara-Tigrean ethnicity, Amharic language, Orthodox Christianity, and sedentary and plough agriculture – were fundamental elements of boundary making in the north-south dichotomy. Thus, the south (the periphery) was perceived as a ‘wild’ awaiting the hands of the center to be converted into civilization (Markakis 2011; Turton 2011). During the 1960s, the Ethiopian government adopted the dominant dualist notion of conservation and systematically exported it to its peripheries, which it already categorized as ‘natural’, ‘wasteland’ ‘desolate’ and ‘uninhabited’. Thus, the management approaches of the Nech Sar National Park were partly informed by the global discourses successive Ethiopian regimes adopted, and partly by the perpetual representation of pastoralist and agro-pastoralist life styles as ‘backward’ that would justify state interventions as legitimate steps for development.
Chapter Five

Ethnic Federalism and Contested Spaces in Ethiopia: Situating the Nech Sar National Park in the Political Discourse

Introduction

Within the century-long history of modern Ethiopia, the country embarked on a remarkable reconfiguration of political order in 1991, marking a major departure from its political tradition at least in principle (Dereje 2010; Markakis 2011). The reconfiguration of the political order was both cultural and political in nature. Culturally, it deconstructed and questioned the national identity of the state, which was associated with one ethnic group – the Amhara – and its language, religion and culture. Politically, it challenged the century-old hegemony of the center and centralization of state power. In chapter four, I have discussed how center-periphery relations were constructed and maintained in the country’s political, economic and cultural patterns, as well as mythical imaginations. The Abyssinian state that later became the modern Ethiopian empire was crafted in conformity with Amhara and Tigrean cultural ethos and religious understandings (Donham 1986; Markakis 2011). Since the mid-nineteenth century, a highly centralized and hegemonic state was established, whereby the core Abyssinian constituents controlled the state’s political, economic and cultural affairs. In the process of creating such a hegemonic state, the peoples in the periphery were excluded from the political participation and socio-economic benefits that the state is supposed to provide its citizens.

The new political order of the post-1991 period can be seen as an attempt to reverse both the cultural and political foundations of the Ethiopian state by institutionalizing ethnic federalism. I would argue that despite conspicuous debates between its proponents, who consider it a solution to redress the century-long Amhara domination, and its detractors, who perceive it as a divisive political system that threatens national integrity, ethnic federalism demonstrated some levels of progress in the country’s political culture.

In this chapter, I will briefly discuss the ideological tenets of ethnic federalism focusing on how the remapping of the political order has changed the center-periphery relations. By doing so, I will probe into the lived reality of the new political order by focusing on community voices,
representation and participation, particularly regarding the planning and management of the Nech Sar National Park. This specific case acts as a mirror to gain an insight into the broader political and economic dispositions in the country and informs us about the nature of state-society relations at large. I argue that the national park is one among many contested arenas in which the national political discourse encounters local realities. Therefore, by taking the experience from the Nech Sar National Park within the context of the post-1991 political and economic orders, I will investigate what the new political order means for the local communities who, despite the apparent new forms of empowerment, continue to face different forms of intervention from the federal and regional states.

5.1. The Reconfiguration of the Periphery within the New Political Order

In the mid twentieth century, the quest for deconstructing the hegemony of the center flared up among different sections of the Ethiopian population, especially in those regions incorporated by force into the state through the empire-building project. However, the major challenge to the bogus ambition of nation-building came from one of the historical centers, Tigray, which was the center of Abyssinian state formation. In any case, social dissatisfaction from different corners of the population first invoked mass movement under different banners that questioned the century-long ambitions of the Abyssinians in building the nation according to ethnic, religious and cultural sentiments of the dominant group during the 1960s (Markakis 1994). Questions of nationalities were invoked for the first time as potent political agenda, serving as instruments of mass mobilization during the period of student movement in the 1960s and early-1970s in which different ethno-nationalist movements, including the current architects of ethnic federalism, participated (Balsvik 1985; Merera 2003).

Initially, the activists in the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) were inspired by the Marxist-Leninist ideology of national oppression and prescribed nations and nationalities’ right to self-determination, including the right of secession as a solution to cure the problem (Merera 2003; Asebe 2012a). By doing so, university students challenged the state hegemony and domination. For example, an article written by Wallelign Mekonnen, then student at Addis Ababa University (formerly Haile Selassie I University), “sparked a political bombshell for the regime by explicitly addressing ethnicity and exposing the Amhara dominance and oppression to the public” (Asebe 2012a: 6). A portion of his article reads as follows:

188
Is it [Ethiopian national identity] not simply Amhara and to a certain extent Amhara-Tigre supremacy? Ask anybody what Ethiopian culture is. Ask anybody what Ethiopian language is. Ask anybody what Ethiopian religion is. Ask anybody what the national dress is. It is either Amhara or Amhara-Tigray!! To be a ‘genuine Ethiopian’ one has to speak Amharic, to listen to Amharic music, to accept the Amhara-Tigre religion, Orthodox Christianity, and to wear the Amhara-Tigre shama in international conferences. In some cases to be an ‘Ethiopian’, you will even have to change your name. In short, to be an Ethiopian, you will have to wear an Amhara mask (Quoted in Balsvik 1985: 277).

Wallelign’s article and other similar works by the student circle questioned the bogus ambition of the Abyssinian nation-building project, which equated Ethiopian national identity to Amhara ethnic identity, with many dozens of nations and nationalities being considered as subjects rather than equal citizens of the country (Markakis 1994). The students encompassed different ethnic backgrounds.

During the 1970s, different ethno-nationalist movements were established, embracing ethnicity as a primary instrument of mass mobilization to redress the ethnic-based dominations and exploitation that had engulfed the country since the late nineteenth century. One of the ethno-nationalist movements is the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), established in 1974 as a guerrilla movement (Vaughan 2003). I briefly elaborate on the political ideology of the TPLF because upon creating other ethnic-based movements and aligning with already existing ones, TPLF has continued as the central architect of ethnic federalism and in general the mastermind of the new political order in the country. Despite its representation as the orbit of ancient Abyssinian ‘civilization’ and state formation, Tigray lost its political role in the country’s power game, particularly following the death of emperor Yohannes IV (1872-1889) in a war with the Mahdist Sudan in 1889 at the battle of Matama. The shift of political center from Tigray to Shewa was both a change in geopolitical center and constituted ethnicity. Beginning from the mid eighteenth century, power contention between Amhara and Tigrean regional lords changed the relation between the two into inter-ethnic competition. This rivalry continued until the formation of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1989 as a coalition of political parties from Tigray, Amhara, Oromo and Southern Ethiopian Nations, Nationalities and Peoples. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the political ‘marriage’ has settled the historical tension between the two, given that the opposition parties are still organized along ethnic lines, contesting the TPLF/EPRDF regime.

I would now like to return to my initial point of TPLF’s political struggle. After emperor Menelik II assumed power in 1889, ethnic-based political domination, economic exploitation, cultural
marginalization and generally state hegemony under the Amhara supremacy became the common feature in modern Ethiopian history (Markakis 1994; Vaughan 2003). Although the nature of state repression and exploitation differs between provinces, with the extreme repressive system imposed on the subjugated south, Tigreans also felt the pains of domination (Vaughan 2003). Later in the 1960s and 1970s, ethno-nationalists from different ethnic groups, including those in Tigray, articulated the economic impoverishment and political underrepresentation of their people into ethnic questions. Thus, informed by the Marxist-Leninist ideology of national oppression thesis, TPLF also mobilized the Tigrean mass to emancipate the people from Amhara oppression, whether by establishing independent state or within the larger Ethiopian framework (Vaughan 2003; Aregawi 2009). Thus, TPLF embraced ethnic federalism and its principles of the right of self-determination of nationalities, with the historical center turned into a periphery, at least in terms of economic, political and social representations, if not in terms of its cultural representation in the state. Through the umbrella party – the EPRDF – the TPLF was able to entrench to the broader regions in Ethiopia beyond its original base in Tigray.

After taking state power by deposing the military regime in May 1991, EPRDF formally institutionalized ethnicity by restructuring the administrative map along ethno-linguistic lines (see map 2 in chapter one). More importantly, the 1995 Constitution declared the establishment of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), embracing the approach of federal arrangement that in principle claims to be ‘coming together’ of member states on a voluntary basis (Dereje 2006; Turton 2006; Berhanu 2009). In principle, the constitution introduced a new chapter in the process of nation-building in the country, with a remarkable departure from the past, by reversing both the identity and political foundation of the state. As Markakis (2011: 237) maintains:

[T]he 1995 constitution was a remarkable departure from Ethiopian political tradition. It rejected the unitary model of the state and the centralized form of government that previous regimes had struggled to forge. It accepted cultural pluralism and rejected the link between culture, nationality and citizenship inherent in the model. It recognized the voluntary nature of membership in the state, as well as the right to renounce it. All in all, it seemed a reversal of direction followed in the century-old process of Ethiopian state building.

From the onset, I would like to make two important points clear prior to moving to the discussion. First, it is not the primary objective of this chapter to discuss in detail about the party ideology of the EPRDF government – the architect of ethnic federalism and the mastermind of policies, strategies and programs in the country for the last twenty-three years. I will rather focus on how the new political order has reconfigured center-periphery relations, in both principle and practice, as well as what such a reconfiguration entails in state-society relations. Second, it is not my intention to analyze the general discourses of ethnic federalism in terms of its practices and consequences.
Since 1991, these issues have become major topics of debates among Ethiopian and foreign scholars, with several books, articles and dissertations produced on the topics (see Aalen and Tronvoll 2009; Aalen 2008; Abbink 1997, 2009; Asebe 2010; 2012a; Assefa 2006; Clapham 2002, 2006, 2009; Dereje 2006, 2010; Merera 2003; Turton 2006; Vaughan 2003, among others). My aim is rather to highlight some of the promises of ethnic federalism, particularly concerning the historical peripheries, as well as investigating its lived realities.

The new political order was thought to introduce two fundamental changes. First, an attempt to deconstruct the historical hegemony of the center and the centralization of the state was promised in the constitution by introducing the devolution of state power to constituent members of the federation that were built along ethnic lines. Second, the new political order ostensibly seemed to be a radical departure from the past by divorcing the century-old marriage between Amhara ethnicity, religion, culture and state identity and Abyssinian/Ethiopian state identity. This divorce was intended by recognizing all nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia as important contributors in building a ‘New Ethiopia’ (Assefa 2006; Berhanu 2009). Markakis (2011: 279) summarized how both the decentralization of state power and the recognition of cultural pluralism were meant to contribute to build a sense of belongingness of the peoples in the peripheries, noting that:

[T]he introduction of a decentralized federal system of government promised to end the centre’s historical monopoly of ruling power, while the reformulation of Ethiopia’s national identity on the basis of cultural pluralism lifted the burden of cultural inferiority from the periphery and the threat of forced assimilation. This was fundamental shift that opened new and hopeful perspectives for the country’s future.

In principle, decentralization means the devolution of state power to lower administrative structures and the empowerment of local level decision makers to decide on economic, political, cultural and other social affairs of their communities. Nevertheless, as will be discussed later in this chapter, the success of this unfinished political project should be evaluated based upon how the political discourse is translated into practice.

5.1.1. Recognition of Cultural Pluralism

The preamble of the 1995 constitution begins by subscribing to the notions of common belongingness and embracing cultural diversity as follows:

We, the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia: Strongly committed, in full and free exercise of our right to self-determination, to building a political community founded on the rule of law and capable of ensuring a lasting peace, guaranteeing a democratic order, and advancing our economic and social development; [f]irmly convinced that the fulfillment of
this objective requires full respect of individual and people’s fundamental freedoms and rights, to live together on the basis of equality and without any sexual, religious or cultural discrimination (FDRE Constitution 1995, Preamble, emphasis in Original).

In contrast to the historical marginalization of the people in the periphery in terms of cultural, political, economic and social values and practices, the recognition of ‘nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia’ as visible constituents of the federation marked a remarkable reversal of the past political order. During the imperial period under Emperor Haile Selassie I (1930-1974), the emperor was celebrated as ‘elect of God’ and the law vested absolute power upon him. The emperor and members of his royal family, as well as loyal nobilities, not only monopolized state power but also the identity of the state, with which members of the core center identified themselves.

Although constitutional analysis is not the central objective of this section, an overview of the 1955 revised constitution of the imperial regime provides us a glimpse into the state-society relations of the period. The proclamation that promulgated the adoption of the revised constitution reads as follows:

WHEREAS, twenty-four years ago, at the beginning of Our Reign, We granted to Our faithful subjects and proclaimed a Constitution for the Empire of Ethiopia; and WHEREAS, Almighty God, the source of all benefits, has strengthened and inspired us to lead Our beloved People, during Our Reign, through the greatest of trials and hardships, to an era of great progress in all fields; and WHEREAS, being desirous of consolidating the progress achieved and of laying a solid basis for the happiness and prosperity of the present and future generations of Our People, We have prepared a Revised Constitution for Our Empire after many years of searching study and reflection; and WHEREAS, Our Parliament, after due examination and deliberation has submitted to Us its approval of this Revised Constitution; Now therefore, We, Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia, do, on the occasion of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of Our Coronation, hereby proclaim and place into force and effect as of to-day, the Revised Constitution of the Empire of Ethiopia for the benefit, welfare and progress of Our beloved People. Given in Our Imperial Capital, on this the 24th day of Tekemt [October], 1948 (Ethiopian Calendar), and on the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of Our Coronation.\(^\text{10}\)

Moreover, articles 2 and 4 of the revised constitution clearly attached state identity to ethnic lines, which was built upon the legend of hereditary linkage between the emperor and king Solomon of Jerusalem, as can be understood from the following statements in the constitution:

The Imperial dignity shall remain perpetually attached to the line of Haile Selassie I, descendant of King Sahle Selassie, whose line descends without interruption from the dynasty of Menelik I, son of the Queen of Ethiopia, the Queen of Sheba, and King Solomon of Jerusalem (Article 2). By virtue of His Imperial Blood, as well as by the anointing which He has received, the person of the Emperor is sacred, His dignity is inviolable and His Powers indisputable. He is consequently entitled to all the honors due to Him in accordance with

tradition and the present Constitution. Anyone so bold as to seek to injure the Emperor will be punished (Articles 2&4 of the 1955 Revised Constitution).11

The proclamation and the above articles in the constitution clearly indicate the invisibility of diversities of the Ethiopian peoples and the exclusion of the non-center from the making of the state. The pronoun ‘We’ in the two constitutions has different meanings. The preamble of the 1995 constitution begins with the pronoun ‘We’, as in “We the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia”, while the proclamation for the 1955 revised constitution begins with the pronoun ‘We’, as in “We granted to our faithful subjects and proclaimed a Constitution for the Empire of Ethiopia”. While the pronoun “We” was used to represent the emperor rather than the peoples of Ethiopia in the 1955 constitution, the 1995 constitution considers the peoples as “authors” of the constitution itself. However, practical issues regarding the translation of the constitutional provisions into practice have reflected points of contention in both cases.

Under the past regimes, different ethnic groups in the country were denied their dignity of existence as distinctive groups and were forced to comply with alien language, religion and culture in their pursuit to participate in the country’s socio-political affairs. As many scholars have indicated regarding the assimilation policy against the diverse nationalities in the conquered regions under the previous regimes, the Ethiopian empire worked hard to relinquish their identity by demoting their language, culture, religion and indigenous system of governance (Markakis 1994; Mekuria 1997; Hamesso 2001). The military regime’s modernist dream worsened the situation of cultural practices by denouncing them as ‘backward’ and being at odds with the government’s development and modernization programs (Dereje 2011). In the post-1991 period, constitutional recognition and formal celebration of traditional practices have been evident, although Amhara nationalists still find such recognition too bitter to swallow.

It can be argued that the recognition of cultural pluralism within the new political order has been anticipated to boost the psychological mindset of the peoples in the periphery by erasing their cultural stigmatization, historical distortion and, more importantly, by empowering every ethnic group (nations, nationalities and peoples). In terms of language and culture rights for example, the constitution opens the space for all ethnic groups, “to speak, to write and to develop its own language; to express, to develop and to promote its culture; and to preserve its history” (Article 39.2, FDRE Constitution 1995). Despite practical limitations that I will discuss in the next section,

11 http://psokolovsky.tripod.com/constitution.html
it can be considered as a breakthrough to gain the constitutional recognition of self-government for the peoples in the extreme geographical and social peripheries, such as the Anywaa and Nuer in Gambella, the Gumuz in Benishangul Gumuz, the Mursi, Surma and Nyangatom in South Omo, the Somali and Afar, to mention a few (Clapham 2009). In areas of resource ownership and utilization, the new political order presumably grants different ethnic groups the right of administering, utilizing and managing resources on territories they historically inhabited. Accordingly, it is against this backdrop of departure from the historical past that contradictions between the lived realities of the political order and community expectations will be discussed later in this chapter.

5.1.2. Decentralization of State Power

The decentralization of state power was another major area intended to deconstruct the center hegemony and centralize the government system. The two constitutions during the Haile Selassie’s imperial regime (1930-1974) and military rule (1974-1991) had enacted a firm centralized system of government by restricting the autonomy of administrative regions, let alone granting self-government to ethnic groups. For example, according to the 1955 revised constitution, “[T]he Sovereignty of the Empire is vested in the Emperor and the supreme authority over all the affairs of the Empire is exercised by Him as the Head of the State, in the manner provided for in the present Constitution” (1955 Revised Constitution, article 26)\(^\text{12}\). Far beyond the concentration of power at the center, it is fair to argue that power was monopolized in the hands of the emperor, as clearly stipulated in article 27 in the constitution. It reads, “[T]he Emperor determines the organization, powers and duties of all Ministries, executive departments and the administration of the Government and appoints, promotes, transfers, suspends and dismisses the officials of the same” (1955 Revised Constitution, Article 27)\(^\text{13}\).

In the post-1991 period, decentralization did not merely mean the structural devolution of power from the center to subsequent lower administrative units (regions, zones and districts); rather, it entailed reconfiguration of the state structure from a unitary system to a federal arrangement. The Ethiopian ethnic federalism has been portrayed as if it constituted a voluntary membership of constituent groups into the federation, which subscribes to the notion of federalism called ‘coming together’ in contrast to the top-down imposition of federal arrangement, termed ‘holding together’ (Berhanu 2009). In fact, the federal system maintained the state that was built through conquest and

\(^\text{13}\) http://www.angelfire.com/ny/ethiocrown/Constitution.html
thus it best fits the ‘holding together’ federal arrangement rather than ‘coming together’. In any case, the 1995 constitution went very far in the country’s history of hegemonic center in including a controversial article that grants nations, nationalities and peoples of the country the unconditional right to self-determination, up to and including secession (Berhanu 2009). Article 39 sub-articles 1 and 3 of the constitution stipulate the following:

Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to Self-determination, including the right to secession. [...] Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has the right to a full measure of self-government, which includes the right to establish institutions of government in the territory that it inhabits, and to equitable representation in state and Federal governments (Article 39 Sub articles 1 &3, FDRE Constitution 1995).

Some scholars argue that issues of ethnic-based domination under the Amhara supremacy during the imperial regime and the heavy hand of the military rule necessitated the provenance of carrying ethnicity as a rallying political instrument during the heydays of ethno-nationalist movements in the 1960s and 1970s. The architects of ethnic federalism learned from their home region in Tigray that the ethnicity card could be played within the larger Ethiopian context both to win legitimacy from non-Tigrean mass as well as experimenting with new forms of democratization along Western notions of multination federalism (Vaughan 2003). Whatever the objective behind such political machination, there is no doubt that it generated a sense of recognition in the mindset of people in the peripheries, for whom issues of self-government had previously been unimaginable (Markakis 2011). According to the federal arrangement, administrative regions and their respective lower units established along ethno-linguistic lines were believed to be autonomous with respect to the right to administer their own affairs and govern the people and their resources. In this context, the federal arrangement can be considered as a process of restoring the autonomy the peripheral groups lost during the late nineteenth century Abyssinian conquest.

On paper, the constitution defines the role of the federal and regional states by limiting the former to major national issues such as defense, foreign policy, currency, inter-regional affairs and national economic policies and strategies (Berhanu 2009; Markakis 2011). It was assumed that the federal arrangement would boost the economic capacities of the regions by empowering them to administer resources, plan and extract revenues and administer investment within their respective areas of jurisdiction. Nevertheless, the regional states’ autonomy and right to decide upon investment projects particularly related to land was retracted in 2010, with the federal government since being formally entitled to control, monitor and administer processes of transferring land in the regions to foreign or domestic investors (Assefa 2013). Although the question of whether the regional states voluntarily gave up their right over land or whether it was political decision from ‘above’ needs
further research, it clearly shows how regional states are gradually becoming nominal administrative units with limited power over key aspects such as land, budget, investment, taxation, education and other major social service sectors. Moreover, the lack of fiscal devolution and the regions’ increased dependency on the federal government for financial subsidies are among the major weaknesses of the federal arrangement, indirectly paralyzing the economic and political autonomy of the regions.

From a different angle, apart from the psychological aspect of empowering the historically marginalized groups, some scholars argue that decentralization could be a right approach to enhance the economic development and democratization in the country by ensuring the equal participation and equitable distribution of resources (Taye and Tegegne 2007). The discourse presumably seeks to redress the past asymmetrical power relationship between state and society and presumes to ensure equal opportunities for the 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.

In principle, ethnic federalism is supposed to serve as a path to democratization and development, harnessing ethnicity for such purposes. This is supposed to be achieved by granting ethnic groups the right for self-determination and empowering them to freely exercise their culture, knowledge, language and religion towards the same vision (Asebe 2012a). However, Mohammed and Markakis (1998: 8) critically warn us that the success of this unfinished project will depend on “whether the formal, i.e., constitutional provisions of decentralization and democratization are realized in practice.” Indeed, I will discuss this critical dimension of the political order in the next section.

5.2. The Lived Reality of the New Political Order (mixed results)

In the previous section, I outlined some of the promises of the new political order and some aspects that marked it as a remarkable departure from the past. The devolution of state power, rights to self-government and autonomy, recognition of cultural pluralism and, more importantly, the reversal of center-periphery asymmetrical power relations and deconstruction of the identity of the state that was attached to a dominant ethnic group were among the remarkable features of the new political
order, at least in principle. This is why the early-1990s was considered as the ‘honeymoon’ period for the proponents of ethnic federalism as a dawn of democratization, peace, stability and development in the country. Such enthusiasm was more evident among the people in the periphery, because the new system promised them something that they had not experienced for the past century or more. In this section, I will discuss the lived reality of the new political order, with particular emphasis on the center-periphery relations.

Ethnic federalism has generated mixed results. On the one hand, it has created a government system that has remarkably reversed the century-old centralized system and granted rights of self-government to administrative regions. Besides the opening of some political spaces for the exercise of multiparty democracy in the early years, the government has delivered in some areas of social services, such as education and healthcare. On the other hand, ethnic federalism has ethnicized every aspects of life among the peoples of Ethiopia. As Abbink (2009) argues, “ethnicity has become the basis of defining every form of social interaction, policy formation, citizenship, education policy, budget allocation and inter-group relations in the post-1991 political order in Ethiopia.” As a result, inter-ethnic conflicts have become apparently frequent during the post-1991 period, despite the relative peace and security in terms of major wars. Moreover, issues of the further marginalization of the periphery have become evident owing to the government’s policy of “Land to Investors” by reversing the motto of the 1960s Student Movement, which was based on “Land to the Tiller” (Markakis 2011). In the following few paragraphs, I will discuss both dimensions of the mixed results of ethnic federalism, to contextualize the discussions on the Nech Sar National Park within the macro-political arena.

At a macro level analysis, EPRDF government’s model of ethnic federalism can be marked as a successful experiment, at least in some key areas, especially during the model’s heydays in the 1990s. Despite continuous intervention and regulation from the federal government, which undermines the autonomy of regional governments (Assefa 2006), the establishment of regional states and lower administrative units along ethnic lines has increased a sense of recognition, identity and autonomy among the people in the periphery. This is thought to reconfigure their peripheral status and is believed to have brought them closer to the center.

Until the 2005 contested election, there were relatively open political spaces in which multiparty politics was exercised. Opposition parties, mainly organized along ethnic lines, won some seats in
the past three subsequent elections (from 1995 to 2005). Besides the constitutional provision of freedom of expression, Ethiopians began to enjoy the right of free press until the government closed down almost all private newspapers in the post-2005 election, allegedly accusing them of instigating conflicts (Markakis 2011). Some scholars argue that the EPRDF government's economic policies were also partly translated into economic schemes, enabling the country to record significant economic growth (Clapham 2009; Dereje 2010). For such a group of scholars, the government's emphasis on rural agriculture and to some extent the 'free market' economy was contributory factors for the so-called economic growth. However, issues of fair distribution of the economy and resources remain points of contention. In areas of decentralization, the distribution of primary education and healthcare services to peripheral regions was enhanced because regional and other local administrative units were given the autonomy to decide upon these matters. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the coming to power of EPRDF ended the long and large-scale wars that the country suffered during the military regime and installed relative peace and stability (Hizkias 1996; Abbink 2009).

Another important result of ethnic federalism worth mentioning is the establishment of 'autonomous' regional states and their respective lower level administrative units. The following statement by Clapham (2009: 187) indicates some aspects concerning the decentralization of power and the continuation of federal state intervention:

To have a government in Konso or Welayta that was visibly run by Konsos or Welaytas was a revolutionary change in Ethiopian politics, and one, which, like the land reform of 1975, established a new, and for many purposes irreversible transformation in the relationship between people and the state. That policies were still to a very large extent made in Addis Ababa for local implementation, and that the constitutional guarantee of a right of secession was more apparent than real, did not at least initially matter anything like so much as the change in the visible appearance of government on the ground.

From regional states to local administrative units, administrative councils were established to deliberate on issues pertaining to their specific areas. Regardless how the autonomy is contested, there are clear cases in which local governments can decide on local budget and other projects, such as in the areas of cultural revitalization, language choice for administration and education, designing education curriculum for primary level and the extraction of taxation from small business enterprises.

However, the relationship between the federal government and regional states has remained contentious throughout the last two decades, with latent frictions between the federal state, regional states and different administrative units along ethnic lines apparently testing the federation in many
instances. This includes claims for regional status, like the Sidama\textsuperscript{14} question, as well as claims for autonomous zonal status, particularly in the multiethnic Southern Ethiopian nations, nationalities and peoples (SNNP) regional state (Merera 2003; Vaughan 2003). As Assefa (2006) argues, continued intervention from the federal state in the affairs of the regional states has threatened the latter’s autonomy to the extent that the country has once again returned to centralization. Although it has granted some form of self-government to historically marginalized groups in principle, the EPRDF has continued to play a centralizing role by reducing regional and local administrative divisions to the status of implementers of policies made in Addis Ababa (Assefa 2006; Clapham 2009). This ambivalent role of the federal state and contrasts between the constitutional provision and practical realities are part of latent tensions between regions and the federal state, as highlighted in the case of management of resources such as protected areas, to which I will return shortly in this chapter.

Among the drawbacks of ethnic federalism, I will focus on two fundamental areas directly relevant to the current study, namely issues of ethnicization of resource ownership and their role in instigating inter-ethnic conflicts and aspects of strong presence of the center in the peripheries. Issues of one-party domination in the country’s political landscape, continued intervention of the federal state in the affairs of the regions and the narrowing of political spaces and limited freedom of press, including the collapse of civil societies in recent years, have become topics of debate among politicians, academics and human rights organizations (Assefa 2006; Abbink 2009; Markakis 2011). Of course, it is not my objective to repeat the same debate in this research. Despite the right for self-government being granted to ethnic groups to the extent that they could negotiate aspects of federation up to secession, ethnic federalism has increased inter-group divergences rather than building on similarities. In fact, such creation of inter-group tension is not necessarily a problem that can be attributed to the notions of ethnic federalism, but rather due to weaknesses in implementation and the way in which it has been translated into practice (Asebe 2010, 2012d). As a result, common resource areas happened to attract ethnic labels of ownership from which members of different groups were restricted. Thus, territorial claims, competition over natural resources and questions of autonomy have triggered conflicts.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14}The Sidama are the largest ethnic group in the SNNP regional state with a population number of nearly three million people according to the 2007 population census of Ethiopia. From 1991-1992 following the coming to power of EPRDF, Sidama was organized as ‘autonomous’ region but it was reduced to a status of zone since then. Following such rearrangement, different Sidama political actors both in the government and in opposition were raising questions of regional status and at times, it instigated conflict between these actors and the regional/federal authorities (Aalen 2011).

\textsuperscript{15}For different inter-ethnic conflicts in the post-1991 period such as the cases between Borana and the Somali, Guji and Burji, Guji and Gedeo, Afar and Karayyu, Guji and Sidama, Nuer and Anywaa, Oromo and Amhara settlers in East
As I have discussed elsewhere on the Guji-Burji conflict, contestations over resources have assumed ethnic dimensions through the involvement of local ethnic entrepreneurs reactivating old memories of antagonism within the current ethnic based divisions (Asebe 2012d). Conflicts between pastoral communities or between pastoralists and agriculturalists over resources (farmland, grazing land, water sources, hunting grounds, etc.) are common occurrences elsewhere in Africa (Zelessa 2008). However, conflicts in post-1991 Ethiopia have mainly adopted ethnic dimensions for resource claims or in questions for self-government and autonomy. One of the early tests to the implementation of the federal arrangement came from the Guji Oromo and Gedeo, who entered into two rounds of conflicts in 1995 and 1998 concerning questions of self-government (Hussien 2002; Asebe 2010).

Given that decentralization meant to open opportunities for local elites in administering their respective districts, the first decade in the experiment of the political model experienced a proliferation of questions concerning the establishment of distinctive self-governing units based upon any possible markers of differences. In the SNNPR, there are over fifty ethnic groups merged together, albeit with different levels of demands for autonomy (Vaughan 2003; Cohen 2006; Markakis 2011). Whether these consequences are fundamental drawbacks of ethnic federalism or weaknesses of the government in translating its discourses into practice is a matter of controversy. In my view, ethnic federalism could have been a viable system of democratization and development process, harnessing ethnicity for the purposes of establishing harmonious relationships between the state and society through genuine empowerment and participation. However, EPRDF has partly failed to genuinely translate its policy rhetoric into practice and partly decentralized conflicts from the center as a mechanism of consolidating its power and building legitimacy as an arbiter of inter-regional or inter-group tensions.

The second area of discussion, which is not a direct consequence of ethnic federalism, but rather seems to have reversed EPRDF’s assertion of decentralization and self-government of regional states and more importantly enhanced a process of re-marginalization the periphery, is the center’s intrusion into the periphery through its development programs. For many decades, the lowland parts of the country remained marginal to the state’s ‘development’ interests, partly due to the state’s failure to ‘transform’ these regions into economic resources, as well as owing to the long-
established representation of these regions by the mainstream society as ‘wasteland’ and being inhabited by violent pastoral communities. Despite the incorporation of the lowland peripheries into the Ethiopian empire in the late nineteenth century, state presence was minimal during the past regimes (Hagmann and Alemayehu 2008; Markakis 2011). On the other hand, the EPRDF government has successfully reached the periphery, both through its ethnic-based administrative structure and in the form of ‘development’ projects that were aimed at taming the ‘wilderness’ and converting it into an economic resource. It departed from its predecessors in reversing the old assumption about the periphery as a violent prone source of trans-border insecurity and marginal in its contribution to the national economy. The periphery has become viable a source of state economic interest in the form of providing ample arable land for foreign and local investors and government projects, such as a hydroelectric dam, large-scale agricultural projects and tourism.

State intrusion into the periphery during the post-1991 period is evident in two different yet interdependent areas of development interventions. While the first is related to the government’s economic policy of liberalization through the adoption of market liberalism and privatization, attracting foreign and local investors, particularly in areas of agriculture, the second is linked to the government’s ambition to diversify the economy to foster development. To begin with the privatization policy and how it has enhanced the state intrusion into the peripheries, it is imperative to highlight on the ideological shift the TPLF/EPRDF made along the process of assuming state power in 1991 and during the years that followed. TPLF/EPRDF dropped its Marxist ideology soon after it assumed state power and embraced a capitalist ethos of market liberalism and multiparty democracy (Markakis 2011). In the process, privatization and the opening of investment schemes for domestic and foreign investors were envisaged to boost the economy. According to a policy document of the government, granting land to foreign and domestic investors was thought to contribute to the country’s ambition to reduce poverty and ensure sustainable development (SDPRP 2003). To meet its ambitious plans of generating foreign income from agricultural investment sectors, leasing out land in the peripheries to investors has become the government’s major target (Markakis 2011).

The government’s transfer of large tracts of land to investors is a major departure from the 1960s “Land to the Tiller” slogan of the student movement in which the architects of ethnic federalism were part. This new approach of “Land to Investors” sharply contrasts with the notion of self-government of nations and nationalities and their autonomy to decide on their resources. For example, according to the 1995 constitution: “Ethiopian peasants have right to obtain land without
payment and the protection against eviction from their possession. Ethiopian pastoralists have the right to free land for grazing and cultivation as well as the right not to be displaced from their own lands" (FDRE 1995 Constitution, Article 40, sub articles 4 and 5).

By contrast, the constitution has left a loophole for government appropriation of land, given that it reads, "Without prejudice to the right of Ethiopian Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples to the ownership of land, government shall ensure the right of private investors to the use of land on the basis of payment arrangements established by law. Particulars shall be determined by law" (Article 40, sub article 6). The central point is that resettlement schemes are still underway in Ethiopia to create 'empty' land for the investors in the peripheries for the sake of different investment programs. The resettlement program should be assessed in terms of issues related to participation, socio-cultural and economic impacts and customary rights of local communities. For example, agricultural investment programs in Gambella regional state and South Omo in the SNNP regional state and large-scale flower farms in central Oromia have resulted in the resettlement of hundreds of thousands of local people, with serious ecological and social consequences (Markakis 2011, see map below).

Figure 11: A Few Areas of Large-Scale Agri-business in Ethiopia (Adapted from discussions in Markakis 2011)

The second dimension of government meddling in the peripheries has been through its own development projects, including hydroelectric dam construction, sugar cane plantation, sugar factory projects and national parks. The government builds hydroelectric dams to generate electric
power, both for national consumption and as means of generating foreign currency by selling electricity to neighboring countries. Besides hydroelectric power generation, it builds dams establish large-scale irrigation agricultural projects from the water in the reservoirs, as is the case of the Gilgel Gibe III hydroelectric dam under construction on the Omo River. The government’s engagements in large projects such as ten sugar cane plantation and sugar factories currently under construction (six of them in South Omo) reflect just a few cases in which the peripheries have become arenas of state interest and intervention. Different media coverage has speculated that the construction of Gilgel Gibe III hydroelectric dam and the sugar factories will have disastrous ecological and social implications, potentially leading to the displacement of over 500,000 indigenous peoples from the region.16

From the part of the government, the intervention has been justified as a process of modernizing and transforming the peoples in the region. The late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi once stated that:

The Federal government is working hard to bring a permanent solution [to problems pertaining to pastoralists]. The Gilgel Gibe 3 dam is developing rapidly and when it is finished the flood, which has been a huge problem for years in this region, will end forever. It will then be possible to create a big irrigation system in this wide and fertile area of South Omo. Following the good results we have achieved in the Afar region, the government is planning, and working hard to establish, a 150,000-hectare sugarcane development in this area starting this year. When this development work is done, we believe that it will transform the entire basis of the area. This will benefit the people of this area and hundreds of thousands of other Ethiopians, by creating employment. The pastoralists who live around this area will be given some fertile land from this irrigation system, which can be used for their own cultivation. There will be support for the pastoralists to combine agriculture with modern cattle herding.17

By presenting the federal government as a guardian of the people and a legitimate development actor, the then Prime Minister brought the government rhetoric of development down to the pastoralists, whose agency in deciding on their ways of life has been usurped through a top-down development plan by the federal government. According to the government’s version of development, “big irrigation projects, commercial farming as in the case of sugar cane development, creating employment opportunities and introducing combination of agriculture with modern cattle herding have been presented as the basis of transforming the pastoralist lives towards development” (Asebe 2012c).

The establishment of protected areas in the form of national parks is another aspect in which state control of territories in the peripheries has been exercised. Although many national parks were established during the previous regimes, land appropriation for conservation purposes and subsequent resettlement programs have also been underway during the post-1991 period (Turton 2011). While some of the national parks have been established since 1991, the existing parks have been consolidated, gazetted and the resettlement of local people has been made within the current political system. In short, the EPRDF government has also maintained the status quo that made the historical South a home of national parks, with over eighty percent of the national parks in Ethiopia located in this part of the country.

5.3. Ethnic Federalism and Community Voices in the Periphery

In principle, the new political order is supposed to grant ethnic groups the unconditional right to participate in the making of the new federal state. By contrast, the government’s increased interventionist policy seems to have resulted in further suppressing the participation the people in the peripheries in economic and political spheres. In this section, I will discuss the interplay between ethnic federalism and issues of representation and participation of the periphery in the decision-making processes on development projects that affect their lives. More specifically, I will focus on the promises of ethnic federalism, which grants ethnic groups the right to self-determination on the one hand, as well as EPRDF’s shift to a ‘developmental state’ paradigm and how it suppresses notions of participation and representation on the other. In the previous section, I have discussed that the state has penetrated into the periphery through ‘development’ projects. Thus, state intrusion into the periphery changed the center-periphery relationship once again to a form of state predation over the periphery concerning economic interests and political control (Markakis 2011).

In administrative aspects, the EPRDF government has extended its areas of influence far beyond its predecessors by reaching the periphery. One of the major challenges for the TPLF in the late-1980s and early-1990s was the question of transforming its ethno-nationalist program to an Ethiopian framework and thereby gaining legitimacy beyond Tigray. To tackle this challenge, it allied with a few existing ethno-nationalist movements and forged new ones, through which it could reach their respective populace. This was partly successful following the establishment of EPRDF in 1989 (Vaughan 2003; Clapham 2009). However, the establishment of the EPRDF did not solve the historical challenge of successive regimes in the country to their efforts to exert effective control over peripheral regions, particularly the pastoral communities. Thus, in its pursuit of reaching the
people in the peripheries, EPRDF has managed to co-opt local elites (primary school teachers, secondary school dropouts and people with very low political or educational competency), training them in Civil Service University College in Addis Ababa, where they were socialized into the political ideologies and policies of the EPRDF. Upon the completion of their education, these government cadres returned to their home constituencies and assumed administrative positions at different levels, where they served as loyal subjects in implementing the policies and strategies designed in Addis Ababa (Vaughan 2003; Markakis 2011).

Therefore, before converting the territories the state historically represented as ‘wasteland’, ‘desolate’, ‘wild’ and ‘violent’ into economically viable spaces, the EPRDF government has managed to secure it under its administrative control. Through such nominal and symbolic empowerment of the periphery, EPRDF has developed notions of self-government, decentralization and sense of ethnic identities (i.e. sense of pride in one’s markers of distinctive group representations) in the periphery, in both principle and practice. As Dereje (2011) argues, during the post-1991 period, the Anywaa in Gambella regional state have resorted to aspects of self-pride in being distinct from the highlanders, who historically used to demote them under the previous regimes.

However, the honeymoon in the periphery did not last long. After consolidating its administrative grip by establishing satellite parties, the EPRDF government entered into a new chapter of intrusion to the peripheries through the ‘domestication’ of the ‘wilderness’ as an economic resource. Contradictions in the EPRDF’s relations with the periphery emerged from two angles. Firstly, there are some contrasts between constitutional provisions and its practices. It has been stated that, “Nationals have the right to participate in national development and, in particular, to be consulted with respect to policies and projects affecting their community” (FDRE Constitution 1995, Article 43 sub article 2). Nevertheless, because the government already established a dichotomous relations between the center and the peripheries by labeling the latter as ‘backward’, ‘developing’ and ‘emerging’ regions, it rarely recognizes their right to be consulted and participated in development plans. Second, there is an apparent contradiction between the EPRDF’s political rhetoric and its economic interests. Politically, the notions of ethnic federalism envisage the promotion of the self-government of nations, nationalities and peoples in their respective regions and/or units with autonomy. This would entail the right of local administrative units to administer resources or their traditional land according to local norms, values and systems of governance.
Economically, it has devised ambitious plans to transform the economy of the country and the lifestyles of peoples in the country, particularly in the periphery, through large-scale development projects. In the process, there have been apparent clashes between promises of ethnic federalism and development programs of the government (Markakis 2011). In a different context, Dereje (2006, 2013) contends that despite experiencing some senses of political and psychological empowerment, the people in the peripheries practically felt the pains of the new political order as it enhanced their marginalization in terms of economic benefits, political representation and autonomy, and because it has become a factor for the escalation of existing conflicts.

The glaring drawback in the EPRDF’s administration is that it failed to effectively translate its political rhetoric into practice in many cases. For instance, in contrast to the much spoken participatory approach of development, hierarchical structures persist in the state-peasant relationship in the process of implementing development programs. Rather than providing the political spaces for the citizens to contest and negotiate discourses and practices of development, it has become a technocratic and top-down process channeled down to society for implementation (Zerihun 2004). In other words, despite the rhetoric, the new political order has demonstrated a retreat to the hegemony of the center, with strong state intervention into local affairs specifically in the resource-rich peripheries, particularly since the early-2000s. As one former administrator of Amaro district recalled concerning the resettlement process of the Koore in 2004: “the higher officials decided everything without any consultation with us. Neither local people nor the district administration was asked. We were only given orders to resettle the people according to the decision” (interview with former Amaro district administrator, April 2012). This experience of the district administrator was widely shared among Koore local communities in the villages adjoining the national park, who blame the government for ignoring them in the planning processes of the resettlement.

Moreover, both local government officials and local communities on the side of the Guji reflected their discontent concerning the government and the park administration for not considering them as important contributors for the management of the resources. One Guji elder once remarked, “The people from the government visited only the animals but they did not talk to us. We came to know that they care for the animals than for people. When we go to government meetings, they tell us we have right to talk. But when we talk, they detain us. What type of government is this?” (Informant:
Aga Guracha, May 2012). The elder clearly noted the mismatches between the government’s rhetoric and practice in areas of participation and empowerment of the local communities. While the government officials encouraged the local people to be engaged in debates concerning issues that are important to their communities as signals of democratization, the actions of detaining those who are critical in their speech during local meetings can be seen as a strategy of suppressing critical voices. As I will discuss in chapter eight, Galana district administration detained seven Guji elders in April 2012 for appealing to the higher government structure against the destruction of sixty-four houses in Gode village by the district and park administration.

At this point, the basic question to ponder is, how does the government justify its compromise of political rhetoric through development interventions? Although one might give different possible answers to this question, the most common explanation on the part of the government is that the EPRDF government prioritizes economic development over democratic rights. The government intervention into the autonomy of the periphery and its apparent retreat from rhetoric of democracy, good governance, multiparty politics and market liberalism to ‘development’ can be understood as an ideological shift within the EPRDF government, from a neoliberal ethos to a ‘developmental state’ paradigm. After a decade of adopting a neoliberal paradigm mainly along its shift in ideological orientations from Marxist-Leninist philosophy to neoliberal political and economic discourses, the EPRDF has once again began to emulate experiments from the East. Unlike when it was a rebel group, the ideological emulation that the EPRDF has introduced since the early years of the 21st century was not from Russia but rather from the Southeast Asian countries. According to an article posted on a pro-EPRDF website called Aiga Forum, the ideological shift that EPRDF made from a neoliberal political and economic paradigm to a developmental state philosophy has been in response to the failure of the neoliberal experiments during the Structural Adjustment Programs implemented from 1991-2001.18

As the central figure in the country’s political and economic ideologies in the last two decades, the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi was an advocate of a developmental state as an appropriate model for the renaissance of African development. In his monograph published on the Initiative for Policy Dialogue (IPD) website in 2006, Meles described neoliberal paradigms as ‘dead ends’ and developmental state paradigms as ‘new beginnings’ in Africa’s quest for development (Meles 2006). The late Prime Minister argued that the neoliberal paradigm has taken Africa on the wrong path, in

both political and development dimensions, in terms of understanding the underlying problems and the solutions it prescribes. In his opening speech at the AU Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance held in Addis Ababa (24-29 March 2011), Meles urged member states, academic institutions and political parties to further the discussion on a developmental state paradigm and practically institutionalize it in their respective countries as a right path to development in the continent.19

Apart from the bulky debates on theoretical underpinnings of neoliberal versus developmental state perspectives, a developmental state paradigm gives the state the opportunity to intervene into economic schemes while also limiting the participation of citizens in political and economic decision-making processes. A developmental state paradigm is a political and economic school of thought that favors a strong state or one that intervenes and regulates the economy, in contrast to the neoliberal development doctrine, which encourages a night watchman state. In other words, by providing the state the space to control the political and economic schemes, the developmental state paradigm allows the government to justify its resource expropriation, as well as the restriction of local people’s participation. In his latest chapter of the book “Good Growth and Governance in Africa” (Noman et al. 2012, eds.), Meles argues that “developmental state can be semi-democratic and semi-parliamentarian at best” (Meles 2012: 167). This clearly shows how Ethiopia has experimented with being a developmental state at the expense of democratic rights, but rather in favor of strong state intervention in the economy. The idea that the first demand of the poor is ‘bread’ before they ask for other sorts of rights is central among the proponents of a developmental state paradigm, including the EPRDF.

However, the argument that attempts to justify the EPRDF’s shift to a developmental state political and economic discourse in response to the failure of the neoliberal policies is questionable from many angles. In the first place, according to Markakis (2011), the EPRDF has never dropped its Marxist ideology of popular democracy, even during the heydays of its neoliberal experiments in the 1990s. Rather, liberal democratic principles were juxtaposed with a Marxist-Leninist ideology of popular democracy that was largely embedded in the party ideology of the TPLF. Secondly, the assertion that the EPRDF moved to developmental state in response to the failure of neoliberalism masks the internal political and economic motives of the party. The EPRDF government relatively

19file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/user/My%20Documents/Books/Ethiopian%20PM%20bashes%20neoliberalism%20%20AU%20Ministers%20call%20transforming%20rentseeking%20political%20systems%20Danielberhane%27s%20Blog.htm
opened spaces for political parties, civil societies, media and NGOs to engage in political debates in the country during the early years. However, it was challenged along the way, from both within and outside the party. Particularly following the split in TPLF in 2001, which had finally shaken all member parties in the EPRDF, the party has entered into a new chapter of power consolidation in both political and economic schemes. From the outside, pressure from opposition parties, civil societies, the media, international donor countries and organizations for more democratization processes have moved the party in a different direction (Markakis 2011).

The government used developmental state paradigm as a justification of the intervention on the one hand, and as a way of silencing pro-democracy critics on the other. As Meles (2012) argues, to bring sustainable development, the state should first take the leading role in designing, implementing and managing development projects that are autonomous from the society and private sectors. By allowing the interventionist policies of the state, the developmental state proves to be hegemonic at times, in that “the developmental agenda must be hegemonic if successful development is to take place and the developmental state is to be established” (Meles 2012: 168).

5.4. The Experience from the Nech Sar National Park

The Nech Sar National Park should be seen not only as a physical space with valuable environmental resources, but also as a contested political, cultural and symbolic space within which multilayer actors contest, negotiate and at times conflict on the meaning, utilization, management and ownership of the territory. With the articulation of the political order along ethno-linguistic lines in the post-1991 period, resource spaces have become political spaces with ethnic connotations. Thus, apart from the involvement of many actors with different interests, the new political order has also created new forms of representation of the space as a territory that some ethnic groups link to their identity, while others associate it to their history of settlement. One fundamental absurdity in the political model is the absence of an alternative approach to accommodate non-ethnic spaces and territories such as common resources, which are difficult to clearly delineate along ethnic lines. In this regard, the principles of ethnic federalism do not explicitly provide a guideline concerning how to administer protected areas that happened to fall along inter-ethnic borders such as the Awash, Nech Sar, Omo and Mago National Parks. Putting such areas under the federal government would undermine local autonomy, whereas designating them under specific regional state inevitably raises inter-ethnic and inter-regional competition for the ownership and administration of the territories.
For example, in the case of the Nech Sar National Park, different strategies of administration have been attempted, although none of them has been successful to date. From 1991-2004, it was been decentralized to the southern nations, nationalities and peoples (SNNP) regional state, although this strategy instigated discontent from the Oromia regional state, which also claims ownership and administrative right over the territory. Although it was assumed to neutralize the inter-regional contestation by transferring the management of the park to an international company in 2004 through a twenty-five year contract, the company terminated the contract in 2007, mainly due to a lack of inter-regional collaboration between the two regions concerning the issue of the park. Since the withdrawal of the African Parks Foundation (APF), the federal government has administered the park through the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA). In this section, I will treat these different trajectories in the management of the national park, hinting at the national discourses of ethnic federalism and whether or not has fostered or hindered access to common resources and the participation of local communities in issues that affect their lives.

5.4.1. Ethnic Federalism, Decentralization and the National Park

Following the reconfiguration of the administrative map of the country along ethno-linguistic lines, the Nech Sar National Park has been included under the SNNP regional state within the Gamo Gofa Zone. Shortly before the new arrangement, the Guji and Koore people who were evicted during the military regime returned to their former home (inside the park). According to some sources, the people reestablished their living in their previous settlement areas using the opportunities of the power vacuum during the transition following the collapse of the military regime (Dessalegn 2004; Freeman 2006). After people returned to the park territory, a hostile relationship was created between the people and the park (and the wildlife) because the people began to associate the park and its resources with the state. In this context, the state has been seen as a coercive, predatory, exclusionist and suppressive entity. It is evident that due to the nature of the state and the experiences and people's memories of problems related to state induced resettlement and displacements, society has considered the state project and institutions as something to be avoided and resisted. As a result, they have used different strategies to dismantle the national park, the details of which will be the subject of chapters seven and eight. The regime change in 1991 also created a new form of competition between Oromia and SNNP regional states concerning questions of administrative rights over the park and added a different form of claim between the Guji and Koore, which took ethnic lines rather than purely a struggle over environmental resources.
According to claims from Guji elders and political elites from Oromia regional state, this arrangement was in sharp contrast with the principles of ethnic federalism. One government official from Borana zone (Oromia region) argues that:

Our people [the Guji Oromo] have been living in Ergansa [Nech Sar] for many centuries before the park was established. No Koyra [Koore], no Gamo and no other people lived there with the Guji. Our ancestors actually used the current Arba Minch town as their grazing areas and all areas around Abulo were Guji customary lands. The previous government evicted the people from their home but now the dictatorial regime has gone. However, when the new administrative regions were established, the park was included into the Southern region. In reality, it was supposed to be included into our region [Oromia] because the very principle of ethnic federalism is to reconfigure administrative units according to ethno-linguistic aspects of belonging. The people in Gamo Gofa simply contended that the Guji were not legal inhabitants of the area. Unless they deny historical facts, the Guji are rightful inhabitants and thus the area belongs to them. This has created unresolved but latent tension between the two regions (Former administrator of Galana-Abaya District, April 2012).

On the other hand, according to views from the part of officials in the SNNP regional state, particularly in the Gamo Gofa zone, the national park’s inclusion into their region was based on historical records of administration. During the imperial and military regimes, the park was partly administered under the Gamo Gofa and partly under Sidamo provinces, which are now largely under the SNNP regional state. According to members of the Gamo ethnic group, the park is a resource space and not an ethnic space. Nevertheless, one can easily refute this argument from the very notion of ethnic federalism that ethnic groups and their territorial units are the central focus in the reconfiguration. Therefore, if the Gamo or Sidama did not inhabit the present day Nech Sar National Park, how can its inclusion into the region be justified? This contestation is important to mention because it hints at the politicization of resource spaces along ethnic configuration, as well as some inconsistencies in the translation of the federal arrangement into practice. The national park has become an arena of contestation between the two regional states, among local communities, between the park and the local communities, as well as between regional states and the federal government. It has also been a field in which different local and external non-state actors contest different missions, including environmental, economic, human rights, etc.

As part of its decentralization endeavors in other aspects of administration, the government has initially attempted to devolve the administration of national parks to their respective regions, with the exception of few contested national parks such as the Awash National Park (Jacobs and Schloeder 2001). Later, many other national parks were centralized under the federal government due to tensions between regions or different adjoining ethnic groups. For example, Awash, Gambella, Semien Mountains, Nech Sar, Omo and Abijata Shalla National Parks are now under the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (Young 2012). In the 1990s, during the time in which it administered the Nech Sar National Park, the SNNP regional government began an ambitious plan
to rehabilitate three major parks (Nech Sar, Omo and Mago National Parks), with five-year financing from the European Development Fund. The preliminary phase of the project began in 1994 for two years, during which it intended to accomplish gazettlement of the three parks, resettlement of people who lived within the boundaries of the parks and strengthening the capacity of the then Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Organization (EWCO) in areas of legal, infrastructural and institutional capacities (Turton 2002).

According to the interim report of the preliminary phase of the project, the resettlement of about 3,220 Guji and 3,580 Koore individuals who were living inside the park was proposed as an agenda not to be compromised (Technical Report No.4, 1995). This relocation plan was arranged to meet the donor’s precondition for further large-scale funding, as stated in the report, “Concerning Nechisar National Park, the main precondition to any further development inputs is the successful relocation of the people living in the park according to a programme that satisfies all parties” (Technical Report No. 4, 1995: 3). One of the glaring weaknesses of the project implementation process was the park administration’s rush to meet the prescribed precondition of resettling the people who lived in and around the park, without due consideration of their customary rights. As the technical report indicated that the park administration considered the people as illegal intruders, it should be noted that all resettlement plans, socio-economic surveys, discussions with the people and plans for establishment of community services (if any) were to be conducted within this asymmetrical power relation, between a ‘legitimate’ government body and ‘illegal’ settlers. It was stated that, “thirty years ago, there were no people resident in the park. At various times since then, Koyera and Guji people have settled in the park to cultivate and graze cattle so that today over 7,000 people and 4,000 cattle occupy the park – considerably outnumbering the large wild animals” (Technical Report No. 4, 1995, Annex 1:2).

According to a socio-economic survey in 1995, over 460 Guji and 550 Koore households were reported to have been engaged in agro-pastoralism and farming in the park, respectively (Getachew 2007). It should be noted that any discussion or negotiation between the state and the local communities concerning the future of the national park would be difficult because both actors held competing narratives about the history of human settlement in the area. Eventually, the government planned the resettlement program with serious drawbacks. In the preparation for the implementation of the project, the participation of grassroots communities was not recognized, apart from discussions held with few local elites whose legitimacy as representatives was contested, given that most of them were handpicked by the state based upon their loyalty. The project was planned
without genuine participation of the local communities. As a result, some argue that the government sought to impose its notions of biodiversity conservation in a military style of top-down approach (Freeman 2006).

As can be learned from the attendees at the final workshop held in Arba Minch town in May 1995, only nine community elders were represented from ten Guji and Koore villages, while the remaining thirty-one participants were government officials from park administration, district offices and regional bureaus (Technical Report No. 4, 1995). Here, I would argue that the government resorted to the nominal type of ‘participation’ to pursue its predetermined conservation agenda. Although participation might take different forms, such as nominal, passive and interactive participation, the only way for development projects to achieve success is through genuine interactive participation, whereby local communities participate in the planning, management and benefit of the project (Turton 2002). The essential feature of interactive participation is that local people are involved in the design, planning and implementation of a project from the inception to the end. As Turton (2002: 110) argues: “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.”

Thus, the management approach of the Nech Sar National Park has largely been exclusionary of the local people, except the involvement of a few local elites whose participation has been considered by their members as the state’s strategy of controlling and gaining access to the communities. According to Halake Chari, a Guji elder from Mi’o, who I interviewed in Darba Manana in February 2012, “The government people always know how to inspect what we think about the park. They pick one or two young men and give them money or I do not know what they do but when they come back to our villages, these individuals are completely changed. They pass our secrets to the government. That is how the government controls our activities.”

One can imagine the nature of discussion that would take place between participants within such power-laden contexts. According to key informants, the chairman of the workshop delegitimized the customary right of both groups by presenting them as illegal settlers and attempted to persuade the local community representatives to accept the resettlement plan without further precondition. However, the representatives, particularly of the Guji Oromo, finally pledged to discuss with their community members because they believed that they had to discuss on the issue at community level.
rather than deciding based upon the views of a few individuals.

Another drawback in the process of the resettlement plan was that beginning from the inception throughout the planning period, local communities did not get the chance to contribute their views. Government technocrats designed and brought the plan to the workshop without the consent of the people. Accordingly, it ignored the cultural, spiritual and livelihood connectedness of the people to the environment. Rather, it only focused on economic assessments such as fruit trees as major variables for compensation and for provisions of other social services in the new settlement areas. For example, although it recognizes the Guji as a ‘nomadic’ group, the new resettlement plan was meant to completely shift the Guji lifestyle into sedentary farming. Apart from the cultural repercussions of such a shift in livelihood style, the difficulty it would pose upon the people to adjust to new environment with a new way of life should have at least been taken into consideration.

The EU funding for the Nech Sar National Park phased out at the preliminary phase because the Ethiopian government failed to fulfill the preconditions of resettling the Guji and Koore households that was set in the financing agreement. Freeman (2006) stated that the resettlement program failed because local communities, and particularly the Guji, resisted the resettlement plans. A former warden of the park who later served as head of the Culture and Tourism Bureau in the SNNP regional state pointed out in one of my interviews that Oromia regional state was responsible for the failure of the EU project in the mid-1990s and later for the withdrawal of the African Parks Foundation in 2007. According to the informant, government officials from Oromia regional state “were discontented from the very beginning with the park’s inclusion into the south, and thus they were encouraging the Guji not to agree to the resettlement plans” (personal communication with former Warden, March 2012). Based upon fierce resistance from the Guji, who were indirectly backed by the Oromia regional state, the resettlement plan did not succeed. The plan to resettle the Koore families was also suspended because both the people and government officials from Amaro district insisted that the decision should also be effected on the Guji.

The government did not proceed to demarcating and gazetting the park, given that it raised discontent and resistance from local communities, for whom the space represents economic, cultural, spiritual and historical meanings. For example, from Arba Minch side, low-income sections of the town dwellers, mainly women and youth, depend on the park for firewood, charcoal
and construction materials from the forest, as well as fish from the lakes. The dependence of the Guji and Koore on the park for grazing, farming and water has been discussed earlier. In addition, for the Guji Oromo, giving away the territory is considered as a compromise to their history and detachment from their Waaga (God) in spiritual aspects because they had sacred spaces, ritual sites and burial places of their deceased forefathers, while the resettlement would also radically transform their pastoral way of life, which is cultural and economic.

Despite the phasing out of the EU funding for rehabilitation of the three parks in southern Ethiopia, the government continued its policy of promoting tourism by strengthening the existing protected areas and establishing new ones. It is evident that the government considers tourism as an important sector to contribute to the country’s economic development and thus entrusted the federal agency and regional bodies with the tasks of strengthening existing protected areas and surveying potential areas for similar objectives (FDRE Draft Wildlife Policy 1997). Although the policy document claims to have been completely new, national park management approaches in the country remained top-down and protectionist in practice. One important aspect of the policy document, despite its failure to be translated into practice, was its commendation of revenue distribution to local communities whom the conservation process affects. It was stated that “[t]he federal and regional governments shall receive and distribute revenues generated by wildlife exclusively for the administration and management of wildlife and for the benefit of communities associated with or participating in the conservation of wildlife resources” (Draft Wildlife Policy 1997: 3).

Despite such policy rhetoric for community participation and benefit sharing, the park management resorted to the classical protectionist conservation approach by fully restricting local communities from access to the resources and excluding them from the management aspect of the park. According to Freeman (2006), the Guji were entirely excluded from any affairs of the national park, including the planning, management and benefit of the park. The author states that, “the current stalemate means that the Guji are not involved in ongoing discussions about the park and natural resource management in the area. This situation is to no-one’s benefit” (Freeman 2006: 19). After the EU project phased out, relations between the park and the Guji became tenser, with the latter blamed for resisting the resettlement plans, which subsequently resulted in the termination of the EU project before its planned project span. In inter-ethnic relations as well, Guji’s refusal was interpreted as ethnic and regional issue in that it generated sense of common concern to the national park among the Gamo and Koore elites, who constructed boundaries of “us” and “them” against the Guji within the ongoing ethnic politics in the country. One government official from the Amaro
agricultural department described the situation as follows:

From our childhood period, we have grown up being told that the park belongs to the Koore on the eastern side and the Gamo on the other side. Both of us had close historical relations. There were trade relations across Abaya and Chamo Lakes to Chencha and then Arba Minch. Later, these nomads came in and began wandering from place to place within and around the park. After the military government, our region has got full control over the park and those Guji nomads were supposed to live either in Oromia region or elsewhere in our region but they do not have the right to live inside the park (informant Kassahun Ayele, April 2011).

Within the context of ethnic politics, whereby local cadre members often used to foment inter-group antagonism rather than for a genuine democratization process, comments like the one above by the government cadre can be well understood as a manifestation of a latent inter-regional tension concerning questions of ownership and administration of the national park. From the Gamo Gofa side, the park is more symbolized with identity of both the people and the Arba Minch town. In one of my discussions with a young employee in the Culture and Tourism office of Gamo Gofa zone, I was astonished by the emotionally loaded reflections of this young uinity graduate, who emphatically described the national park as a strong identity marker of his group, the Gamo, as well as the town of Arba Minch. The informant describes the relationship between the Nech Sar, Gamo identity and Arba Minch town as follows:

This park is a national treasure. It is for all Ethiopians. It is particularly an identity for our people and our town. We are proud of conserving this national heritage and when Nech Sar is mentioned, nothing comes first than Arba Minch and our people. Nech Sar is our heritage, our pride and shows how our people to conserve the wildlife. Tourists flock to this part of the country because of it. If this park is registered as a UNESCO heritage like what the Konso did for their terracing, we will be internationally known. However, there are still challenges from another side. The pastoral people do not care for this national treasure. They claim it belongs to them but they did not have a single hut inside the park as they were always on move. The Koore are relatively better in their understanding of the resources but we should cooperate and bring effective management of the park. Another problem is intervention from the federal government. After the federal government took it some three years ago, our people have lost the initial sense of belongingness. I fear that if it continues to be administered by the federal government, people would not care for it and there will be severe damage to the resources (informant Molla Alemayehu, May 2012).

Within such polarized images of the park, the SNNP regional state administered it until 2004, before it was transformed to the Dutch Multinational Company called the African Parks Foundation (APF). As I mentioned earlier, Guji’s exclusion from the park in terms of gaining any benefit from tourism and access to customary resources has antagonized their relation with the park. For instance, out of twenty-six park scouts before 2004, only two were from the Guji, while the remainders were from Koore and Gamo ethnic groups. According to some park authorities, the Guji have been given limited job positions in the park because they did not have people who went to ‘formal’ education (informant: former park Warden, February 2011). However, during my conversation with Guji elders and youth in Ergansa village, they questioned the government’s
excuses, arguing that they have more rich knowledge of wild animals' behavior, management and its relations with the people than those who have modern education. In the context of ethnic federalism, resettlement programs, employment opportunities, restriction to local communities' customary rights and administrative measures on the part of the park administration were mainly part of the existing ethnic politics. However, in terms of the administration of the national park, the initial administrative decentralization developed a sense of ownership among the Koore and Gamo political elites, as well as generating discontent and alienation on the part of those in Oromia regional state.

5.4.2. Privatization of Nature Conservation – the African Parks Foundation

The political and economic conditions within the new political order after 1991 have introduced resource privatization under the name of investment. Despite its categorical rejection of the neoliberal development paradigm in recent years\textsuperscript{20}, and particularly following the contested 2005 national election, the EPRDF government has selectively subscribed to neoliberalism mainly to comply with some conditions of donors and generate income by leasing land to investors (Aimé 2008). As a policy discourse, one of the markedly core tenets of neoliberalism is the privatization of the "hitherto unoccupied, state-owned, or communally owned aspects of the social, cultural and/or natural worlds" (Castree 2010: 10). In the Ethiopian context, this aspect of neoliberalism remains in practice, such as in leasing arable lands, mining areas, protected areas, factories and hotels to foreign and domestic investors. In this sub-heading, I will focus on the privatization of nature conservation that brought a Dutch company (the African Parks Foundation) to take over the management of three national parks in southern Ethiopia – the Nech Sar, Omo and Mago National Parks – in 2004 and 2005 (Markakis 2011; Turton 2011).

The African Parks Foundation (APF) took over the management of the parks for both business and conservation purposes under a twenty-five year contract (Freeman 2006). The agreement was reached between the Ethiopian government represented through the SNNP regional state and the Ministry of Agriculture on the one hand, as well as the African Parks Foundation on the other. The agreement had a precondition to come to a full-fledged operation only if the Ethiopian government relocated all the people residing inside the park. According to the agreement, “the Government, in

\textsuperscript{20} http://danielberhane.com/2011/03/31/ethiopian-pm-bashes-neo-liberal-paradigm-african-ministers-call-transforming-rent-seeking-political-systems/
accordance with its intention that the Park shall meet the IUCN criteria for Category II Protected Areas and for other reasons, undertakes to relocate all people living within the boundaries of the Park, their livestock and possessions, and to deal with all matters of compensation that may arise.\textsuperscript{21} Moreover, the government took the responsibility of demarcating the boundaries, while the company retained the responsibility of fencing and patrolling the park.

The discussion concerning the transfer of the park to the APF and the challenges the government and the company faced in the management process will help us to understand disparities between local resource rights and the implementation of ethnic federalism. It is not my objective to describe all the activities of the APF in this discussion; rather, I will focus on resettlement programs that the government attempted to implement, local people’s responses to the resettlement plans, the conservation approaches introduced by the company, as well as the company’s withdrawal from Ethiopia. The responsibility that the government reserved to relocate the people who were vaguely described in the agreement as “squatters” later became a significant test of inter-regional relations and challenged the federal government’s capacity to handle the tension. In the process of transferring the management of the park to the APF, the SNNP regional state pursued plans of relocating the Koore and Guji people who lived in and adjacent to the park boundary.

Many meetings were held with government officials from Amaro district, Gamo Gofa zone, park administration, the SNNP regional Bureau of Agriculture and Natural Resource Development, as well as later with representatives from Galana Abaya district (Oromia regional state). However, people from the local communities did not participate in this long process of planning for the resettlement, because, according to one government official, “it was thought that consulting them through meetings and conferences was time consuming and also would instigate conflict because the people do not envision broader development policy of the government. Instead, local communities always want to satisfy their immediate needs” (informant: Ayele Chane, May 2011). For technocratic government politicians, notions of community participation, consultation and engagement are considered as wastage of resources because local communities are not capable of contributing substantial input to the project, according to their views.

Rather, community participation is often used in Ethiopia for media and political consumptions, as

well as fulfilling donor requirements in the case of implementing foreign-funded projects. For example, within this specific resettlement plan, only few representatives from the Koore and Guji people attended the final meeting arranged as a “Community Conference”, held in Arba Minch town from July 12-13, 2003. During the conference, an expert from the regional Bureau of Agriculture and Natural Resources Development presented a research paper titled "Relationships between Local Communities and Natural Resources". As one would expect, the conference paper concluded that the local people were illegal settlers and should be resettled somewhere else to create a better home for the wildlife and enhance the development of the tourism industry in the national park, which would benefit the people in turn. In addition to such a self-evident conclusion, the fundamental point to question is whether the conference was organized to accommodate views of the people or whether it was simply used as a forum to inform community representatives about the government decision.

As became evident in the later years, the resettlement plan and other forms of resource management approaches were top-down and exclusionist. The government’s orientation to the top-down approach, dominance of scientific knowledge production and negligence of local peoples’ voices in development projects was evident in such cases where the ‘experts’ presented ‘academic research’ papers to local people who had not attended modern school. While the paper was presented in Amharic, only a few members of the local communities understand a few words, let alone have the ability to comprehend the concepts discussed in the research paper. One Guji elder recalled that:

The government officials called us for a meeting in Arba Minch. They told us that we illegally came to the park. They also told us it was a government policy to protect the animals. They warned us that the government would take tough measures unless we voluntarily move out of the park. Because we rarely speak and understand the language [Amharic], we could not express our ideas well. The authorities were also not ready to listen to our ideas. They already finished [decided] the issue before bringing it to us. That was why we discussed among ourselves and decided to take the case back to our people (informant: Danbala Badacha, April 2011).

Another Koore elder particularly focused on the influence of local government cadres before and during the conference, saying that: “We had a meeting in Kelle town before the conference in Arba Minch and decided with our officials not to resist the resettlement but to negotiate terms of resettlement such as compensation and other provisions. Although we wanted to stay in our home, our officials warned us not to oppose the government policy” (informant: Shibiru Ayele, February 2012).

---

22 Minute of a Meeting dated 14/09/2003
A taskforce organized to produce an implementation plan for the relocation of these people held a meeting on 18 December 2003\textsuperscript{23}, during which neither the local representatives of communities nor the government officials from Oromia regional state attended. The team underscored in the discussion that the Guji were considered as having intruded into the park boundary during the transition period, while their current settlement was considered illegal. Likewise, the team considered the Koore as if they had expanded to the lowland slope of their district in search of farmland around the same time. Eventually, the taskforce proposed to resettle the Guji in Oromia region, but since the team labeled them as illegal settlers, there was no proposal for material or monetary compensation for costs incurred during the relocation process. On the other hand, the taskforce recommended that the SNNP regional state should take the responsibility of resettling the Koore, with necessary compensation. In any case, the Amaro district officials ‘agreed’ and received an order from higher officials to convince their people about the resettlement plan without any condition (interview with former Amaro district administrator, May 2012). With financial assistance from the government and the APF as compensation and initial establishment, which included two hectares of land, a school, a clinic, and food aid for eight months, around 1,089 Koore people were relocated to Abulo and Alfachio villages some fifteen kilometers to the south of the park in 2004 (Dessalegn 2004; Freeman 2006; Dowie 2009). One Koore elder described the process as deception by the government. He bitterly recalled the incident as follows:

> Our government officials deceived us by telling us that ‘if you do not agree to the plan, the government will bomb you and your properties’. We asked them what about the Guji? And, they replied to us saying that ‘you will see what will happen to them. The government decided to take a severe measure against them if they would continue maintaining their rigid stand against its policies’. We believed them because it reminded us of the attacks the military regime took some years ago. By that time, houses were burned to ashes and crops were destroyed. Later, the Guji did not move. Our politicians cheated us. We suffered in Abulo and Alfachio because there was no water, no fertile land and no road to the market (informant: Shibiru Ayele, February 2012).

Indeed, some local government officials also shared the same idea. During some of our discussions, they implicated that higher officials ordered them to persuade the people. A former administrator of Amaro district who ordered the resettlement of the Koore people expressed the situation with regret, given that opposing the decision was beyond his administrative mandate at the time. He described the situation as follows:

> We actually discussed the issue of resettlement but it was more of a dead deal. The regional and federal governments had decided the issue and brought it down to us just as information. During the discussions, government officials told us that if we oppose the resettlement, the government would consider us that we were resisting its policy. The government already

\textsuperscript{23} Minutes of a meeting held to discuss “Planning the Implementation of Relocating Illegal Settlers in Nech Sar National Park”, SNNP Culture and Tourism Bureau Archive, dated 18/12/2003.
agreed with the African Parks on the relocation of the people. We had to accept it. You know things in our country. Sometimes you accept decisions looking at an existing scenario. But, now after some eight years, when I heard the Guji people did not move out and our people suffered from lack of good agricultural land in Abulo and Alfacho, I regret for leading the resettlement. But, even if I opposed it, others would have accomplished it (informant: former district Administrator, May 2012).

Unlike the Koore case, whose local government officials were said to have been ‘co-opted’ to the government project and forced their people to accept the plan, both the Guji people and their government officials covertly joined hands and resisted the resettlement plan from the very beginning. However, despite the refusal on the part of the people and the Oromia regional state, the Guji were evicted at gunpoint by the police force from the SNNP regional state in November 2004, before retreating to the eastern outskirt of the park (Refugee International April 19, 2005; Abiyot 2009; Dowie 2009). In contrast to the claims from the SNNP regional state officials who deny Guji’s customary right to the area on the grounds that the people only ‘intruded’ the park during the transitional period in the early-1990s, the Guji opposed any government program that would dismantle them from their homes. A Guji elder said:

The government people came and told us that the land belongs to the government. They evicted us from our home. That was first during the Mengistu era [the military regime]. Under Meles Zenawi [EPRDF government] they came again and told us the same thing. But this time we decided not to be fooled again. We know this is our land, a Guji land. Our ancestors lived here and died here. You can see their burial sites inside the park. Unlike in the past, we have got our people in the government. They speak our language and understand our problem. We appealed to them at district and regional level in Oromia and they helped us to stay here (informant: Galgalo Edema, March 2011).

In the previous chapters, I discussed Guji’s connectedness to the land from religious, cultural, economic and historical dimensions. What makes the 2004 resistance against the resettlement program different was the collaboration between the local people and Oromia regional state against the government’s resettlement plan. According to one higher government official in the Borana Zone, who requested for anonymity, there was common understanding among some government officials in Oromia region concerning the issue that the people were not supposed to move from their homeland. According to the informant, there were two reasons for the opposition against the program. First, Oromia region still raises questions of ownership right of the park, although they did not formally bring the case to the concerned bodies in the federal government. Second, like the local Guji people, the politicians believe that the Guji were prior inhabitants of the area long before the park’s establishment. They held the opinion that displacement would not solve the presumed resource degradation in the park because unless the right of ownership and utilization was recognized, the local people would continue defying government restrictions. According to this view, conservation efforts without the consent and participation of local communities would result
in failure. Moreover, local politicians raise issues of the cultural and economic rights of the people, whose livelihood and cultural practices heavily rely on the environment. While negotiations were underway, the police burned 463 Guji houses, destroyed their properties and evicted the people on November 25, 2004 (Refugee International, April 19, 2005; Dowie 2009). Since then, the Guji were pushed to the outskirts of the park on the eastern side, until the two regional governments demarcated some part of the park for human settlement, grazing and access to water in 2008.

The APF initially conformed to the exclusionist national park management approach when it agreed with the Ethiopian government concerning the relocation of the local communities. As discussed in chapter two, environmental conservation and development rhetoric are often used by state and non-state actors in their justifications for establishment national parks, which often compromise the customary rights of local communities. Likewise, APF’s collaboration with the Ethiopian government was part of the broader conservation and development discourse that has brought nation states and multinational business/conservation companies together. However, as it faced local resistance and attracted international criticism, the APF was prompted to involve some members of the local communities in some job opportunities in the national park, although their role in the management process was limited. For instance, it organized ninety-eight households who were earlier dependent on the resources from the park for their livelihood and engaged them in different activities within or outside the park (APF Annual Report 2006). The company paid compensation for over one thousand Koore households who were relocated to Abulo and Alfacho villages. Regarding the Guji Oromo agro-pastoral community, the APF increased the number of scouts recruited from the group from three to ten, although the number was far below than the number of scouts from Koore and Gamo ethnic groups. The company made another important concession with the Guji when it came to terms with their demands after some three years of tense relationship.

According to some sources, the APF was prompted to engage the Guji people mainly because it learned that a complete exclusionist approach did not serve its conservation and business missions. Moreover, it was also partly due to external pressures, such as criticisms it faced from Refugee International and Survival International, which championed against the company’s exclusion of the people (Personal communication with a former APF staff, March 2012). On the 30th of September 2007, only three months before the final termination of its contract, APF reached on an agreement with the Guji people and allowed them to get access to some portions of the ‘park territory’ for their settlement, grazing and access to water from Lake Abaya and the bore-salt around Xabala hot spring (APF Annual Report 2007). The employment of a few Guji men was also part of
the company’s recognition that any discontent on the part of the Guji would counterfeit the missions of the organization because they had direct contact with the park territories and the Guji had indirect support from Oromia regional state. However, this concession was utterly opposed by government officials in the Gamo Gofa zone and regional Bureau of Culture and Tourism in the SNNP region.  

To elucidate the position of Oromia regional state regarding the Guji’s claim of entitlement and the concessions given to the people by the APF in September 2007, the following letter sent from the president of Oromia regional state, Abba Dula Gemeda, to the then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Addisu Legesse, holds significance. The letter reads as follows:

Dear H.E. Ato Addisu Legesse,

Although Nech Sar National Park was established in 1974, studies show that its boundaries were not clearly demarcated like the Semien and Awash Parks. Following the establishment of the park, the Guji who were living scattered in the park had faced serious brutality during the imperial and Derg regimes. Specifically, the Derg regime burned their properties and houses and as a result, they were forced to leave their homeland. However, after EPRDF controlled the country, these people returned to their home and began to lead stable life. Nevertheless, following the February 2004 agreement with African Parks (Ethiopia Ltd.) in transferring the administration of Nech Sar National Park, it can be recalled that disputes erupted on issues of demarcating the park boundaries and subsequent relocation of the Guji. We believe that the park is not only a habitat for wildlife but also is supposed to contribute to improvement in living conditions of the surrounding communities and to the national economy at large. Therefore, to settle problems pertaining to the boundaries and administration of the park, the governments of the two regional states (Oromia and South) arrived at the area on April 8, 2008 and observed the overall situation. As we understood from the field observation and discussions with local people, it came to our attention that there are several people and livestock in the area. Thus, to avoid the influence of people and livestock on the park core areas, it is agreed that the park boundary that was agreed upon between the Guji and African Parks shall be maintained and the management and conservation of the park shall be done in close collaboration between the park administration and local people. Therefore, we would like to confirm to you that Oromia regional state accepts the boundary agreement reached between Guji Oromo and African Parks on 30 September 2007 (my own translation).

This letter was written after the withdrawal of the APF in December 2007. Nevertheless, it hints at the view of Oromia regional state on Guji’s settlement in the area, basing its argument on history. It is evident that some of its contents indicate some controversial issues about the human habitation of the area before the park, disputes concerning resettlement plans, as well as Oromia’s acceptance of

---


25 A Letter dated 21.04.08 with Ref. No. BM /409/112/Z11 was sent from the then Oromia regional president, Abba Dula Gemeda to the then deputy prime minister and minister of agriculture and rural development on issues related to Nech Sar National Park and the Guji Oromo (my own translation from Amharic).
the boundary agreement between the Guji and the APF. In contrast to the dominant government narratives about the land as ‘uninhabited’ before the establishment of the park, this view depicts heterogeneity within the government itself and poses a fundamental question about the motives behind these competing notions of representation of the space as ‘uninhabited’ and ‘inhabited’, which will be dealt with in chapters six and seven.

Despite its ambitious plan to introduce ‘modern’ techniques of protected areas management such as an electric fence, airplanes and a well-equipped patrolling system, as well as doubling its income within the first three years, the company came to a premature end in 2007 citing several challenges it faced along the process. According to the APF’s Annual Report (2007) and its termination letter, the Ethiopian government failed to accomplish the responsibilities that it was given in the agreement, particularly concerning issues of boundary demarcation and the relocation of the Guji agro-pastoralists. In its statement of terminating the contract dated December 7, 2007, the APF highlighted a lack of cooperation on the part of the Ethiopian authorities to settle the issue of resettlement or recognize the negotiation reached between the Guji and the company. Part of the termination letter stated that:

The resettlement was partially accomplished with the Kore community being resettled to the south of the park. However, 3 years into the project one of the communities still remains in the Park, and the increased use by them and their livestock herds are further threatening the sustainability of the parka. In the first two years of the project, the authorities made little progress with negotiating an acceptable compromise to the mutual benefit of both the community and the park. Therefore this year African Parks decided to make a concerted effort to negotiate, with independent specialist advice, an agreement with the Guji on the limits of use of the park. External organizations were invited to participate in and witness the negotiations. To an extent this process was successful, and a formal agreement was reached on 30 September 2007 with the Guji defining a core area, which would be free from both people and cattle, with use permitted in the remainder of the park. The authorities were requested to recognize this agreement as an acceptable and practical compromise for the benefit of both people and nature. This recognition has not been forthcoming. Therefore, African Parks has decided that it shall terminate all operations in Nech Sar.26

Eventually, the APF terminated its contract on the three national parks (Mago, Omo and Nech Sar) in southern Ethiopia, citing complexities of the situations in all three cases, including pressure from international human rights organizations, a lack of common understanding among Ethiopian authorities and the involvement of several ethnic groups with different kinds of claims for ownership rights. Following the withdrawal of the APF, the management of the Nech Sar National

---

Park was reverted to the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA) at the federal level. Overall, the transfer of the national park to APF was part of the country’s privatization policy as a strategy of enhancing its development visions. However, because both the internal political and economic systems and the company’s business/conservation discourses and practices did not practically address the rights of local communities, the new state-non-state actor partnership invoked local resistance and attracted international criticism.

5.5. Extending the Nech Sar Case beyond Local Contexts

In the preceding sections of this chapter, I discussed the new political reconfiguration in the post-1991 period as a remarkable cultural and political departure from the past. However, the federal arrangement failed to bring the periphery close to the center; rather it enhanced the center’s penetration of the periphery through political control and resource extractions. Another important repercussion of the new political order has been the emergence of multiple contested spaces. Although ethnic federalism and decentralization of state power were supposed to have coalesced center-periphery relations, both the center and the periphery have become arenas of contestation for different purposes. In addition, ethnic federalism has brought the ethnicization or politicization of territories, resources, spaces, policies and development programs along ethno-linguistic lines. It has added new meanings to territories and resources by changing latent forms of competition over resource ownership into potent questions of entitlement based upon ethnicity. For instance, common resource areas and territories that were previously located along inter-ethnic borders have been split into different ethnic-based administrative units. As a result, access to resources such as grazing land, water, forest and fishing grounds requires ethnic membership to a group that has given administrative rights over the territories.

The state has also penetrated the periphery through both political and developmental rhetoric and practices by using local elites as channels. For the first time in the history of the modern Ethiopian state, the EPRDF succeeded in effectively controlling the periphery and in turning these regions into viable economic spaces using technological subjugation of the territories in the form of mega dam constructions and large-scale plantation agriculture. In the process, multiple actors have been involved in the ‘taming’, ‘controlling’, ‘domesticating’ and ‘commodifying’ the periphery. This is why I have situated the contestations over the meaning, ownership right and utilization of the Nech Sar National Park with broader center-periphery relations in the country.
Despite the rhetoric of decentralization, the Ethiopian state has still featured as a dominant center with the vanguard party (the EPRDF) consolidating its strong power at the federal level (Assefa 2006; Turton 2006). In this regard, the center has become a contested political and cultural space, within which different groups struggle for fair representation and the equitable distribution of wealth. Moreover, the periphery has become a contested space where different actors contend to gain access to these regions for political and economic control. Unlike its representation as a ‘desolate’, ‘violent’ ‘wilderness’ and ‘deserted’ land with limited contribution to the making of the state (economic, cultural and political contributions) in the past, this new political articulation has successfully enhanced state intrusion into the periphery. The contestable dimension of the new dynamics in the periphery mainly reflects the state’s attempt to determine, dominate and control the periphery for its economic and political interests. On their part, people in the periphery have become the targets of the federal government’s ‘carrot-and-stick’ approaches. By granting them some degree of autonomy and recognition, and some aspects of socio-economic services, the federal government has presented itself as the ‘redeemer’ of the people from past injustices. On the other hand, the people in the peripheries have experienced the introduction of massive development projects that have bulldozed their homeland, cultural sites and ritual spaces, as well as generally transforming their territories into consumable commodity in the form of plantation agriculture, hydroelectric dam, mining, etc. On their part, the local communities in the peripheries also struggle to maintain their right over their resources or deter the state and other external actors that push them away from areas they consider as their home. Such interplay between competing perspectives concerning the order of things (development, conservation, modernization, etc.) has at times grappled the people to resort to different forms of negotiations and resistance.

Likewise, it is fair to position the development and conservation programs of the state in the Nech Sar National Park within these broader political, economic and environmental discourses. In this regard, I would seek to place the discussions made in this chapter on conservation enclosure within two broader intertwined developments in the post-1991 political and economic dynamics in the country. While the first scenario is the political landscape in which the conservation enclosure was inherited and how it was adjusted into the new political landscape, the second context is related to the idea of nature marketing, which was appropriated by the Ethiopian state from global environmental discourses.

As discussions in the previous chapters have indicated, the exclusionist conservation approaches, hostile park-people relations and issues of environmental degradation in the park were not new
developments in the post-1991 period; rather, the EPRDF government inherited the dominant discourse that masked the history of human settlement in the national park. The unique part of the post-1991 developments is the contradictions between the political rhetoric and practical experiences on the ground.

Despite its applauded rhetoric of decentralization and self-government, the government maintained the old representation of pastoral and agro-pastoral communities in the area as illegal settlers. The justifications from the government side for the resettlement plan were its responsibility to improve the lives of the people and safeguard the environment, including the wildlife, as well as the notion that people and wildlife were not supposed to live together (Turton 2002, 2011). The question of who decides the status of the territory as ‘inhabited’ or ‘uninhabited’ and whether humans and the wildlife were not supposed to live together remains contested, because different actors impose their views and narratives upon others based on their power relations. By presenting itself as a steward of nature and the people, the government has tried to broadcast its authority to the periphery. As Herbst (2000) maintains, states in Africa during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods have struggled to exert their authority over the mass through control over resource areas on which the people depend for their economic and cultural purposes. As during the previous regimes, the legitimacy of the state has been questioned in the peripheries and thus the EPRDF government has sought to build a new image of the state as ‘developmental’, ‘environmentalist’ and more importantly ‘designer’ of the future generation, passing down a green, developed, prosperous and peaceful nation to the future generation.

Another important point to note regarding the macro-political reconfiguration and the specific developments in the Nech Sar National Park is how the state has decentralized conflict. In the past, most of the conflicts in the country were mainly between the state and society, with the country experiencing major wars whereby different ethnic groups fought the state due to its oppressive political systems, exploitative economic policies and socio-cultural marginalization. Although these forms of conflict have been reduced, there has been a shifting trend from society-state conflict to inter-ethnic conflicts. By decentralizing conflict to the local level, the federal state has reserved the right as an arbitrator in such conflicts. For example, apart from being enclosed as a protected area, the inclusion of the park into the SNNP regional state has created a sense of exclusion on the part of the Guji, while the Gamo and to some extent the Koore people have begun to associate themselves with the park. Thus, conflicts concerning resources and issues of access or restriction from natural resources have adopted ethnic dimensions.
Differences in commitment on the part of the two regional states concerning the implementation of conservation enclosure, including the resettlement plan of the local Guji and Koore people, clearly demonstrates heterogeneities within the government itself. We cannot talk of ‘the government’ as a homogenous political entity whose policies and programs can be smoothly channeled down to the grassroots without challenge, particularly in contested regions. However, the federal government’s failure to settle such internal conflict of interests and claim of entitlement among the regions also signaled a lack/weakness of the institutional setup to handle inter-regional issues such as trans-border resources.

The discussions in this chapter show some inconsistencies and disparities between the constitutional provisions and practical implementation of the political discourse on the ground. However, one would ask how the government negotiates these inconsistencies in terms of translating its policies into practice. In this regard, the inconsistencies are explained in three different ways. Firstly, it should be acknowledged that lack of interest and capacity among government officials at different state structures in terms of understanding, translating and implementing the policies, perspectives and programs have been evident in several sectors (Assefa 2006). Secondly, the EPRDF government is keen to maintain its control over the social, economic, cultural and political spaces, despite the provisions in the constitution. For example, any cultural practice or ritual that seems to strengthen the people’s sense of self-consciousness or identity slightly different from the way the government wants to shape the citizens faces government scrutiny. The case of Oromo traditional religious and cultural practice called irrecha represents, a good case in point, because the government has placed it under close inspection and control since 2003 (Asebe and Meron 2014). Likewise, the government considers traditional life styles such as pastoralism and indigenous knowledge and practices of resource management in the national park as obstacles to the government’s development and transformation visions.

Thirdly, the government seeks to justify its interventions from ‘developmental’ state perspectives. As discussed earlier, the EPRDF government’s developmental state paradigm represents the government embodying the ultimate path of development and thus gives it the absolute right to design and plan development projects and mobilizes the subjects for its implementation. According to this perspective, setting aside land as protected area, resettling people to ‘transform’ their life style and planning and managing protected areas are considered part of the state mandate. In one of
his speeches on Pastoralist Day celebrations, the late prime minister, Meles Zenawi once described the federal state as a rescuer of pastoralist communities from poverty and backwardness, as follows:

In the coming five years there will be a very big irrigation project and related agricultural development in this zone [South Omo zone]. I promise you that, even though this area is known as backward in terms of civilization, it will become an example of rapid development. I also want to assure you that the work we have started in this area on infrastructure and social development will continue stronger than ever. I want to assure you again that all our development work will be in line with protecting the environment and the friends of backwardness and poverty, whatever they say or do, can’t stop us from the path of development we are taking.\(^\text{27}\)

In other context, although the EPRDF government adopted a strategy of nature marketing within the broader neoliberal perspective of privatization of development sectors, the effort of leasing out the park to the APF failed prematurely. The failure was owing to internal political incompatibility, particularly because of inter-regional discontents on issues of ownership and administration of the park. The approach of community-based conservation that the APF strived to introduce after some years of resistance from the local communities against its exclusionist practices also failed because the Ethiopian government authorities were not ready to negotiate the protectionist resource management they inherited from the previous regimes (APF Annual Report 2007). Nonetheless, the government evidently practices the notion of nature commodification and marketing through tourism in the national park.

To summarize, the three successive regimes in Ethiopia share in common many features of nature conservation and representations of the peripheries, despite their differences in the political discourses. The EPRDF government’s intrusion into the periphery through ‘development and conservation’ schemes has further exacerbated the marginal existence of the people in the periphery. The government’s rhetoric of granting ethnic groups the rights of self-determination on the one hand, and its developmental state paradigm that neglects these rights on the other, have added to the complexity. As the analysis in the next chapters will show, such competing narratives and practices have generated different forms of resistance, including conflict between different actors, particularly between the state and the local communities, as well as within local communities, along ethnic lines. Therefore, I conclude that the Nech Sar National Park is one of the multiple contested spaces in the political, economic and cultural schemes within the post-1991 political order, which enhanced ethnicization of claims of entitlement to environmental resources.

Part Three

The Nech Sar National Park: An Arena of Contestation/Negotiation on Nature-Culture Relations

Introduction

In this part, I will analyze how different actors have contested, negotiated and at times appropriated various perspectives and discourses of human-environmental interactions in the process of their struggle over the Nech Sar National Park. Political ecologists discussing human-environmental interaction have focused on the involvement of multilayer actors in environmental degradation and competitions over the utilization, ownership, control and conservation of natural resources. Within this broader context, social actors with different interests, characteristics, practices and power positions interact within different levels of power relations. Thus, in order to understand the interplay between different actors, it is essential to discern their political, economic, cultural and environmental motives in their struggle over a particular environmental resource (Bryant and Bailey 1997; Robbins 2004). As analytical directions, some have focused on specific environmental problems such as soil erosion, deforestation, water and air pollution and land degradation (Blaikie 1985), while others have strived to approach the issues from discourses and ideas used in the politics of environmental problems (Escobar 1995). Ideas, narratives and stories on environmental change shape how people and institutions deal with the environment. In this regard, notions such as the ‘tragedy of the commons’, ‘environmental degradation’, ‘climate change’ and ‘biodiversity depletion’ are all powerful in shaping how state and non-state conservation institutions deal with the ‘commons’. Moreover, because human-environmental relations are intertwined with other forces across spatial and temporal boundaries, some political ecologists have also employed a regional approach of analysis (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987).

However, although human interaction with the environment can be addressed within the context of political ecology in either of the above approaches, including a focus on “socio-economic characteristics such as class, ethnicity or gender” (Bryant and Bailey 1997: 23), an actor-oriented approach offers a comprehensive understanding of the complexity of political and ecological dimensions of the topic. This is because an actor-oriented approach probes into competing notions
and practices that social actors employ regarding the utilization, management and ownership of environmental resources, as well as hinting at how they articulate, negotiate, appropriate or compromise different discourses and practices in the process of their interaction.

In this context, I use the concept “actors” to refer to individuals and social groups who deploy their agency in formulating or changing or advancing the course of action in societal, political and economic spheres (Long 1992). In the development and conservation context, an actor-oriented perspective recognizes the agency (knowledgeability and capability) of actors in using resources at their disposal – human, social, capital, political, cultural and knowledge – to turn a certain program or intervention into their advantages or deter the interest of others (Few 2001; Long 2001). Although his work does not directly concern human-environmental interaction, Norman Long’s (2001) seminal book titled Development Sociology: Actor Perspectives illuminates the advantage of employing this analytical approach, given that it helps to interrogate questions of why different actors respond to the same phenomenon differently.

In the analysis of human-environmental interaction and conflicts that ensue from the interaction between different actors with competing interests, an actor-oriented approach is an appropriate analytical method. It is an important tool to comprehend not only covert and overt interests and actions of the actors, but also to understand notions of power and agency of the actors in their conflict, cooperation and negotiation (Bryant and Bailey 1997; Long 2001). Recognizing the influences, voices, actions and interests of actors encompasses an epistemological paradigm shift in the representation of grassroots social actors in the development and conservation discourses. It demands a change in understanding from considering them as passive recipients of development discourses, ideas and programs to recognizing these actors as “active participants who process information and strategize in their dealings with various local actors as well as with outside institutions and personnel” (Long 2001: 13).

In the three subsequent chapters that follow, I adopt an actor-oriented approach to analyze the interests, characteristics and views of place-based and non-place-based actors in their pursuit of achieving their interests or restricting the interests of other actors over the Nech Sar National Park. The choice of this analytical approach has been informed by the fact that the Nech Sar National Park has become an arena of contestations, at times with negotiations between competing perspectives and practices among various actors. In this case, the chapters address both place-based
and non-place-based actors as having their own role in shaping human-environmental interactions and in partaking in the struggle with varying degrees of involvement. Place-based actors refer to those social groups who have had direct interaction with the territory, through either administrative authority or livelihood and socio-cultural engagements, whereas non-place-based actors include external actors whose policies, advocacy works or perspectives have had some influence on the human-environmental relations in and around the park. Because both categories of actors influence the course of action or intervention programs in the national park, I will discuss both as per their level of involvement, influence and power positions.

Based on the above understanding of social actors, I have identified actors that have employed different forms of capability and knowledge to influence the course of human-environmental interaction regarding the national park. Although a comprehensive investigation of all social actors would have been essential to complement an understanding of the complex dynamics in the area, I decided to focus only on major actors whose direct or indirect presence in the area and whose agency in influencing decisions concerning the national park have been evidently visible. In this regard, chapter six deals with the Ethiopian state, its positions in the conservation discourses and practices, as well as how it has channeled down its policies to the grassroots level. In chapter seven, the perspectives, strategies and interests of local communities, a transnational business and conservation organization (i.e. the African Parks Foundation) and international human right advocacy organizations over the Nech Sar National Park will be analyzed vis-à-vis their interaction with the environment, the state or among each other. While chapters six and seven mainly deal with the actors’ conceptions of the human-environmental interaction more at the epistemological and ontological levels of conceptualization, chapter eight places much emphasis upon the agency of grassroots actors in resisting or coming to terms with external interventions. Nevertheless, the study still recognizes internal heterogeneities within each actor and strives to bring together inter-actor and intra-actor competing perspectives. Taking each actor or group of actors individually, I will discuss issues related to their characteristics, interests, actions and conceptualizations of the territory within each subsequent chapter.
Figure 12: Actors and their Interactions
(Source: My own graphic adapted from the empirical data)\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{28} Although this graph might simplify the complexity in the actors' interactions because it does not show contestations and negotiations between different actors, it gives us a preliminary overview of the major actors and some chains of interaction. I would like to acknowledge the contribution of my colleague, Megerssa Tolessa in revising the graphic.
Chapter Six

The Ethiopian State: Conservationist, ‘Developmental’ or Encroacher?

6.1. Situating the Conservation-Development Debate within the Identity of the Ethiopian ‘State’

In Africa, perhaps as is common elsewhere, the state defines itself and is represented in the mainstream political and development discourses as a legitimate body to govern the people and resources within its jurisdiction and to design development visions (Bryant and Bailey 1997). What differs between countries is the ‘how’ aspect of the governance. In countries such as Ethiopia, the state uses sovereignty, power and resources in the quest for control over the society and the environment. In other words, the control and expropriation of environmental resources engenders the state with political power, economic wealth and boosts its claims of legitimacy, which in turn replicates the exercise of power in the process of subduing the subjects. Likewise, although political power, legitimacy and economic wealth are supposedly essential to enable the state in gaining the capability to deliver services to the society, the Ethiopian state used it as a source of power to control and dominate its subjects. As Scott (1998: 184) notes, “the logic behind the state’s large-scale attempts to redesign rural life and production from above” is the process of ‘civilizing’ the ‘uncivilized’, according to the modernist state discourse. In the process of imposing a centrally designed or imagined development or conservation program upon societies in the periphery, the state institutionalizes policies and practices of what Scott calls “domestication, a kind of social gardening devised to make the countryside, its products, and its inhabitants more readily identifiable and accessible to the center” (1998: 184).

My point of departure in this chapter is that under hegemonic government systems, like the case of Ethiopia, where the state’s legitimacy at the periphery is questioned and under contexts where it is

---

29By the usage of the “state”, I do not subscribe to the notion of considering state as a monolithic institution. Rather, as has been discussed in this work, the Ethiopian state has become more heterogeneous particularly following the new political reconfiguration along ethnic federalism. However, by the ‘identity of the state’, I refer to the political and socio-cultural self-representation of the core constituents of the Ethiopian state vis-à-vis the people in the periphery. Because of the fusion between the culture and identity of the dominant group and that of the state, the identity of the state implies the socio-cultural, economic and political identities of the mainstream Amhara and their junior partners, the Tigrean people (Markakis 1994).
described as ‘extractive’ institution, environmental conservation is not an end by itself; rather a means to other goals like economic and political interests. Fletcher (2010: 178) posits conservation debates within discussions on governmentality, concerning the governance of mentality or the art of conducting subjects’ conduct’. Within the context of state conservation discourses and practices, governmentality is a process or an art of controlling or governing environments and environmental users as a means to achieve economic, political, environmental, emotional or psychological interests (Fletcher 2010; Peet et al 2011). The state discourses of environmental conservation are often forms of exercise of power over the people and territories they inhabit through different strategies. These strategies include establishing ‘environmental subjects’ through education, which is described as ‘disciplinary environmentality’, the ‘participation’ of local communities in conservation projects that can be termed as ‘neoliberal environmentality’ and a pure protectionist approach that is placed under ‘sovereign environmentality’ (Fletcher 2010: 177).

Owing to limited state authority over the society, particularly in peripheral parts of Africa, postcolonial states have resorted in some cases to environmental enclosures “promoting environmental conservation for reasons related to internal security or social control. Conservation initiatives might thus be a means for states to assert their authority over peoples and environments hitherto subject to weak control, thereby strengthening the position of the state in relation to other actors (even if grassroots ‘participation’ is ostensibly part of the process” (Bryant and Bailey 1997: 62). However, while I concur with the above argument, I would like to move the discussion further, suggesting that it is not an outright nullification of the state’s intentions and capabilities of environmental conservation in Africa. Rather, in a quite different scenario from some global discourses of environmental conservation that promote conservation for the sake of inherent salience of preserving biodiversity as the end goal, nature conservation in Africa has been promoted for economic, political, scientific and aesthetic purposes, using conservation discourse as a means to achieve these ends.

In Ethiopia, the state appropriation of land from local communities for the purposes of ‘biodiversity conservation’ in the form of national parks shares much in common with the colonial legacies that other African states inherited from the colonial powers. Because the state remains the key actor in influencing human-environmental interaction, mainly in developing countries, it is imperative to discuss the nature of the Ethiopian state, its interests in the struggle over environmental resources and its agency in creating environmental subjects. In this regard, I argue that the historical antecedents that ensued after the birth of the modern Ethiopian state have influenced its relations
with the society and its claims over environmental resources, particularly in the peripheries. By drawing on the notion that the state deploys different forms of power, narratives and technologies in its quest for environmental conservation, which is often a means to other economic and political ends, I will analyze how the Ethiopian state under different regimes deployed resources at its disposal for the same purpose. As Li (2007: 275) maintains, the fundamental principle of a government is to foster social change and the progress of its citizens, and more specifically to “improve the welfare of the population.” Nevertheless, it is a point of great contention as to whether successive Ethiopian regimes designed and implemented conservation projects such as the Nech Sar National Park for the sake of improving the welfare of the population.

To situate the discussion within the identity of the state, I reiterate what I discussed in the two preceding chapters about the political and cultural identities of the Ethiopian state. I have stated earlier that the Ethiopian state was characterized by a strong hegemonic center, with clear asymmetrical power relations between the center and periphery. In terms of cultural identification, the Ethiopian state was built upon the cultural, ethnic and religious manifestations of one dominant group, namely the Amhara. As a result, the worldviews, values, customs, religious outlooks, economic lifestyle and other forms of cultural practices of the peoples in the periphery did not have any representation in the making of the Ethiopian state (Markakis 2011). In other words, the imagination, identity and worldviews of its constituent society shaped how the center related itself to the periphery. This goes in line with Agrawal’s (2005) arguments that politics, institutions and identities of the state are the three fundamental technologies of governing the environment and creating environmental subjects. While the political setup prepares the ground for institutional frameworks for the state’s environmental policies and practices, identities are elements of values and beliefs that bring together state elites regarding their representation of the state, subjects and territories (Migdal 2001). In this regard, Orthodox Christianity, Amharic language, peasant agriculture, hereditary land tenure system, hierarchical social structure and the myth of ‘great tradition’ are the central constituting elements of its cultural identity, making the cultural self-identification of the Amhara and the Ethiopian state alike (Markakis 1994, 2011; Turton 2011).

Despite the new political order after 1991, attempting to deconstruct this trend and imagination, there are continuities of the past in most aspects of state-society relations in the country. The EPRDF government is confronted by three mutually contradictory policy paradigms regarding its intrusion into the periphery. Firstly, its policy of decentralization and rhetoric of local autonomy has created ambitious expectations on the part of the people in the periphery, who envisage seeing the
policy rhetoric translated into practice. In fact, this local aspiration for autonomy, self-government and recognition to their cultural values and practices can be seen as part of the global phenomenon of the late twentieth century, which sparked global indigenous peoples’ movement across the globe. Although grassroots movements in Ethiopia did not have a direct link with global indigenous peoples’ movements, it should be noted that there were some global dynamics and changes that encouraged ethno-nationalist movements in the country that linked local grievances with national and international discourses.

Secondly, as is common in most postcolonial African states and in contrast to the constitutional provisions of local autonomies in the post-1991 Ethiopia, the government has strengthened and expanded protected areas in the form of national parks, game and forest reserves, which largely exhibit the protectionist approach of conservation adopted from the Yellowstone National Park model. As elsewhere in the world, where national parks exclude local people from their livelihood, cultural and religious spaces and customary rights, the government’s conservation policy restrained the right of the people to decide on their affairs. It is clear that the dominant protectionist approach of nature conservation aims at maintaining a particular environment and its resources unchanged by restricting human interference.

The third scenario again contradicts the previous incongruities in the government policy. In contrast to the political rhetoric of self-government, which ostensibly granted ethnic groups, including those in the periphery, the right to administer resources under their administrative jurisdiction, the federal government seems to have usurped their rights through its ‘developmental state’ policies. There are some contradictions between the practices of the state, which represented itself as the main development agent on the one hand and as a guardian of the rights of its citizens on the other. This is because by placing itself as the ultimate planner and designer of development, the state denies the local people their rights to decide on matters that affect their lives. In addition, development interventions such as hydroelectric dam construction, large-scale plantation agriculture and leasing land to foreign and domestic investors stand in sharp contrast with conservation discourses that intend to maintain the status of biodiversity unchanged. It is evident that conservation and development projects are often contradictory to one another, although both share similarities in hampering local people’s customary rights (Brockington et al. 2008). The modernist developmental discourse of the state encourages sedentary agriculture and denigrates pastoralist livelihood style. Therefore, it is within these broader understandings of the Ethiopian state and the competing policy paradigms, particularly under the EPRDF regime, that this section will attempt to address the
aforementioned themes.

6.1.1. The State and Peripheral Representations

To understand how the state represents the territory, it is essential again to recall the nature of the Ethiopian state, its relation to the periphery and some dynamics in the process. This link is important because the Nech Sar National Park was established in the periphery that was incorporated to the empire in the 1890s. The representation of the periphery as ‘uninhabited’, ‘wasteland’, as well as the stereotypical representation of the people and their ways of life as ‘violent’ and ‘backward’ have persisted among the mainstream Abyssinian core society until present (Turton 2011). This representation is analogous to what Mbembe (2001: 1) refers to as the “negative interpretation” of Africa in the global discourses, where he further contends that “Africa is never seen as possessing things and attributes properly part of “human nature.” Or, when it is, it’s things and attributes are generally of lesser value, little importance, and poor quality. It is this elementariness and primitiveness that makes Africa the world par excellence of all that is incomplete, mutilated, and unfinished, its history reduced to a series of setbacks of nature in its quest for human kind.”

The hegemony of the center that was installed following the birth of the modern Ethiopian empire continued unchallenged despite major changes in the political order of the country particularly since 1991. Following the late nineteenth century conquest of the south, a new form of state-society relations emerged between the center and the periphery (Vaughan 2003; Markakis 2011). The center can be understood as an arena that constitutes three interdependent and complementary elements, “values and beliefs, institutions and elites” that enable the center to exert its authority over the periphery (Migdal 2001: 44). While the values and beliefs constitute the cultural, religious and mythic imaginations and practices considered ‘sacred’ among the members of the core, institutions are important instruments through which to channel the core values and beliefs of the center. Likewise, the elite category constitutes the core actors (political, business, religious, cultural and academic elites) who maneuver the institutional setups in the quest to exert state authority over the society.

In my previous discussions, I have explicated how the imposition of economic, cultural and political domination by the Amhara ruling elites upon the peoples in the subjugated regions had established a hegemonic system similar to the colonial encounters in other parts of Africa. The core values and
beliefs, such as the so-called ‘great tradition’, Orthodox Christianity, Amharic language and plough agriculture, remained central in the identity of the state and its “Othering” of the periphery. From center-periphery perspective, the modern Ethiopian state should be understood not as an institution accommodating both the center and the periphery, but as a center striving to encroach, control and engulf the periphery. The approaches of such encroachment and engulfment were different across different regimes. For example, while the imperial regime annexed and sought to control the peripheries by installing its hegemonic institutions such as Orthodox Church, state bureaucracy and feudal modes of resource extraction in the form of settler or absentee landlordism, the military regime attempted to broadcast its authority through collectivization and the establishment of peasant associations. On the other hand, the current regime uses two strongly interconnected strategies: the co-optation of elites from the periphery and encroachment through ‘developmental’ rhetoric and practices.

To contextualize the discussion within the scope of this chapter, I will first briefly discuss how the process of the conquest and the subsequent center-periphery relations that it created subsequently contributed to the dominant state representation of the territories in the periphery as ‘wilderness’ and ‘wasteland’. Two different but interconnected phenomena shaped such representation. Firstly, the conquest produced a victorious-defeated relationship between the center and the periphery, and forced people in the subjugated regions to come to terms with and at times contested their subordinate status. Whether it was represented as ‘wasteland’ or recognized as inhabited territory, the conquest removed the customary right of the indigenous peoples and vested ‘authority’ on the conquerors to decide the status of the conquered land (Markakis 1974; Donham 1986). Moreover, the fact that it was established as an Empire through the invasion of several autonomous states that contributed to the establishment of the subsequent colonial type of relationship between the center and the conquered subjects has had tremendous implications in framing the nature of the state and its representations of the lands and the people that it conquered. This is why Donham (1986) describes the Ethiopian Empire and its relations with its subjects in the South as predator-prey relations, whereby these regions were expropriated of their resources through the exploitative feudal system. Upon the incorporation of the resourceful regions into the empire, exploitation of the peasants in the Abyssinian center was significantly reduced, while it became harsher on the conquered subjects.

During the process of the conquest of indigenous peoples’ lands elsewhere, the conquering powers used discourses, narratives and myths such as the ‘doctrine of terra nullius’ and ‘wilderness’ that
were invented to delegitimize indigenous peoples’ customary practices and their rights to the lands (Stewart-Harawira 2005; Asebe 2011). I have also discussed in chapter two that the notions of wilderness were used as discursive instruments to nullify the history, culture and customary rights of indigenous peoples. Likewise, similar representations of the periphery were embedded in the identity of the Ethiopian state and in the north-south dichotomy, which were passed down from regime to regime.

Secondly, the conquest and the subsequent asymmetrical power relations between the core and peripheries created dichotomized relations, within which the state and its constituent core members identified themselves as cradles of civilization, whereas they demoted the conquered subjects as ‘backward’. Myths and narratives such as the legend of ‘great tradition’ and hereditary line of connection to king Solomon of Israel (the “Solomonic dynasty”) were invented to exclude non-Amhara and non-Tigrean groups from the political center (Markakis 2011). In this regard, the state and its dominant group used religion, language and state institutions to engrave the synonymy between the state and the dominating group. Donham (1986) maintains the view that the core-periphery dichotomy that existed long before the conquest was further strengthened by the post-conquest political, economic and cultural asymmetries in the empire. Prior to the incorporation of the periphery into the Ethiopian empire, the encounter between the two geographical and cultural niches took the form of trade, mainly constituting slave that flew from the periphery to the center and then sold to the outside world. Thus, slavery, slave trade and differences in ecological and economic lifestyles contributed to the establishment of cultural boundaries between the two.

The power-laden relationship between the Amhara ruling elites, the Orthodox Church, the military and their ordinary peasants on the one hand and the subjected people in the peripheries on the other had exacerbated the dichotomy between the two. In other words, the cultural self-representation of the core as the cradle of ‘civilization’ and its portrayal of the periphery as ‘backward’ entailed the assertion that cultural and religious practices and economic livelihood other than those of the dominant group were considered ‘inferior’ (Donham 1986). In short, both the military conquest and the center-periphery dichotomies in cultural and political spheres enhanced the center’s justification for its actions in eroding the customary rights of the subjected people in the periphery. As part of the justification to its administrative interventions and assimilation policies in the South, the imperial regime presented the conquest and its interventions as ‘civilizing missions’ through the homogenization of cultural and religious pluralities into the Amhara/Tigrean culture and religion (Mohammed 1996).
The military regime that took state power from Haile Selassie in 1974 sustained similar notions of representing the territories, livelihood and cultural practices of the people in peripheral regions as backward (Dereje 2011). Although the regime did not officially identify itself with a specific ethnic group, its ‘high-modernist’ orientations placed the periphery at the margin of the state, whereas its inclination to mainstream cultural practices favored the continuation of the status quo. According to Scott (1998), high-modernist ideology entails uncritical acceptance of the legitimacy of science and technology by powerful actors, such as states who consider ‘rational’ social order or ‘social engineering’ and mastery of nature, including human nature as signs and instruments of modernization. For example, state-initiated development and social re-ordering such as “the Great Leap Forward in China, collectivization in Russia, and compulsory villagization in Tanzania, Mozambique, and Ethiopia are among the great human tragedies of the twentieth century, in terms of both lives lost and lives irretrievably disrupted” (Scott 1998: 3). Likewise, the military regime in Ethiopia strengthened the centralization of state power, suppressed multiculturalism and disrupted socio-cultural practices under the guise of modernization (Clapham 2002; Dereje 2011).

I discussed earlier that the Ethiopian state inherited the socio-cultural bias towards sedentary agriculture as a form of modernity, in contrast to pastoralism. For instance, the former prime minister of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi, once described the pastoralist areas in the southern and southwestern parts of the country as ‘backward’ in terms of civilization. According to the late prime minister’s speech on ‘Pastoralist Day Festival’ in 2011, the government planned to launch a large-scale sedentarization program to convert the pastoral communities in the Lower Omo valley to sedentary villages, where they would abandon pastoralism and begin a new way of life based upon agriculture and wage labor.30 As I discussed in the preceding chapters, the dominant idea in nature conservation also presumes the domestication of wilderness, for both biodiversity conservation and utilitarian purposes (sporting, aesthetic consumption, tourism and scientific research). With the exception of few internal differences within the state structure, this view concerning the area has continued among the state authorities throughout the history of the park.

For example, in the case of the Nech Sar National Park, successive Ethiopian regimes described the territory as an empty land and thereby made the people who lived in and around the park ‘invisible’

30 On a Pastoralist Day festival held in South Omo zone (Jinka town) on 25 January 2011, the late prime minister was quoted saying “I promise you that, even though this area is known as backward in terms of civilization, it will become an example of rapid development.” see http://www.mursi.org/pdf/Meles%20Jinka%20speech.pdf
through this dominant discourse, which privileged farming agriculture over nomadic pastoralism (Getachew 2007). In his discussions of ‘high-modernism’ – a condition in which states, elites, individuals and institutions “claim to speak about the improvement of the human condition with the authority of scientific knowledge” – Scott (1998: 93) further argues that many parts of the world experienced tragedies of state intervention. Scott further contends, “all human habits and practices that were inherited and hence not based on scientific reasoning – from the structure of the family and patterns of residence to moral values and forms of production – would have to be reexamined and redesigned” (1998: 93). Likewise, despite formally recognizing the traditional values, customs and practices of diverse ethnic groups including those in the periphery, the ambitious developmental plans of the current government resemble the high-modernist orientations of its predecessor.

Nevertheless, the state-society relations in the post-1991 political reconfiguration have been most contentious and ambivalent for some contradictions between the political rhetoric and its lived realities on the ground. Here, it is sound to argue that despite its ostensible departure from the past in terms of deconstructing the Ethiopian state, in terms of both its political foundation and cultural identity, the current regime has inherited much from its predecessors. For instance, in contrast to the constitutional provisions as well as some practical appearances on the ground, there is a clear continuation of centralization of state power as well as hegemony of the center, albeit with a shift from Amhara to Tigrean ascendancy (Merera 2003; Markakis 2011). In this regard, the federal state has often been criticized for interfering with the internal affairs of regional governments by appointing its loyal officials and dismissing others, by assigning cadre members from the TPLF party to oversee the works of regional states and by maintaining authority over the budget (Merera 2003; Vaughan 2003; Assefa 2006).

Moreover, the developmental state paradigm that has been in place since 2002 has remarkably undermined the autonomy of the local governments and the people in the peripheries, because this political and economic discourse gives ultimate right and mandate to the state in planning, designing and implementing development projects and impinging the democratic rights of the citizens. However, unlike the previous regimes, the Ethiopian state has become more heterogeneous in terms of comprising regional states established along ethnic lines. This has sometimes brought contestations among regional states and/or between regional states and the federal state on implementation processes of policies and programs such as the conservation of the Nech Sar National Park. Although regional states are not as such autonomous to take strong positions against some policies and programs that come from the federal government, internal heterogeneity of the
state itself hints at possibilities that state intervention at times faces some challenges both from grassroots communities and from the state structure itself.

6.1.2. Development and Conservation in Ethiopia – Perspectives from the State

While discussing state strategies of implementing its developmental policies and practices, James Scott (1998) argued that authoritarian states design ambitious development plans and use coercive power in its implementation, although such ‘high-modernist’ practices fail because of the simplification of the simplification of practical knowledge, social relations and environmental conditions. When governments adopt a certain ideology, idea and model and channel it to the grassroots level, they often present it as a project designed to improve and transform the living conditions of society (Li 2007). Likewise, the successive Ethiopian governments used conservation and development as mutually reinforcing projects to improve the living conditions of local communities ensure the sustainable conservation of the biodiversity and promote tourism. The successive Ethiopian governments (the imperial, military and current regimes) used the concepts conservation and development as mutually constitutive phenomena in their rhetoric of establishing protected areas.

The past regimes emphasized the economic and environmental contributions of protected areas and presented the state as a key actor in achieving these goals. For instance, in its request for UNESCO’s technical and expert support in the process of establishing national parks, the Ethiopian government under the imperial regime underlined its commitment to establish protected areas to boost the economy of the country through tourism, as well as contributing to biodiversity conservation (Huxley et al. 1963). Indeed, the establishment of the Nech Sar National Park was partly informed by the imperial regime’s efforts to place the Guji agro-pastoral community under its effective administrative control. The military regime positioned national parks within its modernist discourses that juxtaposed development, nationalism and conservation as idioms of nation-building. It placed emphasis on forest, wildlife and soil conservation, albeit with utmost top-down approaches (Shibiru and Kifle 1998). The establishment of national parks during this period was further linked to the notion of conquering ‘wild’ areas as the case of the socialist military regime’s often saying, ‘Tefetiron be kutitir sir enawulalen’ (We shall put nature under control). This rhetoric implies the government’s projects of controlling, domesticating and subduing the physical nature and its resources, although it broadly envisioning science and technology to implement its ‘high modernist’ economic schemes and social changes.
Like the post-enlightenment thinking in Europe that equated domesticating and subduing ‘wilderness’ with the victory of ‘modernity’ over ‘primitivism’, the establishment of national parks in Ethiopia was a conservation endeavor, an ideological manifestation and a strategy of political control. Keeping wildlife under the gaze of humans within national parks or game reserves by restricting their movements and behavior is tantamount to the conquest of the ‘New World’ from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, whereby indigenous peoples were kept within restricted territories (Merchant 2003). I would like to reiterate that setting aside land in the form of national parks within the dominant nature-culture dualism imposes human’s hegemonic control over the wildlife. Likewise, the ‘modernization’ discourse under the military regime itself was built upon the existing cultural supremacy and dichotomization between what were then considered by the mainstream society as ‘civilized’ and ‘ uncivilized’ cultural practices.

Because it considered delineating humans from the wildlife as a sign of modernity, the military regime launched resettlement programs targeting the Guji and Koore communities in the 1980s. At a national level, the regime undertook an ambitious program of collecting peasants into collective villages, which was meant to ‘develop’ and ‘modernize’ the living style of peasants by facilitating easy delivery of social services (Taddesse 1995). Like a villagization program that was ostensibly planned under the rubric of ‘modernization’ and ‘improving’ the living standards of peasants, the government situated the resettlement program and in fact the eviction of the Guji and Koore from the Nech Sar National Park within the context of development. Moreover, its efforts to create better home for the wildlife that were thought to include the country among the progressive African nations of the time, such as Tanzania under Nyerere was also part of the ‘modernist’ project.

As a former official in Gamo Gofa province during the military regime recalls the 1982 eviction of the Guji and Koore communities from the national park, the socialist government was obsessed with its modernization discourse and ordered the eviction as part of controlling the environment and transforming it into modern ways of national park management. The informant described how government officials contextualized national parks within the modernization rhetoric, on the one hand, and attempted to justify the eviction as a process of ‘improving’ the lives of the people and of the wildlife on the other hand:

Higher officials told us that people should not live with animals. They warned us that we had to control people’s entry to the national park because it was considered as a sign of backwardness and embarrassment to the revolutionary and modernized state. The government said, ‘the people should be removed in order not to distort the image of the country among foreigners who visited the country and also in order to conserve the national heritages such as
the endemic wildlife. Everything was understood according to the politics of the period. Today, the government talks about beher behereseboch [nations and nationalities]. In this context, everybody talks about rights of every group. People practice their culture and ways of life. However, during the Derg regime, those practices like nomadism were considered as primitive. Therefore, it was brought to the attention of the provincial administration that the people should be resettled somewhere and lead a better life where the government would provide them education, healthcare and other modern facilities. It was also to avoid human impacts on the wildlife (informant Ayele Danche, April 2012).

Moreover, pastoralist areas in the peripheral lowland parts of the country were seen as violent-prone and a threat to national security (Hagmann and Alemmaya 2008). Most of the pastoralist areas in Ethiopia straddle along national borders and given that pastoralist communities do not have the conception of compartmentalized boundary, there were actually apparent cases of arms smuggling and trans-border livestock raiding along Ethiopia’s borders. Moreover, these border regions were where ethno-nationalist armed movements have been operating against the central government across different regimes. In this context, it can be noted that setting aside portions of a territory in the form of protected areas was part of the government’s exercise of power in subduing dissidents, because it controls access to those areas. Moreover, the military state represented the territory as a violent prone area inhabited by ‘warrior’ nomadic pastoralists whose presence in the park threatened the security of the neighboring communities.

As I discussed earlier, political ecologists call for the greater scrutiny of conservation enclosures owing to the intricacy and inseparability of political and economic motives of actors from ecological objectives. Bryant and Bailey (1997: 62) noted that “in the case of the creation of a park, there is not only the delimitation of the borders of the new administrative entity, but also the appointment of a whole ‘army’ of park rangers and guards to ensure that excluded actors do not interfere with park management. These officials also keep potential ‘troublemakers’ in the area under close surveillance in a manner akin to a military operation.” Likewise, the military regime took punitive measures against the Guji in Segen Valley (some 30 kilometer to the south of the national park) in 1975, accusing them of rebelling against the government (Asebe 2012d). The government used the same allegation against the Guji during the course of the 1982 eviction, with a Guji elder, Danbala Badacha, recalling the incident as follows:

I have been living here since the last three governments [Haile Selassie, Mengistu Haile Mariam and Meles Zenawi]. All of them considered us as their enemy. They said ‘Guji is shifta’ [bandit/rebellion] but Guji is always peaceful. Actually, Guji does not bow down to its enemies. That is why they said so. Before they chased us from our home in 1982, the officials from Gamo Gofa province announced on a big public meeting that the shifta lived among the Guji. They also declared that unless the Guji were removed from the park, trade relations between the Gamo and Amara [Koore] would be impossible. They chased us from our home but that was not really for the sake of the animals (informant Danbala Badacha, March 2011).
Under the current regime, which ostensibly recognizes the rights of nations and nationalities to administer resources on their territories, the government juxtaposed both economic interest and conservation objectives when it comes to the Nech Sar National Park. These interests underpin the government’s obsession with the narratives propounded by its predecessors. Besides the perspectives of the ‘wild’ and ‘natural’ south to which the government subscribes, its developmental state paradigm is also central in its policy formulations that rarely recognize the voices of local communities. However, as part of its initial notions of decentralization of state power to lower administrative structures, the EPRDF seems to have resorted to what Agrawal (2005: 15-16) describes as “governmentalized localities” and “the making of environmental subjects.” By the term “governmentalized localities”, Agrawal (2005: 15) refers to the process or strategy by which the state extends its control over the subjects and the environment by stretching state power and “political-economic relationships between centers, localities and the subjects.” The making of environmental subjects is a process of inculcating dominant environmental values or discourses into the life worlds of the subjects through environmental education or coercive approaches.

Following the political reconfiguration along ethnic lines in 1991, the EPRDF government decentralized the management of the Nech Sar National Park to the SNNP regional state, whereby local administrative units were supposed to be given mandates of planning and managing the territory. As part of the general optimism of the early-1990s concerning the political ‘blessings’ of the regime, which were thought to promote democratization and development by harnessing ethnicity for the same purpose, the decentralization of the national park administration was also supposed to enhance local empowerment and mobilization towards conservation projects. However, decentralization alone does not guarantee community participation, empowerment and benefit. Rather, as Agrawal (2005: 7) suggests, “policies aiming at greater decentralization and participation are about new technologies of government. To be successful, they must redefine political relations, reconfigure institutional arrangements, and transform environmental subjectivities.” Moreover, as Mohan and Hickey (2004) contend, any development program that undermines the cultural, economic, political and social rights of citizens cannot achieve any goal of social transformation, given that it faces resistance from the people whom it is supposed to serve. It has also been argued that citizens’ participation should be more broadly conceptualized as a transformative political and citizenship right, through which “people extend their status and rights as members of particular political communities thereby increasing their control over socio-economic resources” (Mohan and Hickey 2004: 66).
In short, despite differences in their political and economic ideologies, there are significant commonalities between the three regimes in their representation of the territory and their approaches of addressing the questions of the local people to their customary rights. Fundamentally, the government has been considering the territory as a ‘human-free’ space by eroding the human history from the land. Informed by the political and cultural identity of the state, as well as development and conservation discourses, successive governments in Ethiopia have relegated the customary rights of the people in the periphery, including those in and adjacent to the Nech Sar National Park. Therefore, it is possible to argue that the notion of representing the Nech Sar as ‘wild’ and ‘uninhabited’ should be broadly understood as part of the ‘North-South’ dichotomy in Ethiopia, which has been instrumentally used as a political and socio-cultural schema of controlling the resources. In addition, the state used development and conservation rhetoric to delegitimize indigenous knowledge and ways of life of the people for similar purposes of ensuring its economic, political and environmental control.

6.1.3. Towards the ‘Making of Environmental Subjects’?

Over the years, state institutions and conservation organizations have worked to institutionalize and inculcate conservation discourses and approaches as mechanisms of ‘making environmental subjects’ through “involvement in new regimes of monitoring, enforcement, and regulation” (Agrawal 2005: 17). According to Agrawal (2005) and Fletcher (2010), the making of environmental subjects entails different strategies of creating people who care for the environment. The process includes neoliberal environmentality – the provision of incentives to resource users as an instrument of persuading them with conservation missions – and disciplinary environmentality – an act of inculcating environmental ethics in the life-worlds of resource users (Fletcher 2010). While agreeing to the two strategies in the making of the aforementioned environmental subjects, I push the arguments of Agrawal (2005) further that coercion is also part of the technologies used by states to create environmental subjects. As the case in the Nech Sar National Park demonstrates, the state’s efforts to create subjects who ‘accept’ its conservation programs not only included techniques of incentives and ethics, but also coercion.

State officials have used multiple forms of environmentalities (neoliberal, disciplinary and sovereign) to suppress local resistance in the struggle over environmental resources. For instance,

---

31 I borrowed the concept, “making environmental subjects” from Agrawal (2005) in which he referred to different technologies of environmental government that are intended to produce subjects that embrace values, discourses and practices of environmental conservation held by strong actors such as the state.
the following ethnographic data illuminates how the government used its visible and invisible hands to create environmental subjects. In March 2012, people from the park administration and some officials from Galana district of Oromia regional state visited a Guji village of Gode. This village was located around the southeastern part of the park, close to the hot spring (*Xabala*) that the Guji traditionally used for its healing purposes. By accusing the people of cattle trespass and encroaching into the park boundary through settlement, the government officials ordered the people to dismantle their houses in two days. On the third day, they came and destroyed sixty-four homes at gunpoint. In another incident, the government arrested eight Guji men and women whom the park administration allegedly accused of killing rhinoceros from Lake Chamo. Moreover, the park administration rewarded a Koore young man who reported the case to the park scouts with money. Therefore, by coercing people whom it found as reluctant in obeying its rule and rewarding those who were co-opted to the state’s conservation rules, the government strived to create subjects who ‘care’ for the environment, due to either fear of coercion or in anticipation of reciprocity.

While the notion of commodifying nature and introduction of market-based approach of environmental resource management through ecotourism fits the neoliberal environmentality, the state’s attempts to educate local people and its resort to coercive forces in enacting its authority go in line with what Fletcher (2010: 177) calls “disciplinary and sovereign environmentalities”, respectively. Drawing on these conceptualizations, I will analyze how the Ethiopian government under different state agencies enforced different forms of environmental government or environmentality regarding the Nech Sar National Park vis-à-vis other contending actors, mainly the local communities.

Because development and conservation programs are often used by powerful actors such as states and multinational corporations as forms of control over the knowledge, the rights and resources of grassroots societies, political ecologists call for great scrutiny of these concepts and the way in which actors use them (Robbins 2004; Peet et al. 2011). I hold the view that although the problems are not inherent in development and conservation per se, but in the way, these notions are used and implemented, it has been often the case that some actors used these discourses to advance their own interests and deter others from perceived or actual fields of competition. This is why we need to cautiously address these concepts and their usage by different actors. According to Peet et al. (2011: 32), “the capacity to dominate or subjugate environment also entails stifling or controlling resistance from the side of local communities who rise against costs of environment related development projects or conservation activities.” For example, in environmental management, the
state exercises its power over the environment through its capacity to control actions of people or other organizations, thus revealing its ‘sovereign’ power (Peet et al. 2011).

Like competing political and economic interests between Oromia and SNNP regional states over the Nech Sar National Park, Robbins (2004) interrogates how different actors cast local or regional political questions and conflicts in ecological terms. Some scholars argue that social actors use narratives and discourses to legitimize their claim of entitlement to a territory in their pursuit to achieve their interests or deter other actors from getting access to the same environmental resources (Gossling 2004). Building my arguments on the notion that “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), I will analyze how the state has used conservation and development narratives to control the territory and the people regarding the Nech Sar National Park.

Based upon its highly contested political and development rhetoric, I will focus on the current government’s intervention in the Nech Sar National Park. However, I present the Ethiopian state as a divided political entity with different state structures and institutions constituting various views on the national park. As I have discussed earlier, ethnic federalism has created diversities of claims, interests and narratives among different groups and regions in the post-1991 Ethiopia by subscribing to ethnicity as a fundamental foundation in the socio-political and cultural reordering of the state. In most cases, ethnic groups began writing their history to redress past distortions and underrepresentation in the mainstream Ethiopian historiography. In the process, additions, omissions or corrections to geographical areas, historical incidents and people’s history of origin and settlement became apparently evident. For example, a historical book published by Oromia Culture and Tourism bureau traced back Guji’s settlement in the present day Nech Sar National Park area to the sixteenth century, although government officials in the SNNP regional state contest this part of the history of the Guji (Getachew 2007). In fact, Lewis (1966) takes this history further, arguing that the lowland areas to the west and east of Lake Abaya were part of the original homeland of the Oromo long before their expansion to different parts of the country in the sixteenth century.

By contrast, while the Koore elites and their ordinary people claim the entire Nech Sar area up to Bonke hill, the Gamo Gofa Zone has redefined its administrative boundary to encompass the entire park, as happened following the 1991 administrative reconfiguration. This contestation and claim of
entitlement based on historical ‘resources’ goes in line with what Appadurai (1981: 202) argues as “discourse concerning the past between social groups is an aspect of politics, involving competition, opposition and debate.” In this regard, while both Oromia regional state and the Guji community questioned the credibility of the notion of ‘uninhabited’ territory and raised questions about the customary rights of the people, those in the SNNP regional state also had their own historical ‘resource’ to counter the claim of their rivals. Such different interpretations of the past, including utilizing them as an historical resource for the purpose of claim over the territory, complicated the issues of management, utilization and customary rights of the people in and around the park. This shows the heterogeneity of the state, which could potentially challenge the smooth translation of any dominant state discourse into practice.

Because the state constitutes people with different interests who sometimes represent competing departments, views and interests it is naïve to imagine it as a monolithic entity with homogenous views among its structures and institutions. An insight into internal diversities and competing interests secures us from the risk of assuming an actor as a homogenous group with common interests, actions and characteristics (Bryant and Bailey 1997). There are clear differences within the state itself concerning the approaches to managing the national park, ranging from inter-departmental conflicts to inter-regional contestations over the national park. Nevertheless, different state departments and administrative structures at times converge in that conservation and development discourses or even resistance against these narratives have been systematically used to control the people.

Department wise, the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA) under the federal state and the SNNP regional state Culture and Tourism bureau has encouraged conservation and tourism development in the national park. The EWCA has criticized investment bureaus for allocating land to investors inside protected areas and complained that they did not give adequate protection to wildlife and rangers. Rather, according to information from the EWCA, encroachment in the form of farming, grazing and extraction of resources are major challenges to the sustainable management of protected areas in Ethiopia.32 As I discussed in chapter five, the EWCA has subscribed to the ‘wilderness’ notions for two major purposes: to attract tourists to the areas and justify the relocation of local communities under the pretext that the coexistence of humans with the wildlife in and around national parks is incompatible. It would reiterate that knowledge concerning the


250
environment is produced through combinations of narratives, discourses and frameworks that are constructed by a particular social actor to legitimize a particular form of knowledge and suppress counter narratives (Peet et al. 2011).

National parks in Ethiopia have been founded on the Yellowstone National Park model, which excluded human history from the territories; indeed, the management of most of the national parks remains largely exclusionist (see chapters 2 and 4). By adopting a mission of conservation and management of wildlife through scientific approaches for ecological, economic and social benefits, the EWCA has also set its vision within conservation and tourism framework and envisions “in 2020 to be one of the top five countries in wildlife tourism in Africa.”33 In order to achieve this vision, the authority has described income maximization in terms of tourism, wildlife hunting, a wildlife export license, as well as wildlife filming and collecting money from researchers.

During my fieldwork, I got the chance to talk to higher officials in the EWCA from whom I learned that conservation in Ethiopia is largely an economic project, while biodiversity preservation is considered as the means to this end. However, the government apparently switches its policies as it suits the interest of donors. For instance, while the front page of the EWCA’s website depicted national parks in the country as ‘wilderness’, announced as “Come and See the Real Wilderness in Ethiopia”, it has also published a self-contradictory statement on its webpage in which it recognized local communities’ co-existence with the wildlife despite persistence of conflicts and harmony. While the former representation implies that these territories as ‘uninhabited’ and ‘natural’, the latter seemingly recognizes people’s settlement in and around national parks. It went to the extent of defending human settlement in and around national parks as a question of survival for peasants and pastoralists who live side by side with the wildlife and experience day to day encounters, in contrast to Western tourists for whom wildlife tourism is a leisure time in Africa. The EWCA document further states:

It is one thing to live in [a] European or American city, come to Ethiopia for holidays and watch dangerous animals from the security of a land cruiser. In addition, it is another thing to live with them side by side, have the crops and livestock, the only food for the family destroyed, and the grass, which provides the livelihood for cattle, goats and sheep eaten by wildlife.34

From this dimension, one might wonder whether the government has made a paradigm shift in its

34 http://www.ewca.gov.et/en/_sdpase
approach of national parks management, – from exclusionist to a more inclusive approach that recognizes the customary rights of local communities. However, rhetoric is often different from action or practice. On the one hand, the rhetoric of inclusiveness the government advocates is a self-contradictory, because the government’s resettlement plans and evictions local communities experienced under the same government are cases that contradict the seemingly pro-people perspectives of the government mentioned above. On the other hand, as the major discourse of conservation has moved from the classical protectionist approach to the so-called community-based conservation, which has gained the support of donors and influential conservation organizations such as the IUCN, the government seems to have adjusted to the ‘realities’ of the day. However, on the practical ground, the government still subscribes to the notions of ‘fortress conservation’ and excluded the local communities from the management, utilization and ownership of resources in the park, apart from strategically using the people as a local regulatory committee by recruiting scouts and committee members who inspect the activities of their own community.

While the above discussions illuminate the ideas, narratives and perspectives that the government adopted as technologies of channeling down its conservation programs, it is important to note what practical activities the park administration performs and how these activities have been undertaken. Such discussion hints at different forms of environmental governance that the state has adopted. The local level administrative unit of the Nech Sar National Park is the park administration, located at the outskirts of Arba Minch town to the east. This local administrative unit did not change much at different times, when the park experienced different administrative changes. The park administration was staffed with park rangers/scouts, biologists and administrative staff, whose number changed from time to time. During my fieldwork in 2012, the park administration had over forty scouts, two biologists, five administrative staff members, a tourism ‘expert’ and the warden.

The scouts were discharged to seven different outposts, three of which were located along the eastern side bordering the Guji and Koore communities. While the park biologists together with other administrative staff oversee wildlife habitat, location and behavior, as well as the status of pasture and water for the wildlife, the tourism ‘expert’ is responsible for promoting tourism through media and giving orientations to tourists upon their arrival. The major role of the ‘expert’ involves reproducing the narratives of aesthetic values of the territory, ‘emptiness’ of the land from human habitation before the 1960s, as well as feeding the audience with the story of how the species have been endangered by human encroachment. Moreover, the officer capitalizes on the tourism potential of the national park, which would contribute to the national economy. Much of the park
management activities were conducted by the scouts or park rangers, who were armed with automatic gun and patrolled the park the whole day. The scouts were responsible for inspecting the local people’s day-to-day activities around the park boundary. In addition, with the entire staff members of the park administration, they participate in ‘educating’ local communities about environmental conservation ethics, benefits that can be recurred from tourism, as well as the punishments people would face if they transgress park rules.

This small government administrative bureaucracy has become a locus of power, sharing much in common with what Agrawal (2005: 15) describes as “governmentalized localities.” While Agrawal’s (2005) conceptualization of governmentalized localities refers to the establishment of local administrative units with closer ties to local communities and with stronger power vested in them, the Nech Sar National Park administration used park rangers who were recruited from local communities as its entry point, using them as instruments of despotic control in the making of environmental subjects. In fact, as I discussed in chapters four and five, the park administration under the past successive regimes exercised coercive power upon the local communities in its efforts to secure the territory from human influences. In this sense, the exercise of sovereign environmentality can be described in terms of the government’s control over the people’s customary rights of resource utilization and ownership through the territorialization of the park territory, relocation of the local communities, the enforcement of fines and the imprisonment of people whom it found ‘guilty’ of transgressing its rules.

Nevertheless, one major point to interrogate now is how to explain such state intervention beyond conservation discourses. Beyond the political-ecological discussion, it is also possible to situate the phenomena within the historical contexts of the birth of the modern Ethiopian state. The military conquest that brought the incorporation of the peripheral regions into the empire transformed the status of customary rights of the people, conferring all land to the crown (Donham 1986). From this angle of interpretation, all the actions of the government such as eviction of the people, restriction of their access to the resources, imposition of fines and other administrative measures can be understood as the exercise of the state’s sovereign right over the subjects and territories under its jurisdiction. It is part of the state’s continuous broadcasting of its authority to the periphery, despite the presumed completion of state formation in the late nineteenth century.

Back to the park administration’s employment of coercive actions as strategies of extending its
authority, the period from mid-1990s to 2005 was the time when the park administration attempted to quash, by deployment of hard power, the people’s struggle for their customary rights. Nevertheless, its inability to suppress local resistance prompted the park administration and the government at large to resort to disciplinary techniques of environmental conservation. The park rangers, biologists, tourism ‘expert’ and the wardens of the park have been engaged in providing the local communities what they called ‘awareness creation education’. In March 2012, I attended a workshop organized by the national park administration in collaboration with EWCA, within which local elders, members of youth associations, women and the entire park staff participated for two days. According to a presenter from EWCA who addressed issues of ‘poaching’, ‘illegal’ fire, cattle ‘trespass’ and farming ‘encroachment’ in different parks with particular reference to the Nech Sar National Park, national parks are protected not for the sake of prioritizing wildlife over the people but because the wildlife and other natural resources are fundamental national heritages in generating income. The participants of the workshop also mentioned that the local people should understand natural resource conservation as part of the global campaign against climate change, the effect of which has been locally felt through intermittent drought and flooding. In this regard, the park administration sought to produce environmental subjects by resorting to a different technology of environmental governance that Agrawal (2005) and Fletcher (2010) described as disciplinary environmentality. Neumann (2001) clearly argues that the state creates conditions that ‘discipline’ local communities by putting them under constant surveillance by state agents as well as by a few co-opted members of the communities.

Nevertheless, as Guji and Koore informants commonly agree, the teachings of the park administration over the last two decades have been quite different from what they have experienced in their day-to-day interactions with the park. For these people, neither its ecotourism advantage nor its contribution to climate change mitigation is their priority. Deprivation from farmland, grazing areas and water wells is a more acute problem for the people than what the state envisions to receive in terms of environmental and economic returns. As will be detailed in the next two chapters, the local communities contested the state intervention through different strategies. This was why the park administration devised a different form of control by establishing local national park protecting committees.

The government and the local communities established local committees under local village administrations among the Guji and Koore communities. Committee members were not salaried but received incentives from the park administration in the form of daily allowances when they traveled
to Arba Minch for meetings or reports. Although committee members were supposed to inspect within their respective villages, the park managed to manipulate the existing inter-ethnic mistrusts by covertly assigning local regulatory members to rival villages. For instance, when I was in the field in March 2012, a member of the Koore local regulatory committee reported to the park administration that a few Guji youth were involved in ‘killing’ a hippopotamus from Lake Chamo. Although the Guji informants dismissed the allegation and accused the Koore committee members that their allegation was motivated by existing inter-ethnic tensions, it ultimately brought the initial arrest of eight Guji individuals including three women and five young men. This strategy of control has been evident in many colonial systems, within which colonial authorities crafted local “regulatory community” to extend their influence to the local communities by tying the newly created regulatory body with resident subjects through social, economic and structural relationships (Agrawal 2005: 16). However, in the case of the Guji and Koore communities, due to strong social cohesion, values and sense of belongingness to one’s community, members of the local regulatory committee were often reluctant to expose members of their own ethnic group. On the other hand, they expose or accuse members of any rival ethnic group as a mechanism of demonstrating their own loyalty, as well as concealing the practices of their own groups.

Put briefly, I argue that the park administration has exercised multiple forms of environmentality in its effort to create environmental subjects. Agrawal’s (2005) conceptualization of the making of environmental subjects focused on the state’s usage of disciplinary techniques and incentives to inculcate its conservation values in the life worlds of the people. I further I argue that the Ethiopian state has used sovereign, ‘neoliberal’ and disciplinary forms of environmental governance through its administrative agencies, aimed at creating people who ‘care’ for the environment through fear of coercion or in expectation of economic and social benefits, or as a result of ‘awareness’ concerning environmental affordances. While the different techniques of control the state exercised upon the local people were strategies of channeling down its conservation discourses to the ground, the representation of the territories as exotic, wilderness and uninhabited were discursive instruments in delegitimizing local claims of entitlement.

Moreover, objectification of the territory has been part of the ‘othering’ discourse of the state, which it inherited from the past. In this regard, by presenting itself as development agent and a guardian of the environment, the federal state downplayed any alternative views from the people. As I discussed earlier in this work, for the Guji Oromo for example, an appropriate development or conservation project is one that goes in line with their traditional values, ethics, customs, belief system and ways
of life. Owing to the strong cultural and identity representations that it embodies, pastoralism remains central in their conceptualization of development. Therefore, any development or conservation scheme that threatens or alters this way of life is not acceptable by the majority of ordinary Guji men and women. By contrast, the government overtly expressed its intentions to change the lifestyle of the pastoralist communities into commercial agriculture and engaging them into daily labor work in the plantation activities, through which the people would be ‘emancipated’ from following the ‘tails of the livestock’ and begin to exercise modern life, according to the state perspectives. These competing visions of development are central in the contestations between the state and the local communities in areas of conservation for the sake of ecotourism.

6.1.4. The National Park as a Field of Contention between the Two Regional States

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, it is naïve to imagine the state as a monolithic institution with similar views on policies, programs and practices. As a major actor in a politicized environment with influential power, “the ‘state’ encompasses diverse agencies and interests, and further operates in a world of states.” Therefore, “the state’s role as an environmental manager needs to be understood as an outcome of intra-state, as well as inter-state conflict” (Bryant and Bailey 1997: 63). In this section, I will focus on conflicts over the management and ownership of the Nech Sar National Park that ensued between Oromia and SNNP regional states. The case of the two regional states is very insightful, partly because it shows the increased internal heterogeneity of the state after 1991 and partly as a phenomenon to probe into different strategies that both regions used to achieve their interests. Moreover, the disagreements between the two regional states were at times advantageous for the local communities, who were capable of converting the conflict to their advantage.

6.1.4.1. Oromia Regional State

To begin with Oromia regional state, it has persistently been claiming that the territory was an ancestral land of the Guji Oromo (Getachew 2007). This was partly why different government authorities in the region were reluctant to the resettlement plan of the Guji in the 1990s and 2004. The resistance from Oromia regional state can be seen as a political departure from the existing trend, because the politicians in this region have been criticized for their surrogate existence under the tutelage of the TPLF (Merera 2003). In his letter to the former deputy Prime Minister, the then regional president of Oromia underscored that the Guji lived in the area long before the park’s establishment (see the letter in appendix). To unpack the ‘mystery’ behind Oromia’s resistance to
the resettlement plan of the Guji Oromo and to generally unveil the prevailing points of contestation, it is imperative to infer to a few of its referents of claims. From a long discussion with one of the higher officials in Borana Zone, I learned that there were two major reasons for the Oromia regional state, represented by the Oromo People’s Democratic Organization (OPDO)\textsuperscript{35} party, to resist or at least remain indifferent towards the conservation and development practices of the federal government in the Nech Sar National Park. The first reasons were economic and historical, while the second was political, involving issues of gaining legitimacy from the populace.

As Getachew (2007) describes, the fact that the Guji were prior inhabitants of the area, at least since the sixteenth century – long before the advent of the Ethiopian empire to the region, has given Oromia strong historical point of reference to claim for the inclusion of the territory into its border in line with the principles of ethnic federalism. Indeed, different historical sources attest that the Oromo lived around Lakes Abaya and Chamo long before the incorporation of the region into the Ethiopian Empire (McClellan 1988; Mohammed 1990). Others further argue that an area including the present day Nech Sar National Park was part of the cradle land of the Oromo people, from where they have expanded to other areas since the sixteenth century (Lewis 1966). Therefore, for a few Oromo political elites even within the OPDO\textsuperscript{36} the incorporation of the territory into the SNNP regional state is commensurate to a compromise to the history of the Guji Oromo and a denial of their constitutional right. Moreover, there were economic interests within the OPDO political elites in Galana and Abaya districts to divert the tourist route from the SNNP region to their own by connecting a road to the national park from the east.

In addition to the historical and economic claims of entitlement to the national park, politicians at different administrative structures in Oromia regional state strive to repair the legitimacy crisis of the OPDO party. Although it managed to recruit members through incentives and coercion, OPDO still suffers from lack of legitimacy and has limited popular support in Oromia. It remains critiqued by its critical supporters and detractors alike for being insensitive to address major democratic rights of the Oromo people and for its nominal position within the EPRDF. Thus, by ‘defending’ the constitutional rights of the Guji, thereby presenting itself as a champion of the interest of the Oromo people, OPDO attempted to gain legitimacy among the Guji and the Oromo in general. For instance,

\textsuperscript{35} OPDO is one of the four coalition parties that make the EPRDF, which has been on power since 1991. Although it is a party that ostensibly represents the Oromo people, OPDO’s legitimacy remained questionable because of its surrogate existence within the EPRDF and for its failure to ensure democratic rights of the Oromo people (Merera 2003).

\textsuperscript{36} The OPDO party has been often criticized for being surrogate within EPRDF and for its floppy position to defend the autonomy of the region (Merera 2003; Clapham 2009; Markakis 2011).
one of my OPDO informants made the following remarkable comments about the party as an insider:

I worked for nearly fifteen years at different positions as an OPDO member. I know how people perceive about this party from outside and I know it from inside. Now, I tell you the inside reality of our party. I believe in its party programs and that, according to my view, is not the problem. The problem lies with the people who work on different positions from lower to higher administrative levels. Some join it to get their daily bread. Others still use the party as a shield for different interests. However, only a few work for the interest of the people. When we come to the Guji case, we clearly know that the park belongs to Oromia but the higher officials are obsessed by the politics of nations and nationalities rather than addressing the urgent problems of the people they represent. How do we respect and even talk about the rights of other nations and nationalities without our rights being respected? Our politicians are caught in dilemma between the issues of multi-nation federalism and self-government. Many of them prioritize their personal political interests. For instance, they do not want to enter into conflict with the federal government or other regional governments on small issues like Nech Sar. However, the land is not small for the people. It is only when they need the people like during elections that they seem positive to the questions of the people. When they get a loophole, they defend the right of the people and present that on big party meetings. They use it for their political agenda just to stay on power (informant: an official in Borana Zone, March 2012).

The above statements hint at the fact that political authorities in Oromia often pursue questions of Guji’s ownership of the territory or retreat from the same question based on the nature of power balance between the regional state and the federal government, as well as in their pursuit to gain legitimacy from the populace. Again, this is not an assertion that political elites in the region held the same views on the political outcome of the resistance against the conservation program. The higher officials at the regional level systematically used OPDO’s firm position against Guji’s relocation as part of the party’s quest to build legitimacy among the Oromo populace. Moreover, some insiders mentioned that Oromia used the Nech Sar National Park as a case in negotiating with the SNPP regional state on other ongoing conflicts over resources between ethnic groups from both regions. On the other hand, the position of local OPDO elites at district level highly depends on their short-term advantages envision from supporting the park ideal or resisting it. In fact, there were also genuine concerns among local government authorities to defend the rights of their people. For example, the Guji informants praise the former district administrator who indirectly worked towards the suspension of the relocation of the Guji in the late-1990s and 2004 for having strong sense of ethnic identity and consider him as their hero. This official did not ask for any individual benefit for supporting the questions of the local people, although it was common for many local government officials to seek reciprocity.

On the other hand, the current administration in Galana district uses the park issue as a political instrument in coercing the people in tax payments. For example, the district officials took part in the
destruction of sixty-four Guji houses in Gode village in March 2012. A Guji elder from Arda Guddina village once metaphorically commented on the relationship between the people and the district officials as a relationship between a rat and a cat, as follows:

We always live under conditions of insecurity. On the right side are the park people and on the left side are government officials. Both wait for some time and threaten us with our weakest part. They know our major problems are pasture and water. Government officials come from Tore and ask us to give them money. We do not know what they do with the money. They said it is for road, dam, tax, OPDO festivals and many more. We do not have money. We have only cattle. At times, they warned us that the government would displace us if we refuse to pay. Instead of destroying our entire life, we prefer to sell two or three among our cattle and give them what they asked. We slaughtered goats, prepared buna qala [traditional food prepared from roasted coffee beans mixed with butter and milk] and many things for the officials every time they came here. We offer them these all to escape their punishments. However, how do we continue to live like a rat and a cat? We always live under insecurity (informant: Shube Dalacha, May 2012).

It should be underlined that Oromia’s resistance against the conservation program in the Nech Sar National Park was mainly informed by the political rewards that the actions were supposed to generate at local or regional levels, apart from some genuine commitments of a few political elites. On the other hand, some political elites in Galana district use the national park as an administrative weapon to coerce and control the Guji people and stifle local resistance.

To situate the views and contestations from Oromia regional state within the regional and national political dynamics, it is important to note how some authorities in the regional state have addressed the issue at different times. The Guji community in and around the Nech Sar National Park have tried to establish strong network with government authorities at different administrative levels in Oromia. The groundbreaking support that they received was first from the former district administrator in Galana Abaya, who guided local elders in their resistance against the resettlement program. This administrator was central in delaying the resettlement of the Guji in the 1990s and 2004. Second, the then regional president of Oromia, Abba Dula Gemed, visited the area in 2008, before apportioning the eastern side of the park for the Guji with the consent of the president of the SNNP regional state. Within the local and national political constellations, the concession given to the Guji by the two regional presidents can be seen as a victory of both the Guji and Oromia in the contestation. However, Oromia’s position regarding Guji’s right to the land has not been consistent. Government officials in Oromia regional state either address or reject local people’s questions for access to their customary resources depending on individual commitment of the officials as well as the power position of OPDO in the national political game.

259
However, there are contentious views regarding the position of Oromia, which some elites from SNNP regional state describe as “an obstacle to the government’s development and conservation policies in the national park” (discussion with a former park Warden, April 2012). As an official in the SNNP regional state pointed out in her critique concerning Oromia’s reluctance during the 2004 resettlement program, the park had no economic advantage for Oromia, although the region might have had hidden political motives:

We could not understand why the people from Oromia were stacked to this bare land. It has remained a puzzle for us why officials who are seemingly educated give deaf ears to this national concern. Not to say for its economic reason, the land does not have oil, nor has it minerals. Nothing grows out of it except the grass, which the wildlife eats for survival. There is no historical fact at any time in history that would support Oromia’s claim over the park. The park belongs to the south and it had been under the administrative province of Sidamo and Gamo Gofa even before the current federal arrangement. Then what should we conclude? It remains unanswered question for me, but Oromia might have had hidden agenda (former park warden, April 2012).

As an expert in conservation science and a technocrat who worked hard to translate conventional conservation theories into practice, the former warden of the national park emphasized the physical elements of the landscape without reference to its cultural, spiritual, historical and political significances. Accordingly, such ignorance of complex representations and purposes of the area for the local community often causes clashes of perspectives between conservation elites and local communities. Moreover, like many conservation and development practitioners, the technocrat has ignored the intricate political, economic and historical dimensions in the struggle over environmental resources.

6.1.4.2. The Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNP)

The SNNP regional state, which is the third state actor, has strong resemblance with the federal state in terms of its interests and the way in which it strived to justify its actions. Since the 1990s, tourism has become the major ambitious objective for the establishment of many national parks in Ethiopia, most of which are found in the southern region. According to Young (2012), the Nech Sar National Park was the second top in the country in terms of number of tourists visiting the park and income generated for the last five consecutive years (2007-2012). For example, from September 2010 to August 2011, about 22,709 domestic and foreign tourists visited the national park from whom it earned over one million birr (about 41,666 Euro). As a result, despite persistence of conflict with neighboring communities, the economic value of the park has been very high compared to other parks in the region, such as the troubled Omo and Mago national parks.

---

37 Annual Report of the Nech Sar National Park Authority, 2012 (see Appendix).
Nevertheless, it is too simplistic to reduce the points of contestation on the part of the SNNP regional state purely to economic interests. The question that follows involves interrogating how the SNNP regional state addresses its claims over the national park. Like the federal state, which channeled down its developmental and conservationist discourses through the EWCA, the SNNP regional state also capitalized on both discourses and relegated local people’s indigenous conservation approaches and livelihood styles as if they are at odds with biodiversity conservation. In addition, I have discussed earlier about identity provenances among the Gamo people in relation to their claim over the national park. As I noted in chapter three, the Gamo do not draw their claim of entitlement to the national park on any spiritual or cultural connectedness, but built it upon subjective identity constructions and administrative rights that they have gained over the territory particularly since 1991. Accordingly, for the Gamo Gofa Zone as an administrative unit, the Nech Sar represented aesthetic meanings and heritage, which gave a positive image to the people and the town of Arba Minch. Thus, the people’s ascription of ‘aesthetic’ values to the land and considering the status of the territory as their knowledge of conservation were subtle claims of entitlement. Apart from their interest over the national park, the Gamo people had long trade relations with the Koore on the other side of the national park. However, the park’s establishment and the presence of the Guji between the two groups have significantly hampered inter-societal relations.

The paradox is that despite the general representation of the south by the Abyssinians as ‘wild’ and ‘uninhabited’, the technocratic elites in the southern region subscribed to the same notion in their representation of the Nech Sar as ‘empty’ and ‘natural’ in defense against Guji’s claim of entitlement. One might wonder if this representation is ontological or superficially driven by other motives such as political and economic desires. Political authorities and conservation technocrats in the region subscribe to these notions mainly to nullify Guji’s claim for customary rights, as well as to conform to the broader narrative employed by the mainstream society in the representation of pastoralist ways of life as ‘backward’, because this narrative helps them to justify actions such as the relocation of the people.

While the views of many government elites from the SNNP regional state over the territory were similar, my conversation with a technocratic official who worked in different offices in the regional state was much instructive. This is because it clearly surfaced from the fact that the discourse of ‘emptiness’ of the land was part of the elites’ management of meaning in the process of the
contestation over the land. It was also a subtle instrument used by the officials to justify the project of creating ‘human-free’ space for the wildlife. My informant worked for over fifteen years in different positions in the national park administration, as well as the regional culture and tourism bureau. She was central during the resettlement program in 2004 and had been an important figure during the APF’s takeover of the management of the park. She gained a master’s degree in Forestry and Natural Resources Management from one of the universities in the Netherlands. During our interview, the official contrasted debates in the two competing approaches of conservation – the ‘fortress’ conservation and community-based approaches and attempted to explain challenges both approaches faced over the years in the case of the Nech Sar National Park.

Apart from such conceptual discussions with the technocrat, our conversation raised the views of the state concerning pastoralist peoples, which the official described as follows:

As common elsewhere among pastoral communities, the worldviews and level of consciousness of these people [the agro-pastoralist Guji] are very much limited in scope. They think of what they get today and are not worried of what comes tomorrow. They bring thousands of their livestock and graze the park. After a week or so, they move to another place or stay at one place only for a season and go back again. At least the agrarian society is better in understanding its environment, soil fertility, land degradation and crop productivity. Because they depend on pasture and water, pastoral communities try to maximize what they get from a particular pastureland and water ground before moving to another place. Their livestock compete among themselves as well as with the wildlife. We learned from different historical sources that the Guji came only two or three decades ago. It was vacant land before that. What concerned us most was the future of biodiversity in the park. The government worked hard to conserve the resources and to contribute to development of the country. The people did not understand and share this vision. Our aim was double. Firstly, it was to conserve the biodiversity and through tourism to get foreign currency. Secondly, we aimed at resettling the people to improve their livelihood through improved agriculture (informant: a former head of Culture and Tourism Bureau, SNNPR, April 2012).

One would agree with my informant that the Guji did not understand and share the same ‘vision’ of conservation and development with the state. For the Guji people, particularly as the ethnographic data illuminates, conservation and development are inseparable from their cultural values and spiritual connectedness to the land. However, there is an elitist message in the informant’s description of the human-environmental interactions, including the history of the human settlement in the area. Although the above description might have been informed by the informant’s academic background, in which the classical notions of ‘tragedy of the commons’ seem to have influenced the official’s perception about human-environmental relations, elite perspectives concerning the knowledge of resource management also visibly surfaced from the discussion. When the SNNP regional state took swift decision to relocate the Koore people to Abulo and Alfacho villages in 2004, government officials adamantly presented the program as a process of ‘improving’ the living
conditions of the people, as well as boosting the national economy through tourism. Nevertheless, both conservation and resettlement programs proved to have failed. At present, almost ninety percent of the Koore have abandoned the resettlement site and returned to Tsalke and other adjacent villages. Since then, human predation on wildlife and encroachment to the park territory increased compared to before.

Despite differences within the regional state regarding questions of access to the national park, the post-1991 political reconfiguration has created a sense of common belongingness vis-à-vis the contending actors in Oromia. Moreover, its subscription to the discourse of conservation, tourism and economic development, which is advocated by the federal state, has been a major resource to the SNNP regional state in its claim for the national park and in granting it the support from the federal state. In short, the general position of many government officials and elites in the SNNP regional state is the claim that the national park belongs to the region due to administrative history since the imperial regime, identity marker and geographical location ‘within’ the region. Nevertheless, economic and political reasons were also the major factors for their claim of entitlement.

To summarize, the Nech Sar National Park has become an arena in which the state’s competing notions of development and conservation encountered local critical views of human-environmental interactions. Despite internal variations within the state, the state practiced environmental conservation for the sake of its economic values through tourism and also used the practice for broadcasting its authority to the periphery. As will be discussed and analyzed in the next two chapters, local communities resorted to production of critical knowledge to delegitimise the state’s ‘accepted wisdom’. The discussion in this chapter ascertained that the successive regimes had similar goals and approaches with regard to the national park. While the imperial regime capitalized on the notion of ‘wild’ south, the military regime resorted to notions of ‘modernization’ that undermined the coexistence of people and wildlife. On the other hand, the EPRDF regime was confronted by its own political rhetoric of democracy and recognition to cultural practices on the one hand, as well as its ambitious conservation and development plans on the other. As a result, it used subtle ideas such as ‘conserving’ nature for future generation and ‘improving’ the living standards of local people to channel down its programs to the local communities. Accordingly, the EPRDF used ‘developmental’ rhetoric in extending its authority to the peripheries. However, all the three regimes shared commonalities in delegitimizing customary rights, denigrating the indigenous knowledge of the local people and limiting local people’s engagement in the process of
conservation and development practices.

Moreover, the discussions in this chapter show that the different kinds of depicting the territory have been rooted in the socio-cultural, economic and political identity of the Ethiopian state, which was biased towards highland sedentary plough agriculture. Using these discursive representations as the instruments of delegitimizing customary rights of local inhabitants who claim to have had historical rights over the land, the state exercised different forms of environmental governance as technologies of control over the people and territories. However, neither its coercive nor disciplinary power was effective in creating environmental subjects. Aside from its rhetoric in ‘educating’ the local people about possible trickle-down economic benefits, the government has not institutionalized the community-based resource management that some consider as a neoliberal form of environmentality. This approach is thought to bring local communities to the conservation projects and missions in the expectation of economic and social benefits.

While the challenges it faced from local communities will be the subject of the next two chapters, this chapter has brought to light some level of complexity that ethnic federalism has brought to the socio-economic and political scenes regarding inter-ethnic and inter-regional relations. The increased internal heterogeneity within the state particularly after 1991 sometimes obstructed the federal government’s exercise of power upon local communities. Moreover, the new political order has enhanced inter-ethnic competitions over common resources, with ethnicity having become an important signification in people’s claim for participation in environmental resource management and entitlement to resource ownership. The failure of the federal government to settle inter-regional claims and contestations has also led to the withdrawal of the APF in 2007. However, the common denominator for the three state structures (the federal and the two regional states) is that narratives of conservation and development are either used or rejected for exercising control over the environment and the people. In the current context, the contestation over the Nech Sar National Park has been played on the socio-political field/arena established in the aftermath of the 1991 political reconfiguration, whether it is built on history of settlement, administrative jurisdiction or constructed identity claims. Under such circumstances, each state actor has been using strategies of management of meanings, discourses and narratives related to the territory that also inform their actions and practices. At the local level, government officials mainly consider ethnic membership of the local communities during the resettlement, eviction, compensation and punishment of people.
Chapter Seven

Grassroots Actors, a Business/Conservation Organization and Human Rights Advocacy Groups

7.1. Grassroots Actors

The category of grassroots actors or local communities broadly includes shifting cultivators, small-scale farmers, nomadic pastoralists, poor urban dwellers and fishers who resist, negotiate and at times come into conflict against the predation of dominant actors such as the state and business corporations in the contestation over environmental resources (Bryant and Bailey 1997). In the context of this study, I will mainly focus on the Guji, who predominantly practice an agro-pastoral livelihood style, as well as the Koore farmers. In addition, fishers, tour operators and forest resource users were also included into the study, albeit not as central actors. This differential emphasis is due to strong dependence of the first two communities (the Guji and Koore) on resources from the national park and owing to their power in challenging state intervention. As the park straddles the two regional states adjoining three ethnic groups and because of different livelihood engagements of these ethnic groups, the local actors are heterogeneous in many respects.

Under circumstances in which various actors with different power relations interact over a particular environmental resource, it is essential to understand social differentiations in many forms taking into consideration ethnicity, religion, language, gender and age to gain insights into how each category interacts with the environment and negotiates with local and global dynamics (Gezon 2006). However, I do not use economic activity as a defining marker of ethnic distinctiveness such as in the case of relating agro-pastoralism to the Guji and farming activities to the Koore. This is because such categorization not only masks internal diversities within the groups, but it might also unnecessarily place the blame on either of the groups in the politics of resource degradation.

In the study of grassroots actors, political ecologists often emphasize the impact ‘powerful’ actors perpetuate on the ‘weak’ local actors as a result of asymmetrical political and economic power relations between the two (Bryant and Bailey 1997; Scott 1985). However, by positioning grassroots actors on the weak side in the continuum of power relations, this perspective understates
the agency of local actors in contesting and negotiating with dominant actors and their capability in 
formulating their ways of defining human-environmental interactions. Thus, by recognizing the 
heterogeneity of grassroots actors and acknowledging the knowledge and agency of members of 
these actors in defining human-environmental interaction, which is built on different notions of 
knowledge, I will discuss how these actors contest, negotiate or appropriate state discourses of 
conservation and development projects in the national park. Nonetheless, local communities’ 
responses in terms of actions to intervention by the state and other non-state actors regarding the 
management and utilization of the national park will be the subject of chapter eight.

7.1.1. The Guji Oromo

The Guji Oromo agro-pastoralist community who inhabited the entire Nech Sar area before the 
establishment of the park were first evicted from their home in 1982 (see chapters 3 and 4). The 
establishment of the park that eventually led to the displacement of the people has dispossessed 
them their customary resource rights. In fact, the focus on physical displacement obscures other 
restrictions and dispossession local communities face due to the enclosure of their customary lands 
through protected areas (Agrawal and Redford 2009). The state had its own justifications for setting 
aside the territory as a national park and for relocating the people from the area. Above all, it 
considered the traditional coexistence between humans and the wildlife as ‘ unholy’ union because it 
was believed that the people would ‘spoil’ the natural beauty of the wilderness and threaten the 
wellbeing of the wildlife. By contrast, the Guji had their own conceptualizations of their 
surroundings and practiced different approaches of environmental conservation for centuries before 
the state intervention. In fact, among the Guji, conservation is not always intentionally planned 
practice in the context of modern biodiversity conservation; rather, it reflects an outcome of 
accumulated practices that are connected to their cultural, spiritual, economic and cosmological 
schemes. In this section, I will discuss and analyze how the Guji position their resistance against 
conservation approaches of the state from their epistemological and ontological understandings of 
their surroundings and their place in it. I will begin the discussion with the following questions as 
points of departure: How do Guji’s understandings of their environment contradict with the state’s 
notion of human-nature relations? What informs Guji’s counter knowledge production in the 
struggle over the Nech Sar National Park?

To achieve a better understanding of the current interplay between the park and the Guji who 
inhabited parts of the national park territory, it is imperative to discuss three fundamental socio-
cultural and historical subtleties of the Guji people. Firstly, the Guji had collective memory of evictions and restrictions the park administration perpetuated upon them in the 1970s and 1980s. Secondly, the social, cultural and economic importance of pastoralism among the Guji has been vital in shaping Guji’s perceptions of their environment. Thirdly, an evident internal transformation within the Guji in terms of cultural and religious practices and livelihood engagements had also contributed its share to shaping the views of individuals towards the national park. These three socio-cultural features and historical memory of the ago-pastoral Guji community in the Nech Sar area convey competing notions of human-environmental interactions, but sometimes complement one another in view of the people’s claim for customary rights to the land. One baseline piece of information that we have regarding the Guji-park relation is their persistent resistance against state intervention at the level of the discourse of conservation and development, as well as its practical implementations on the ground. However, the central point that should be interrogated relates to what informs the contestation and how the Guji position their claims of entitlement. I will discuss this in the following sub-headings.

7.1.1.1. State Mistrust and Memory of Past Eviction

The Ethiopian state has been considered among the people in the periphery as extractive and predatory state, with its coercive institutions such as the park authority and local government administrative units, who intermittently intervene into the ways of life of the people, compelling them to accept government political and economic policies. The Guji faced punitive attacks from the successive regimes for their non-submissive behaviors. For example, following the conquest in the late-nineteenth century all throughout the imperial period, the Guji in the highland areas were dispossessed of their land while the lowland pastoralist Guji were victims of sporadic state invasions (Hinnant 1977; Van de Loo 1991). In the process, as happened to other Oromo groups during those periods, the Guji experienced cultural marginalization, economic exploitation, administrative suppression and a stereotypical representation as violent and rebellion. During the military regime, the Guji faced one of the early brutal attacks from the government in 1975, in which the military massacred about 377 people in a day (Solomon 2002; Asebe 2012d). More related to the national park, I have discussed earlier how the military regime forcibly evicted the people from their home in 1982, not least involving the dispossession of their customary rights and restriction of access rights to the park territory all over the history of the park. As a result, the legitimacy of the state as developmental and guardian of the wellbeing of the people and the wild animals have been questioned by the majority of the Guji men, women and youth around the park.

Perceived and real imaginations of the state as a coercive institution have been vivid memories and
day-to-day experiences among the Guji. For instance, my Guji field assistant once interjected in our discussion about the people-park interaction, saying, “The effect of this park on our people is very damaging. They displaced our parents and killed some people. If you go to Hiituu village, you would see a woman who lost one of her eyes by the government during the eviction [in 1982]. This is what we expect again if they come and chase us from our home. They kill people, destroy properties and do not care for the livestock” (Field Assistant, Edema Galgalo, April 2012). My field assistant was an eighteen year-old young boy, yet grew up with lived-in experiences and oral narratives about how his parents and the community at large were mistreated at the hands of the government for the sake of conservation and tourism. Most Guji men and women share similar views. Their memory of the past evictions and their current experiences of disposessions of their customary resources enhance their resistance against state conservation discourses and practices. Moreover, despite changes in regimes in Addis Ababa, there was no significant change on the ground for the Guji in terms of their right to the land. Practically, they did not get healthcare centers, schools and roads under the successive regimes in the country. By contrast, all of the regimes were similar in terms of displacing, dispossessing and expropriating their resources, including livestock. Therefore, they question the legitimacy and credibility of the government’s development and conservation rhetoric because neither the previous regimes nor the current government brought practical improvement to their living conditions. When it comes to the national park, given that the Guji did not benefit from tourism projects on the one hand, and rather the national park became the major factor for their displacement in the past on the other, the local people would less likely accept the state project unless the government uses coercive force, which will also be counterproductive.

Such collective memory of the evictions and the ongoing disposessions of their customary resources have informed the Guji to carry cultural and historical idioms of representation together with a subscription to traditional forms of conservation and coexistence with the wild animals as critical forms of knowledge against state discourses. A sense of insecurity in the proposed resettlement areas, which was built upon past memories in which many people lost their lives and livestock, was among the major historical basis for Guji’s defense against state intervention. In other words, the Guji considered the government’s conservation and development projects as something that alienates them rather than a system that embraces their values, customs and needs. According to Guji informants, their long experiences with the state are sufficient evidence for them to consider it as an alien institution that seeks to grab their resources without reciprocating them for what it takes. This is why they often perceive state institutions, its agents and policies with great
7.1.1.2. Situating Pastoralism in Defense for Customary Rights

Guji’s relation to their environment, and particularly of those who remain engaged in agro-pastoral economic activity, is closely intertwined with the socio-cultural and economic significance of livestock herding. Without establishing the nexus between livestock herding and its socio-cultural and economic imperatives for the Guji, the people’s contestation against the national park remains elusive. Moreover, place-based practices and rituals that largely contribute to maintaining the harmony between humans, non-humans and the divine being are also interconnected to herding practices. In chapter three of this work, I have discussed how the Guji position livestock herding in their worldviews, identity frameworks, creation myth, inter-societal relations, self-esteem, as well as cultural practices. In this section, I will reiterate some fundamental points of references that the Guji make in their contestation against the national park.

Among the Guji, livestock represents strong socio-cultural meanings in that “cattle herding and possession of large herd of cattle are associated with cultural pride, economic values (wealth), sense of Guji identity and provides social privilege in marriage arrangement and inter-societal relationships” (Asebe 2011: 54b). In terms of the psychological, emotional and identity representation of the self, the Guji consider possession of large number of healthy and productive animals as crucial because their interaction with their neighbors and their internal socio-cultural practices also strongly depend on the possession of large herd of cattle.

In the traditional context, the Guji made animal sacrifices during prayers, blessings, thanksgiving and rituals conducted to cleanse a person from a ‘sin’ and purify a certain environment from bad spirits. Moreover, they performed rituals to maintain spiritual connection between the people and Waaga (God) and strengthen harmony between people and their surroundings – living and non-living things (Baxter 1991). For such purposes, riverbanks, mountaintops and sacred trees are important ritual sites among the Guji. Through these rituals and the sacrifices that accompany the practices, the Guji believe that they communicate with Waaga who would reciprocate them with rain, fertility for the people and animals, peace and stability to the Gujiland and regeneration of pasture and water that are essential for herding communities. For instance, in the study area, the Guji used one of the hills currently located in the park, called Bonke hill as a ritual site. Year after year, the Guji conducted prayers and rituals that involved animal sacrifices for a few weeks, before

269
they brought back their livestock to the wet season encampment in the plains of the Nech Sar (Ergansa). However, the Guji were restricted from access to the ritual site following the evictions in 1982 and 2004. In their struggle to gain access to their customary resources in the national park, the people capitalize on the economic, spiritual and cultural significance of the territory.

Figure 13: Guji Oromo slaughtering a Calve during a rite of transition in the Gadaa System
(Photo: Asebe Regassa, March 2009)

Moreover, livestock possession is a marker of social prestige among the Guji. In the past, and indeed still today among the majority of the rural Guji community, bride prices are paid in kind, which mainly constitutes cattle. In fact, unlike in many areas in Oromia, they Guji pay bride price more in the form of reciprocity from both sides rather than as a payment for marriage. For example, regardless of the amount of ‘money’ that the bridegroom paid, the families of the girl accompany their departing daughter with at least ten to twenty cows. Marriage arrangements are often made between families of ‘equal’ social status, defined in terms of wealth in livestock and other social prestige that accompany wealth.

In April 2012, during my fieldwork in Arda Guddina village, I came across a story of a failed relationship between a schoolteacher and a Guji girl, which goes as follows:

270
The schoolteacher, Gadisa (pseudonym) fell in love with a girl from Mi’o, one of the villages adjacent to the park. Although it was prohibited for Guji girls to practice love affairs before marriage, Sooretti (pseudonym) and Gadisa were in relation for couple of years. Eventually, they wanted to get married and thus Gadisa sent formal request to her parents via local elders. Nevertheless, Sooretti’s parents declined to accept Gadisa’s request citing that the schoolteacher did not match their social status. Gadisa was from another part of Oromia with agrarian family background. Although some elders tried to negotiate so that Gadisa would pay the bride price in cash and jewelry, the parents finally canceled it because monetary payment would not substitute the symbolic meanings of livestock (reconstructed from discussions with Arda Guddina schoolteachers, May 2012).

The centrality of livestock in Guji’s life as symbolic representations of their identity, livelihood sustenance and key elements in rituals defines the people’s interaction with humans and non-human beings in their surroundings. The Guji have a well-established ethics of herding livestock. When they head their animals to grazing or water fields, herders restrain from chasing the cattle in order to avoid creating emotional chaos on the part of their animals and those in the wild. Unlike my own childhood experience when we used to enjoy watching and even instigating bulls to fight, Guji youth are educated by their community that such an act is unethical. According to the Guji, the fight among bulls would create instances of chaos that disturb the harmony of nature (spirits, wildlife, livestock and people).

During the evening of May 10, 2012, I joined my field assistant, Alemu, as well as his ‘brother’, Danbala (Alemu was ‘adopted’ to Danbala’s family) in their search for a bull that remained behind the herd. After nearly two hours of searching in the bush, we found the animal in the park. Although Alemu and I wanted to propel the animal in order that we would arrive home before it was too late, Danbala insisted that we should walk slowly and quietly as it would otherwise invoke some sorts of anger on the part of spirits and the wildlife. He explained further on the point mentioning that the bull entered the territory of spirits at a wrong time and it would be inflicted with disease or even death if it dashes in the territory that is not its own. Danbala also refused to loudly call his brother, Dhugo, who went to a different direction for the same purpose of looking for the lost bull, given that shouting in the bush was prohibited. Rather, after we reached home, Danbala climbed on a tree and rustled. As it was a common sign of communication, Dhugo understood the message and came home.

Like most pastoralist communities in East Africa who believe that they were created as herders and all cattle belong to them (Igoe 2004), the Guji also have deep conviction and pride for being pastoralists. Guji’s worldview and their understanding of their surroundings are framed around herding and possession of large herds of livestock. As Baxter (1991) and Taddesse (2006) discussed
in relation to the strong cultural and social attachments of the Guji to their livestock, my fieldwork experience also confirms the notion that Guji cosmology revolves around a tripartite nexus between Waaqa, the people and livestock and other non-humans. The relationship between the three is reinforced through prayers, blessings and thanksgiving rituals that are performed at specific sites. They believe that for the livestock to prosper, Waaqa created ‘limitless’ pasturelands and water. This is why the Guji claim to have a natural right over pasturelands and water sources as far as they could move their cattle. On the contrary, they traditionally believed that agricultural areas in the highland were exclusive domains reserved for other agrarian groups as agriculture was in the past a despised livelihood practice among the Guji.

Guji’s respect for their cattle was part of the reasons why they traditionally prohibited consuming certain types of food such as wild animal meat. Apart from considering it as a sign of poverty, killing wild animals for food has strong provenance in Guji’s high respect for their livestock and the belief that such an act would invoke punishment on their livestock in the form of disease, infertility or death of their animals. This is why the Guji strictly follow a tradition of cleansing a sin from a person who happened to have killed wild animals, because unless a they make purification and reconciliation rituals for the transgressor, the person or his family would face different kinds of punishment from Waaqa and the spirits in the surroundings. During the purification ritual – purification from sin of transgressing ancestral oath – they take a sheep or calf to a place where the wild animal was killed and slaughter the domestic animal, before sprinkling its blood to different directions and onto the face of the killer. In some cases, the person washes his hands with the blood of sacrificial animal. The people leave all the meat and skin of the sacrificial animal in the bush, with only the Watta – a caste group within the Guji – are allowed to take the meat.

Concisely, livestock herding is a cultural as well as economic practice for the Guji and any disruption in this mode of lifestyle is considered tantamount to intervention into their cultural identity as a group and a crisis to their livelihood. Besides their reference to history as inhabitants of the area long before the park’s establishment, Guji’s resistance against state restriction to their customary rights in the national park is geared towards the cultural and economic importance of the territory. A Guji elder once commented: “Giummaan keenya aada keenya. Aadaan keenya waama mara. Looni, jila, safuu, gaara, lageen fi mukkeen tunillee aadaa gabbisan” (informant: Gagasa Adola, April 2012). Loosely translated, this means: “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 continuity of our culture.” In other words, according to Guji’s
conceptualization of the territory and their interaction with the animals inside the park, the economic and cultural significances of livestock herding are inseparable. One might think this does not show Guji's connectedness to the land inasmuch as it focuses on the attachment of their cultural values to livestock. In this regard, I would explain the inseparability of pastoralism and their cultural values from the land in two ways. First, the Guji practice pastoralism within spatial, cultural and mythic frameworks conceptualizations of their surroundings. Thus detaching the people and their livestock from the space where cultural practices and mythic imaginations are based would disrupt the entire system. Second, the Guji believe that the government's resettlement plan would 'transform' Guji's lifestyle from agro-pastoralism to sedentary form of lifestyle, which in turn would disrupt the socio-cultural and identity provenances embedded in herding. This is why the Guji oppose the state's resettlement plans, conservation discourses and development rhetoric.

7.1.1.3. Religion and Education: Elements of Contestation and Negotiation

Since the mid-twentieth century, Gujiland experienced some external forces that brought some socio-cultural transformations within the Guji. Despite the multiplicity of internal and external factors for the socio-cultural transformation among the people, I will focus only on the role of Protestant Christianity and modern 'Western' education with particular reference to the change in people-park relations. In fact, increased inter-societal interaction (cultural diffusion), exposure of the youth to urban life, the engagement of the Guji in different livelihood options such as farming and fishing, as well as the introduction of the national park itself have all contributed their share to the change in some socio-cultural practices among the people and their perception of the environment. The introduction of protestant Christianity to the Guji land brought new worldviews to the people (Hinnant 1977; Van de Loo 1991). Moreover, although access to education among the Guji in general and particularly those in the Nech Sar area was very limited, children who went to school began practicing or imagining what they learned at schools, such as climate change, overgrazing and soil erosion, while it also gave them the opportunity to critically evaluate state interventions. These two external forces and processes enhanced internal heterogeneity within the Guji community, but also produced critical knowledge that challenged state intervention from different perspectives.

Regarding the effects of Christianity, it is possible to see from two different angles. On the one hand, it enhanced the utilitarian conception of human-environmental interactions based on the teachings in the Christian Bible. Guji Christians positioned their claim of entitlement to the
resources arguing that God created these resources for human purposes, thus suggesting that they have natural rights to utilize it. While the Christians objected to traditional ritual practices, sacrifices and taboos condemning them as demonic practices, they were also against the government’s exclusionist approaches. Guji Christians consider strict obedience of traditional customs as a sign of cultural conservativeness and in contradiction with the teachings in the bible. As common in Christians’ justification of human mastery over nature based upon the Christian doctrine that vested authority on humans to control and subdue animals of the earth, birds of the sky and the fish of the Sea (Merchant 2003), Guji Christians began defining their relationship with their surroundings from religious perspectives.

However, there are intergenerational differences within the Guji Christians. The adults on their side understand their ancestral aadaa (culture) and safiuu (norms) as something that is entangled to their Christian religious belief and practices. For example, during the drought that struck most pastoralist parts of Ethiopia in 2010 and 2011, the Guji abba Qaalluu (religious leader of Qaalluu institution) conducted series of public prayers to Waaqa for rain. Some informants stated that some Christians also participated in the prayer sessions. Gamade Halake, one of my Christian informants said that, “We, Christians usually pray to God in our churches but whenever there are large public meetings for common concern like the issue of rain, we attend the meeting with the non-Christians. However, we refrain from offering sacrifices. We never eat the food other people bring for the rituals. Those things are prohibited by our bible” Informant: Gamade Halake, April 2011). People such as Gamade do not see any problem in maintaining their ancestral aadaa and safiuu, although not in a way that it contradicts with the new religious doctrine. On the other hand, some of the youth preferred the strict observance of the teachings in the Bible. Christianity in this context can be understood as an agent that detached the community from their spiritual connectedness to the land on the one hand, and as another form of critical knowledge on the other. Therefore, while it distances the people from their traditional values of nature by denigrating some rituals and belief, it also enhances people’s claim for utilizing the resources including the wild animals building their argument on the Bible’s prescription about human dominion over nature. Therefore, one might see the introduction of Protestantism as a socio-cultural transformation within the Guji community in bringing some changes in the people’s understandings of their surroundings.

Followers of traditional belief interpreted the frequent occurrences of natural calamities such as drought, flooding and diseases as infliction invoked by people’s deviance from ancestral norms, customs and beliefs. Adherents of traditional belief who are strict to Guji customs, values and
rituals accused Christians for bringing ‘sin’ to the Guji land because “they kill wildlife for food, cut down sacred trees and denounce rituals as demonic practices. In Guji custom, these practices would evoke Waaqa for punishment” (informant: Aga Shota, March 2011). These incidents illuminate the existence of cultural tensions between Christians and non-Christians and within Christians between the young and adult generation. The common feature among all different categories of the community is their views towards their surroundings. Whether from a Christian perspective or within the traditional belief, the people claim that they had undeniable right over the land, which Waaqa their ancestors and passed down to them. While members of Guji Christians claim their right over the land and its resources from a religious perspective that posits human dominion over nature, non-Christian emphasize the cultural and spiritual connected they have with the land.

Another point to interrogate in connection to these competing perspectives from members of Guji Christians and followers of traditional belief is whose perspectives to take in this context. Nevertheless, as I discussed in the first chapter of this work regarding the need to recognize multiple voices and interpretations, I argue that it is not possible to take a strictly distinct position as both arguments depend on the worldviews, beliefs and values of the subjects. Rather, it would be sound to suggest that any attempt to impose a certain discourse or policy without recognition of these multiple voices and interpretations would be a futile exercise in any development and conservation project like the Nech Sar National Park where actors with various ideas, perspectives and practices interact.

Likewise, the introduction of modern education, however limited it might be, has exposed a few of the young generation to different ideas regarding nature conservation. Although the establishment of school for the Guji children in and around the park was only in 2008, few children earlier went to schools in Arba Minch and Tore towns – the latter is located at a distance of over 400 kilometers from the park. Schools equip the children with different ways of understanding their surroundings. However, due to incompatibilities between home and school in children’s domains of knowledge production, Guji children who go to school often face challenges to adjust themselves to these competing arenas of knowledge (Asebe and Kjolvolt 2013). While some managed to accommodate different views within particular contexts, the majority of schoolchildren I interviewed developed interest to the ‘school culture’ and thus considered some local customs and practices as backward. For instance, in one of my group discussion sessions with seven schoolchildren, we discussed on the importance of the national park, particularly regarding tourism.
It emerged that five of the participants agreed to the ideas about the issues of national parks for the sake of biodiversity conservation and tourism activities. In their arguments, they referred to what they learned in Civic and Ethical Education and history books at school about conservation of national heritages. The youth seemingly subscribed to notions of tourism and its economic returns for the people and the country at large. On the other hand, the remaining two members of the group brought a different point of argument disentangling the two spaces of knowledge production, acquisition and exercise. This means that school and home are different contexts where knowledge is produced. In this line of argument, despite learning about the importance of national parks for economic development and biodiversity conservation at school, the schoolchildren were also worried of its impacts on the livelihood practices of their parents. They underscored that the knowledge they acquired from the school is useful only in a particular context and the same is true for culturally viable forms of knowledge. Accordingly, this is how the school created a critical mass to challenge state intervention based upon informed evidence.

In this regard, it is possible to analyze the impact of education on the children from two different angles. First, due to an absence of integration of local knowledge into modern school curriculum in the country, local communities consider the school as an institution that detaches children from their cultural roots. In this case, it facilitates internalization of ‘developmental’ and conservation discourses of the government by introducing sense of ‘modernity’ within the mind setup of the schoolchildren. In other words, the school might serve as the state’s instrument of creating environmental subjects. For example, a grandmother from Dabaq, one of the Guji villages in Abaya district, once commented on how the school ‘spoiled’ the behavior of her grandchildren as follows:

In the past, children respected their fathers and mothers, their community and culture. Now, after this school thing came to our land, children do not listen to elders. They say ‘it is our right’. In our culture, children learn the customs and values of their community at early age. Now, they began considering it as backward. Look at my grandchildren. They do not want to practice their ancestors’ customs. They want to bring back what they learned at school. Nevertheless, that does not work with us. Our children respect the rules of the government and their teachers rather that of than our elders. I can simply say that the school spoiled our children and detached them from their roots. A girl who does not know how to prepare traditional food and beverage and a boy who is ignorant of herding livestock cannot be proper Guji (informant: Dalgee Robale, April 2008).

In a small community like the Guji around the Nech Sar National Park, the success or failure of few individuals becomes visible in the entire community. Likewise, the ‘success’ story of few Guji youth who secured jobs in the national park administration as scouts and of a young boy who
managed to earn money as part-time tour guide has been commonly told among few young people who went to the school. In this regard, a short life history of my field assistant hints at how the Guji youth aspire to work in the national park. One of my field assistants, Edema\textsuperscript{38}, was studying tourism management in a private college in Arba Minch town. Besides his studies, Edema earns some money as ‘informal’ tour guide. Although my first contact with him was through his father, whom I visited in Arba Minch hospital, Edema was usually available in front of Arba Minch Tourist Hotel and Paradise Lodge. He used to wait for tourists who stay in these hotels. From there, he would guide them to the Guji villages on the other side of the national park. Unlike most youth of his age from his community, this young Guji had good command of English, Amharic and Gamo languages, in addition to his mother tongue language of Afaan Oromo. He has established a good network with few other youths from Arba Minch town who did not dare to take tourists to Guji territories because of the stereotypical representation of the Guji as still practicing the \textit{midda} tradition, namely killing ‘enemies’ for honor. When Edema and his friends succeed in convincing tourists, Edema guides tourists or researchers to Ergansa/Arda Guddina village.

Although the park authority discouraged tourists from entering the Guji community, some tourists and researchers who were interested in experiencing human-park interactions opted to go through the ‘informal’ way. Edema and his friends share what they get from their guests. Through such economic ties, they have built strong social networks. Despite intimidations from the park authority that categorized Edema’s activity as illegal, he continued with his part-time job for the last couple of years. In May 2012, the park authorities detained Edema accusing him of taking me to the Guji community. When he took me to the village, he shared with me his future career plans, namely that he planned to be a tour operator in the park. For Edema, “the park is a big national and international treasure. It is also an important resource for local people, because some already got job in the park as scouts and there is possibility for others in the future to get jobs either as tour operators or in other related jobs. I think it is still possible to divide the park into two for wild animals and livestock” (Edema Danbala, May 2012). Some Guji youth including Edema, consider the national park as one of their future employment institutions; indeed, they envision its conservation in line with their current and future economic interests.

Second, the local educated youth became more critical and aware of state manipulations in the struggle over the Nech Sar National Park. The schoolchildren have established informal networks

---

\textsuperscript{38} This name is pseudonym upon request of the individual for his security. Edema was detained many times by the park authority accused of guiding tourists and researchers to Guji inhabited villages adjoining the national park.
with some government authorities in Oromia region and pass over information to the latter about what is going on around the national park regarding their community. They also took part in community meetings and helped the local elders when they traveled to towns for appealing against the national park authority in cases of detainment of members of their community or any other park encroachments. Although they did not have the knowledge and skills of legal procedures to help their community, the schoolchildren served as a bridge between their community and state officials in networking their elders with other educated Oromo who would support the people in the legal or administrative challenges they faced. For example, the pupils managed to get the official letter sent from the former regional president of Oromia to the former deputy prime minister of Ethiopia regarding the national park and the right of the Guji to be involved in the management and benefit of the national park (see the letter in Appendix). Government offices were not willing to give me the letter, although I easily obtained it from the school pupils who considered my research as part of their struggle to regain their ancestral land.

In short, the two elements of socio-cultural transformation among the Guji have brought different worldviews regarding the people’s perception and interaction with their surroundings, mainly with the national park and its resources. While members of protestant Christianity began questioning some traditional customs and practices, the youth who went to school have started focusing on the economic benefits of the park rather than cultural and spiritual representation the elders attach to the territory. From this side, it opened a field of negotiation with the state discourses of environmental conservation, albeit from different perspectives. By devaluing the cultural and spiritual connectedness of the people to the land, Christianity seems to have brought the modernist understandings of nature-culture relations. However, both Christianity and education also produced critical mass who questioned the state’s monopoly of rights over the natural resources.

Nevertheless, some commonalities bind these categories together. Whether it was for economic purposes of the territory as a grazing, farmland or as a future employment sector or for cultural and spiritual sacredness of the space, the claim for ownership of the territory has remained central. As a result, each category emphasizes upon the history of settlement prior to the park and subscribes to the current political model that grants ethnic groups with the right to own and utilize resources in its respective historical settlements. By subscribing to history, culture and spiritual practices connected to the territory, Guji elders dismissed the idea of state intervention as a threat to their life style that would in turn disrupt their identity, culture and economy. Likewise, the youth and a few Guji elders who were conversant of the current political constellation along ethnic lines were able to use the
politics to their advantage by establishing informal networks with politicians in Oromia regional state at different administrative structures.

7.1.1.4. "They Came Yesterday and Told us What to Do and What Not to Do" – Views of the Guji on the State’s Conservation Practices

In March 2012, just before the beginning of the rainy season, the park authority detained eight men from a Guji village in Maddo allegedly accusing them of setting fire to the national park. The village is located in the northeastern part of the national park, which the park authority claims to include within its boundary. The fire burned some bushy areas located between the main Nech Sar plains and the rugged hills to the east, where the Guji settled for their wet season encampment.

In another incident, the park authority and police force from the SNNP regional state in collaboration with Galana district administration (Oromia regional state) destroyed sixty-four Guji homes in Gode village to the southeast of the park. Gode was also a wet season Guji encampment site but due to its proximity to Sermale River and the farmlands in Gashe, Golbo and Qarsha, some people established permanent hamlets in this village. The park authority and Galana district administration accused the people for encroaching into the park territory and justified their action of destroying the houses to halt cattle trespasses that threatened the safety of the wild animals and sustainability of the park. However, local Guji community members and the village administration did not share this view. Local elders who objected the destruction and appealed the case to Borana zone were detained for a week by the district administration, accusing them of provoking people to rise against the actions of removing the ‘illegally’ built houses.

Both villages were located on the contested border between the park and Guji settlements, which were reserved for the people after the negotiation with the APF in 2007 that the two regional presidents approved in 2008. As I discussed earlier in this work, the park authority and different administrative departments in the SNNP regional state did not recognize the concessions given to the Guji by the APF despite the approval of the concessions by the two regional presidents. This is why the park authority claims all the Guji settlement areas, including the newly established Arda Guddina village, as included within its boundary.
Drawing on the above ethnographic information and other related incidents, I will briefly discuss how the Guji conceptualize the state conservation discourses. While Guji’s actions against the state intervention will be dealt in chapter eight, in this section, I focus on the epistemological aspects of nature conservation by bringing into the discussion both state approaches and Guji’s understandings of their surroundings. The above incidents hint at two competing perspectives and narratives on the part of the state and the Guji people regarding practices of burning pasturelands and questions of access to pasture and water fields that happened to be located inside the park territory. While Guji’s conceptualization of their customary right to pasture and water was situated within their creation myth as herders, namely that they were given pasture and water from Waaga, as well as their belief that they had a covenant with Waaga to coexist with non-humans in their surroundings, the debate concerning the use of fire warrants further elaboration here.

The state and the Guji Oromo understand burning practices as forms of environmental degradation and mechanisms of conservation practices respectively. Therefore, the use of fire has remained a
controversial dimension of conservation knowledge between the Guji and the park administration. Burning pastureland before a rainy season is considered among many pastoral communities in East Africa as an appropriate conservation approach, given that it enhances regeneration of fresh grass (Neumann 1998; Igoe 2004). Beyond its contribution to restoration of fresh grass following the rainy season, the Guji know that failure to burn pastureland for a year or two would destroy the entire pastureland, because the decomposition of dry grass would kill the grass from its roots and instead enhances the growth oforny bush tress (see picture below).

![Horny trees grown in parts of the national park after the banning of burning](image.jpg)

Figure 15: Horny trees grown in parts of the national park after the banning of burning
(Photo: Asebe Regassa, April 2012)

In order to conceptualize how the Guji perceive environmental problems and how they opt to redress it, a glimpse of their reaction to state conservation approaches is imperative. The Guji understand changes in their environment at local and broader levels. However, they explain it quite differently from the state authorities. For Guji elders like Gagasa Edema, an 82 year-old resident of Maddo, Gujiland has undergone dramatic transformations in terms of physical resource coverage, socio-cultural dynamics and state intrusion into their affairs. When Gagasa’s parents moved to Belte (now in the center of the park, see the participatory mapping above) sometime in the 1930s from
Hiituu (some 20 kilometers to the northeast of the park), the entire Nech Sar plains were covered by long savannah type of grass as tall as two meters. It was a home for several wild animals, including elephant, rhinoceros, lion, buffalo, giraffe and zebra, among others. Gagasa’s memory goes with Smith (1897 [2008]) who also described the area as one of Africa’s spectacular territories with hundreds and thousands of beasts flocking together as if they were gathered in a kraal. In a retrospective comparison, Gagasa evidently observed environmental crisis in his surroundings. “Now everything is perishing out. Small rivers dried up, grassland was changed to horny bushes. Animals migrated to other countries and those remaining in the park are perishing. Animal disease has swept our animals including the animals in the park. We do not know what punishment it is but it came with these park people” (informant: Gagasa Edema, March 2011).

The Guji accused the park authority based upon its lack of conservation knowledge in many dimensions. Following the ban on fire in the 1990s, horny trees eventually invaded the grassland on the eastern side of the park. The Guji also attribute the death and reduction in number of animals in the national park to two major factors. Firstly, they associate animal death to parasitic mosquitoes and ticks. Although the park officials allegedly blame the people for the spread of contagious diseases from livestock to the game, in turn the Guji blame the park’s resource management approach that made the environment conducive for the parasites to reproduce. The Guji argue that the failure of the park administration to burn the pastureland enhanced the reproduction of the parasites that enhanced the distribution of animal diseases. Secondly, the Guji contend that animals from the national park migrated away owing to the park authority’s restriction of the animals from access to fresh grass by banning fire and exposed them to predators because of the displacement of the people. According to this latter argument, the displacement removed the people from the area, who were used as ‘guards’ to the prey animals. Migration of these animals is interpreted as an escape mechanism from ‘a prison house’ that kept together both the prey and predator through the territorialization of the space. This local conceptualization of national parks as a prison house is noted in Campbell (2005), who argues that the territorialization of protected areas entails enforcement of control on the movement and behavior of wildlife inasmuch as it imposes restrictions on local communities in their pursuit to access resources in the territorialized areas. In this regard, the Guji were capable of delegitimizing the state’s conservation rhetoric by capitalizing on the state’s weakest side.

As part of the general epistemological contradiction between the Guji and the state, a remark from a Guji elder from Gode, who had lost one of his houses by the government action in March 2012,
illuminates both incidents and epistemological conflicts between the two actors:

We lived here for many generations. I am now over eighty years old. My father was buried at Dhakaa Bule [inside the plains of Nech Sar]. My grandfather died at Hiituu [located to northeast of the park]. The majority of the people you see here in our villages have one or many burial places of their ancestors in Dhakaa Bule, Belte, Bonke, Maddo, Mi’oo, Ergansa and many others. They are all in the park now. In the past, our ancestors lived in harmony with the animals. They cared for the animals as they did for their cattle. This was because of covenant with Waqqi not to kill the animals. Of course, they killed some animals for cultural purposes such as mida. However, Guji never ate the meat from those animals. In those times, animals were abundant but there was no shortage of space for our cattle and other animals. These people [the government authorities] came yesterday and began telling us what we should do and what we should not do. They told us not to burn pasture. They banned our mida culture. Above all, they restricted us from access to our home. By blocking our access to spiritual and sacred sites, they detached us from our ancestors and Waqqi. Guji is now cut-off from the past. That happened during the military government. This government also cares much for the animals than the people. These park people consider us as children. They think as if we do not know anything about the animals. However, park problems came because of the park people. After they banned fire and restricted livestock from the park, the pastureland degraded. Mosquitoes and ticks infested the animals (informant: Chari Gamasa, June 2012).

The Guji understand and practice nature conservation as a holistic cultural, religious, economic and institutional practice that cannot be separated from one another. By referring to sacred spaces such as burial places and ritual sites, the informant linked historical referents of settlement and cultural and religious dimensions of the territories to indigenous knowledge of conservation. According to the elder, their ancestors maintained harmony between the humans and their surroundings through culturally embedded knowledge and spiritually connected relationships between the humans and non-humans. By capitalizing their counter narratives concerning areas of Guji’s competence such as spiritual connectedness, sacred cosmologies and culturally embedded ecological wisdom, the Guji have challenged the government’s allegations that they threaten the national park. They expressed these views in their conversations with park officials, government authorities and external observers (researchers, human rights advocacy groups and conservationists).

Guji’s major counter narrative of the state’s ‘environmental degradation’ thesis was built upon their ecological wisdom, which is also called ‘sacred ecology’ (Berkes 2008). As is common among all Oromo groups, the Guji symbolize ‘green’ with fertility, good luck, abundance and, above all, peace. Peace among the Guji is much beyond absence of conflict. The Guji people consider their homeland peaceful when their livestock and the people reproduce, pasture regenerate and water wells do not dry up. It is peaceful when predators do not prey on their cattle. It is peaceful when seasonal rain comes and goes on time; it is peaceful when there is no disease that threatens the people and their livestock. Gujiland is peaceful when they have harmony with their neighbors. While the latter aspect of peace is conventional, others are often subsumed into the general aspects
of human security and have not been given due attention in the mainstream peace and conflict studies. Therefore, prohibitions against cutting sacred trees or generally restrictions against forest destruction and killing of wild animals are sanctioned by the cultural and spiritual norms and customary laws of the people. Guji’s cultural and spiritual connectedness to their surroundings is believed to ensure peace between the people and their non-human surroundings.

However, it should be underlined that the Guji are not ‘close to nature’ in the strict sense of the representation of traditional societies as the ‘noble savage’, which subsumes the utilitarian aspect in people-nature relations (Berkes 2008). Within different socio-cultural and economic contexts, the Guji depended on their territory for different purposes. Grazing, farming and killing wild animals for cultural practices, food and business were common practices that indicate Guji’s strong utilitarian tradition. However, the central point here is that despite their reliance on nature for their economic and cultural purposes, the Guji have maintained traditional values, ethics and practices of resource governance. The heterogeneity within the group that is increased by internal socio-cultural transformations and external forces is in fact another point of consideration in dealing with the weakening efficacy of traditional institutions, values, customs and practices in nature conservation among the Guji.

Despite changes in cultural practices and worldviews among the Guji regarding their conception of the environment, they still challenge the notions of state conservation practices. Accordingly, apart from contesting state intervention from historical and cultural perspectives, the Guji were capable of capitalizing on their own indigenous knowledge of conservation, which according to some elders, has maintained the human-non-human co-existence and particularly enhanced the conservation of biodiversity in the territory long before the advent of the state. The argument goes that due to the centrality of livestock in Guji’s cosmological understandings of the world and their long experiences of herding, they have developed deep knowledge of resource management and utilization, herding skills, disease prevention and animal behaviors. In contrast to the mainstream academic discourses such as the “tragedy of the commons” (Hardin 1968), which downplays the concerns and knowledge of common resource users, the Guji have long history of governing communal resources such as pasture and water.

They had areas called kaloo reserved only for calves, goats and old cows. Kaloo is located close to homesteads and each household has a right of access for its animals, although responsibilities are
also given to each household to monitor the pasture to prevent entry by other animals, apart from those mentioned above. Local elders have authority to sanction different rules upon individuals who transgress local rules of resource utilization and management. The people practiced the management and utilization of pasture and water in the major grazing areas through seasonal movements between dry season and wet season herding sites as well as through locally established customary laws. For instance, despite being understood as a common resource, the Nech Sar National Park plains itself was ‘divided’ into different portions according to its proximity to hamlet areas. The Guji did not draw boundaries but they knew which area belonged to which hamlet. According to Danbala Dhugo, one of my guides during a transect walk along the park border, the ‘division’ of the pastureland among different villages was made to avoid overgrazing that would damage the regeneration of the grass.

Nevertheless, most Guji informants also reflected on their own actions in contributing to environmental problems. While they are aware of the current resource depletion and its multidimensional causes, Guji elders pragmatically reflect on some actions of their members as part of the causes of the problems. Firstly, they mentioned the negligence to customary ethics and rules of resource management and utilization on the part of the youth. Secondly, elders who stick to traditional beliefs, customs and taboos interpret environmental degradation as a punishment from Waaqa for people’s transgression of ancestral laws and customs. For instance, Dokale, one of my key informants from Hiituu, had six children and over ten grandchildren. According to him, only two of his children join him during his annual thanksgiving rituals, while all the remaining children and grandchildren including his in-laws have converted to Protestantism. Dokale complained about the behavior of his children and grandchildren in violating the ancestral laws. According to the informant, members of protestant families killed wild animals for food and demoted sacred spaces and trees. He observed that the following:

Now it has become right for people to go for whatever religion they choose. That is not the problem. The problem is when people use religion as a shield and demote our sacred spaces. These children invoke infliction to our land by violating our ancestral laws. They kill animals and eat in the bush. Some of them bring home. We might think it is a cow or goat and eat. How do I go for rituals after eating such meat? That is impossible. This generation is lost. I do not know the future of Gujiland but I am afraid that much problem awaits us ahead (informant: Dokale Shanxara, April 2012).

At the beginning of this section, I have raised two interrelated questions regarding competing understandings of human-environmental interaction on the part of the Guji and the state, as well as the basis for Guji’s counter knowledge production vis-à-vis the state’s rhetoric of conserving nature and improving their living conditions. It has been ascertained that while the state’s notions of
human-environmental interaction regarding those in peripheral regions was partly rooted in the identity of the state and partly in its economic and political interests in controlling the space, Guji’s conceptualization of their surroundings were informed by their cosmological, cultural, religious and economic schemes. More specifically, despite differences in political and economic policies at the national level, successive Ethiopian regimes subscribed to the nature-culture dualism in their representation of people-environmental relations in the periphery. On the other hand, despite internal dynamism within the Guji in terms of education, religion, livelihood and cultural diffusions, livestock herding continues to be strong marker of Guji’s cultural, economic and identity representations. As a result, to maintain the health, fertility and reproduction of their livestock, the Guji practice rituals, prayers and sacrifices that includes non-human beings including sacred spaces. Therefore, for the Guji, the human, non-humans and Waaqa are inseparable in the way in which all form societies of nature. Thus, it is possible to conclude that Guji’s understandings of their surroundings and their resistance against state conservation discourses were informed by their memory of their past relations with the state, the cultural and economic significances of pastoralism, a critical knowledge enhanced by education, religion and lived-in experience or knowledge called ecological wisdom. It is also important to underline that conservation is not practiced among the Guji as a planned activity for the sake of preserving biodiversity; rather, it is a cumulative outcome of religious, cultural and economic activities and governed by customary laws and eco-cosmologies.

7.1.2. The Koore

Similar to other actors discussed above, the Koore people have had claims of entitlement to the eastern lowland portion of the park. The Koore small-scale farmers who sustained their livelihood on rain-fed and irrigation agriculture in the Tsalke valley along the Sermale River considered the expansion of the park to this fertile low land as a threat to their livelihood. Despite competing narratives concerning when and how exactly the Koore moved downslope to Tsalke; some sources attest that the people began using the area for seasonal farming shortly before the mid twentieth century (Awoke 1985; Bediru 1986). Traditionally, there were remarkable ecological, cultural and economic boundaries between the highland Amaro district and the low-lying Nech Sar plains to the west, which the Guji inhabited as pastoralists. Koore’s predominant engagement in peasant agriculture on the mountainous highlands of the Amaro district on the one hand, as well as Guji’s pastoralist livelihood in the lowland Nech Sar plain areas on the other, created a well-defined ecological niche until the Koore moved to the Tsalke valley.
With the park’s expansion to the east following the eviction of the Koore and Guji households from the area in 1982, the fertile Tsalke valley was included into the park boundary and this phenomenon brought direct contact between the Koore and the park. Although the Koore people did not settle beyond the Tsalke lowland, Amaro district exercised administrative authority over portions of the park during the imperial and military regimes. Thus, drawing on this history of political administration, Koore elites and ordinary people often claim that the park belongs to their district of Amaro. To better position Koore’s contestation over the Nech Sar National Park, it is essential to underline that this narrow strip of land along the Sermale River has become a cause of disagreement between the Koore, Guji and the park. While the Guji used it for dry season pastureland and small-scale agriculture, the Koore used it entirely for agricultural purposes through irrigation, as well as to some extent by seasonal rain. The park administration also claimed that the area was a dry season retreat for wildlife, where animals would get water and fresh grass. Accordingly, it is within the context of Koore settlement history in the area, the economic significance of the area, contestation between the Koore, Guji and park and Koore’s relation with the state that I will analyze Koore’s views towards the national park.

7.1.2.1. “Tsalke Is Our Life”: The Economic Dimensions of the Territory

In February 2012, when I entered the Koore villages of Darba Manana, Gumure, Tifate and Yero that adjoin the Tsalke valley, I was amazed by the abundance of fruits, vegetables and fresh maize in a local market in Darba. Given that February is a dry season in Ethiopia; it was uncommon to find on-farm fruits and vegetables, except from irrigated farms. Along my way to the villages, I observed degraded land on the highland parts of the district where the people did not practice any irrigation activities. By contrast, the majority of the households in these four villages have plots of land in Tsalke, from where they ensured their subsistence through irrigation agriculture. I was later informed that the fruits and vegetables in the market were brought from the contested Tsalke valley that adjoins the Nech Sar National Park. Local Koore informants recalled that the people in these villages did not have recent memory of food insecurity, apart from some three years food aid they received following the 2004 resettlement program.
Figures 16 & 17: Farm Land in Amaro Highland; and Coffee Plants in Tsalke/Golbo Lowland

In addition to ensuring the subsistence demand of the people, many Koore residents in the adjacent villages see the Tsalke lowland as a source of their economic development and a safety valve during natural uncertainties. A story of Shibiru Ayele and his son Kasahun was illustrative in hinting at the significance of Tsalke for the people. Shibiru was a resident of Darba Manana village but he and his children had large plots of land in Tsalke. Shibiru traced back the period his parents moved to Tsalke to the 1930s. According to this elder, his parents and many other people in Amaro district initially moved to the lowland to escape from the invading Italian army (1935-1941). In addition, the Koore once again retreated to the lowland to escape the exploitative and despotic administrative system that was installed following the restoration of the imperial regime in 1941. Some informants mentioned that many people continued to cultivate the lowland areas to subsidize the heavy tribute levied upon them by the government. Cotton and maize were the major crops cultivated in those times, while they later began cultivating coffee. Shibiru and others in these villages continued going down to the Tsalke during dry seasons for irrigation, which they later expanded by planting fruit trees and other plants such as mango, avocado, banana, coffee and sugar cane for household consumption and business. Like all the villagers who moved to Tsalke, Shibiru did not abandon his land on the highland, because both areas were sources of livelihood security during times of uncertainties.

Population pressure and land degradation on the highland made it difficult for households with large family size like Shibiru — with extended family of over twenty family members — to confine to the highland. On the other hand, due to the swampy nature of the lowland with mosquito and tsetse fly infestation and prevalence of sporadic conflict with the Guji, permanent settlement in the lowland has been a major challenge over the years. Thus, the Koore were caught between competing
uncertainties of life in both the highland and the lowland. For instance, there was fear and speculations of inter-ethnic conflicts in the lowland and state repression on the highland; deadly disease and destructive flooding in the Tsalte valley and unpredictability of the weather and yield on the highland; and state encroachment to Tsalte through the park and its ‘incentives’ of resettlement plans to Abulo and Alfacho villages. The Koore villagers continued their day-to-day routines within hope and worries/frustrations. It was within these dilemmas of life that the Koore people in these villages negotiated government conservation discourses regarding the national park.

Like other villagers in the area, Kasahun considers Tsalte as a life stream, situating it within the broader political, ecological and economic issues in the district across different historical periods:

People first moved down to Tsalte to escape from feudal exploitation. There were problems of heavy taxation and administrative suppression in the highland areas. People also worked much and degraded the land to get high yield for their family and for the government. Gradually, the highland was degraded and gave low yield. It was not enough to pay the taxation and to feed the household. In 1976, some two years after the revolution, I quitte my school from Arba Minch and joined my family in Tsalte. That year, many people flocked to Tsalte because in the previous year there was no good harvest in the highland. Rain did not come on time. I remember people suffered a lot. In Tsalte, we planted maize, sweet potato and cabbage by irrigation. People planted those crops and vegetables that grew fast. After the harvest, we got sufficient food for the whole family until the next harvest in the highland. The mango, avocado, sugar cane, coffee, banana and ensete plants we planted in those times are now the source of our income. Every year, we get an average of over 100,000 birr [nearly 4000 Euro] from the fruits, sugar cane and coffee. We cultivate maize for household consumption but others are for the market. Tsalte is a gift for us from God. In the highland part of Amaro, people live on small plots of land that does not sustain their household demand. However, in Tsalte, except the problem from the Guji and the park, everything is very good. Now, there are serious problems and we do not know the future. The Guji claim that the land belongs to them. Two years ago, there was conflict with the Guji and that affected much of our market relations with them. The park also wants to include it into its territory as a whole for the animals. Another major problem is access to market. These are our major worries (informant: Kasahun Shibiru, February 2012).
For the Koore residents in the villages adjoining the park, the economic significance of the territory is central. From the above resource mapping, it became clear that areas such as Gashe and Tsalke along the Sermale River are important farmlands for the Koore, where they grow crops and fruits for subsistence and commercial purposes. Likewise, the two lakes (Chamo and Abaya) are also resource spaces for fishing activities mainly for business. The Koore used strategies of maintaining plots of land at the highland and the lowland for times of uncertainty. Confinement to the highland or the lowland was risky owing to uncertainties in government policies, inter-ethnic relations and weather conditions. The Koore capitalized on their dependence on this territory for their livelihood, with both the Guji and the park administration also competing for different purposes. Therefore, the Koore used the economic significance of the territory and their history of utilizing the area long before the establishment of the national park in their claim for entitlement to the eastern portion of the park, namely the Tsalke valley.

7.1.2.2. Situating History and Culture in Claim for Land Rights

In their claim for entitlement to the fertile agricultural Tsalke valley, the Koore positioned their arguments within historical and cultural references. In defining inter-group relationships or claims
for resource ownership, different social groups or actors draw on historical incidents/references to justify their claims and to delegitimize any claims by their adversaries (Schlee 2002). Historical narratives are powerful legitimizing instruments that enhance people’s agency to build their current positions on strong historical episodes and trajectories. As Appadurai (1981) argues, competing actors invest a lot in management of meanings, narratives and myth to counterbalance notions used by their rival actors. The Koore people’s narratives on history of early settlement of their people in Yero, Darba, Tifate and Gumure villages were systematically used to extend the historical time span of their expansion to the lowland area, although the phenomenon was said to have been shortly prior to the mid twentieth century. According to a Koore elder by the name of Ayele Chamo from Tifate village, the people established settlements in the four aforementioned villages during the sixteenth century and expanded to Tsalke over the course of time. The elder used a metaphor of human body to explain how the two geographical areas or agro-ecological niches were highly interconnected. For elders like Ayele Chamo, Tsalke was part of their history of settlement that could not be separated from the main Amaro district:

Our ancestors first settled in Yero, Darba Manana and others. They built Yero Medhanealem church [one of the ancient Ethiopian Orthodox Churches in the region]. Gradually they moved to Kelle and to Tsalke. Our Koore people settled in Tsalke just at similar time with other places in the district. Tsalke was a source of life for the Koore from earlier times and continues to be so. You know, a human body does not function well if any of its parts is missing. Darba Manana and other villages on the hill are like the head of human body. Tsalke and other lowland areas are like the heart, foot and other lower body parts. Can a person live without any of these? No, it is impossible. Our ancestors recognized that it was impossible to separate the different parts and that was why they included Tsalke into the whole body part to make it function well. Tsalke played an important role in saving the life of our people during drought and famine. Our people escaped from the fascist Italian occupation to Tsalke. Patriots like Abebe Mengesha and Beyene Tafesse retreated to Tsalke during the war. My father was killed in Tsalke by Italian forces and by the Banda [co-opted citizens]. For me, Tsalke is more than where we get our food. It is part of our history. It was where our ancestors went for hunting, it was where our patriots fought against the enemy, and it is where our generation still struggles against the Guji and the park. Is it not a historical place then? For me it is a historical place (informant: Ayele Chamo, February 2012).

Indeed, Tsalke served the Koore as a refuge in their retreat from foreign invaders and internal despotism and exploitation. Following the incorporation of Amaro into the Ethiopian empire in the late nineteenth century, local chiefs maintained their traditional authority but became authoritarian in levying tribute on their subjects. They oppressed them administratively and exploited the peasants in terms of economy. According to Awoke (1985), local chiefs levied unbearable taxation on the Koore peasants because of which some of them escaped to lowland areas where the state was unable to reach. Thus, Koore’s downslope expansion was part of the broader political and economic systems of the period under the imperial regime. During the imperial period, as the above Koore informant mentioned, the lowland pastoral and agro-pastoral areas were almost out of the day-to-
day administrative, social and economic burdens of the state. The past governments did not manage to put pastoral communities under effective state administration until the 1990s. Due to the cost of extending authority and control to peripheral regions, most pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial states in Africa were fairly absent in these regions as a result of which peasants from the state-reach areas used the peripheries as exit zones (Herbst 2000). According to Herbst, African states across different historical periods did not have the technological, political and economic capabilities to extend power to the peripheries. In the context of Ethiopia, although the situation has been changed in the post-1991 period, the imperial and military regimes did not effectively control the periphery.

In the post-Italian occupation period (post-1941), the imperial regime restored and strengthened its administrative and exploitative state bureaucracy particularly in the conquered regions. These regions became the targets of state repression and exploitation in the post war period for two fundamental reasons. First, despite differences in the way in which Ethiopian people across the country reacted against the Italian occupation, these regions largely considered Italians as ‘liberators’ from the yoke of Amhara domination and exploitation. Within the short period of occupation, the Italians sought to win the support of the people in the subjugated regions by redistributing land to the peasants and by disposing Amhara feudal lords. Therefore, the imperial regime toughened its administrative system over these regions as a mechanism of reasserting imperial hegemony. Second, to consolidate its power both in terms of economic and political power, the regime had enacted brutal administrative and taxation policies that made the peasantry in those areas the major prey to the predatory state system (Markakis 1974; Donham 1986). Because of the state repressive system on the highland parts of the Amaro district, the Koore peasants were compelled to escape to the lowland areas by establishing social networks with the agro-pastoral Guji community in the area. Therefore, Tsalke was part of the exit options. Using ilmoffacha (adoption) tradition as another strategy of integration into Guji community, the Koore managed to establish settlements in the lowland areas.

Koore elders and political elites in the district have also raised some aspects of cultural connectedness of the people to the land. Despite meager information, elders traced back to the past when their ancestors were said to have been performing a ritual called Tobe ritual every year. According to their views, the Koore practiced the Tobe ritual to pray for rain and abundance. For followers of traditional religion, Tobe was a shrine where they worshiped the god of rain. Although the ritual is no more existent, Koore elders and elites seem to have subscribed to the cultural dimension of human-environmental relationship in line with the constitutional provision that grants
ethnic groups the right to preserve their culture and exercise their religion. During my discussion with a chairman of Darba Manana village, he emphasized the economic significance of the territory but to substantiate the economic interest, the chairman referred to historical administrative borders of the district and some culturally meaningful places in Tsalke. According to the chairman:

Nech Sar belongs to Amaro district. It belongs to the Koore people. In the past, even during the military government, our district administered up to Sanxaqa Dingay [Bonke Hill]. It was almost up to the forest close to Arba Minch town. The majority of the two lakes were under Amaro district. Our ancestors told us that our people used to go for rituals to Tsalke whenever there were droughts and other problems. They performed rituals and sacrifices to get rain. Later after the period of Italian occupation, people began cultivating the land through irrigation. However, today both the park and the Guji are catching it in hands with our people (Darba Manana village Chairman, February 2012).

Regarding the national park, the Koore peasants and political elites had somewhat common views at least when they expressed it on a ‘public stage’. The people emphasized the advantages of the national park for the national economy, for the future generation and for the purpose of conservation of the wild animals while discussing the issue in a public or in a formal discussion. However, ‘back-stage’ information from the Koore residents depicts contradictory views about the park. For many men and women, the park is an institutional threat to their livelihood survival and they strived to challenge its existence in different ways. For the Koore, while historical reconstructions on their past administrative and settlement history were the major references for their claim of entitlement, they also sought to use the government’s discourses of development, food security and conservation in their pursuit to maintain their traditional right over the land. For instance, while considering Tsalke as their life stream and source their economic development, the people covertly challenge the government’s resettlement plan, given that it would dismantle their development foundations. In fact, they also openly expressed their views that the park is limited only to the grassland areas and they downplayed any claim of the park authority over the Tsalke lowland. In the next chapter, I will discuss how they contested, negotiated and at times appropriated government discourses of conservation, as well as dealing with their Guji rivals.
7.1.3. Other Local Actors/Groups

This category of local actors includes local social groups who had some degree of influence concerning the course of conservation practices and management approaches of the national park. For the sake of this work, I assess the role of self-organized fishermen, low-income town dwellers, those who depend on the extraction of forest resources from the park and tour operators in Arba Minch town.

7.1.3.1. Self-Organized Fisheries

Self-organized and unregistered fishermen were among the local actors with certain level of agency in shaping the conservation approach in the national park. The government considered this group as ‘informal’ fishermen to refer to their status of registration and organization in contrast to those registered and organized under ‘formal’ government administrative structures. According to some studies, ‘informal’ fishermen fulfilled the largest proportion of fish demand to Arba Minch town and beyond before the year 2004 (Dessalegn 2004; Bayisa 2011). During the 1990s, the fishermen expanded their scope of supply to major towns in southern Ethiopia up to the town of Hawassa while a few even managed to send it to the capital city, Addis Ababa. In those times, dozens of self-organized fishermen made their living by fishing business from the two lakes, which were partly included into the national park in the 1990s. Nevertheless, their limited financial capacity made the fishermen dependent on large businessmen, such as hotel owners, to secure loans for buying or repairing boats, hooks and nets. Beginning from the period of the preliminary implementation phase of the EU funded ‘Southern Ethiopian National Parks Rehabilitation Project’ in the mid-1990s, the national park, in collaboration with Arba Minch town and Gamo Gofa zone administrations, banned ‘illegal’ fishing activities on the Abaya and Chamo Lakes. By banning the ‘illegal’ fishing activities, the government intended to encourage formally registered and organized fishermen, who would pay taxation to the government for their access to specific parts of the park. It was also necessary to regulate fishing activities because the self-organized fishermen were accused of catching premature fish, as well as using nets and hooks that indiscriminately catch the fish (Bayisa 2011).

However, according to members of the former outlawed fishermen who were later organized under registered associations, the government did not provide them with any alternative livelihood when it restricted the fishing activity in parts of the lakes. A chairman of Chamo Fishermen Association recalled the restriction and financial problems that he and his colleagues faced between 1998 and
In 1997, I completed secondary school but I did not succeed to join the University. At that time, there was no private college in Arba Minch. Even if there were a college, I would not be able to pay tuition fees. We discussed with my former classmates and our friends from the town and started the business. Actually, we used to bring fish to hotels even when we were at school. The park already outlawed fishing from both lakes, which it said were part of its territories. We did not know where the borders began and where they ended. What we knew was that the Lakes were supposed to be free for all. Nobody was supposed to claim right over God-given resources like water and resources in it. Many times, they confiscated our fishing boats, nets and hooks. They detained us too. We moved further south but there were not many fish there. Some of our colleagues went to Lante area on Lake Abaya but there were already many fishermen. We became borko [literally: empty pocket] for many years. [I asked their sources of income during those difficult times and Hailu responded] Some of our colleagues went to different ways of life. They picked whatever came to their ways. Some of them even began looting tourists in the park. That was not a right thing but it was to save their lives for a day or two. However, some of us pushed on with fishing. We established good relations with scouts and got few hours on the Lakes. We also worked part-time in other activities in the town. Nevertheless, life was so difficult. Then African Parks came. I remember it did not lift the restriction. However, African Parks was better because it opened discussions with us and suggested for us to be formally registered as an Association. It supported us with money and expertise on how to begin the business. We formally established Chamo Fishery Association in 2006. The registration helped us to get access to parts of the Lakes, which were controlled by the park. However, the government at times asks us to pay much tax. They think that we collect fish as we wish. It is a difficult job. Anyways, life goes on like this (interview with Hailu Dacha, May 2012).

Two important areas of contestation and negotiation would surface out from closer analysis of the above quotation, which other former fishermen also shared. On the one hand, as it happened with the Guji and Koore communities, this social group also faced the ‘tragedy of enclosure’ built upon the classical notions of conservation through strict control of human influence on the ‘natural’ environment. In this regard, the fishermen challenged the concepts of territorialization or enclosure of the lakes, arguing that nobody was supposed to claim absolute right over these natural resources. On the other hand, by compelling them to be registered under different government offices/departments as associations, the government has put the fishermen under its control where they would be legible for taxation and other forms of administrative control. As Scott (1998) argues, one of the characteristics of modern states, and particularly in developing countries, is their deployment of coercive forces, placing their citizens/subjects under institutional and bureaucratic control to make them legible for taxation and administration. While the fishermen came to terms with some conditions of the government, particularly through registration as formal associations, they also contested the ban on fishing during the early years. At times, they prompted the government to facilitate them with some concessions such as micro-finance credit and formal access to some parts of the two lakes.
Drawing on the discussions with former ‘informal’ fishermen, I would like to further probe into how the fishermen who were denied access to the resources responded to the action. When I was in the field among the Guji and Koore people, my informants raised issues of security problems along their ways to the Arba Minch town until few years back. In most of the discussions on security issues, my informants underlined that there were gangs from Arba Minch town who were formerly engaged in fishing as their livelihood but they resorted to looting and killing tourists and any passer-by in the forest after the government banned their former economic practice. In order to get the link between the criminalization of fishing activity and the eruption of ‘gang’ crime in the national park, I used an extended case method. As I discussed in the methodology part, the extended case method extends the fields of investigation beyond a particular locale or beyond a micro level to establish a nexus between different local and extra-local social forces and processes (Burawoy 1991, 2009). According to this method, a social science researcher should follow a thread of information and establish links between different spots of data to formulate the link between the epicenter of the phenomenon and the edges of its radiating forces and processes.

I first began my academic investigation from the park authority and Gamo Gofa zone administration to get some clues. Based upon interviews and some documents, it became evident that there were security problems and attacks against tourists and park staffs by unknown gunmen in the years before 2004. However, none of the sources from both offices linked the crimes to the criminalization of fishing. Rather, they used the Guji as scapegoats for the attacks and included it in the agenda for the resettlement program in 2004. Meanwhile, I had a chance to informally discuss historical trajectories in the national park with a park scout who has been working as scout since 1978. According to this informant, security problems in the national park were major concerns to the park administration especially between 1991 and 2004. For people who closely observed different political and social developments that had direct or indirect effect on the park, the security threats in the park were inseparably linked to the management approaches of the park. My informant once interjected a clue to my question if the crimes might have been linked to the ban on ‘informal’ fishing stating that:

Many people were killed in this park. During the period of transition, it became unsecured. Nobody knew the killers. Some five or six years later, all former fishermen became jobless. They all entered into the forest. They targeted tourists and passer-by people who come to the town. However, it seems also that there were some hands in it. It brought a big tension between Oromia and Gamo Gofa zone but it was solved. The last incident came out when two or three Guji men were killed some eight or now it was nine years ago (Senior Park Scout,

39 Minute of a Meeting held in Arba Minch (18/12/2003) to “Develop Implementation Plan for Resentment of People who illegally settled in the Nech Sar National Park”.

296
April 2012).
Following the thread of pieces of information from here and there, I interviewed a former Galana Abaya district administrator who was supposedly involved in settling a large-scale tension between the Guji and Arba Minch town/Gamo Gofa zone in 2003. The story goes as follows. In 2003, two Guji men were killed and some five others were attacked and looted on their way back from Arba Minch town. The Guji men and women who escaped the attack speculated the identity of the killers. According to the district administer, the killers were later identified as members of former fishermen whose fishing practices were outlawed by the government. A few days after the incident, the Guji from the adjoining villages were fully armed and sieged Arba Minch town and vowed to attack the town in retaliation for the death of their fellow Gujimen. It was then that both Oromia and SNNP regional state administrations intervened and gave the responsibility to Arba Minch town and Gamo Gofa zone administrations to ensure the security of the people and the national park. The view from Oromia side attests that “the people in the southern region recognized that it was the former fishermen who turned into gang and criminal activities but they did not want to formally accept it, given that it was their fault in just leaving the youth on the streets. We also suspected that the Guji were targeted for their earlier refusal to the resettlement program. The issues of security were later used against the Guji to justify the government’s plan to relocate the people” (Former District Administrator, March 2012).

From pieces of information that I managed to collect from different sources, it can be concluded that the criminalization of fishing activity prompted the youth in Arba Minch to resort to a different form of resistance and livelihood sustenance. Despite some officials’ denial to recognize the link between ‘criminalization’ of ‘informal’ fishing practices and the security problems posed to the park, it later became evident that the government organized the former fishermen into formal associations and supported them with some start-up fund to avoid the risk of youth gangs. Nevertheless, even after registration, the persistence of strong business relations between fishermen and some government officials in Gamo Gofa zone had restrained the park from exercising its authority in line with its conservation approaches. For instance, although the park authority wanted to introduce regulations on types of hooks and nets to be used by the fishermen to avoid disruption in the fish habitat, government officials often ignored the park’s proposals and complaints because they were connected to the fishermen for some business benefits (informant: Park Biologist, April 2012). In any case, the fishermen were able to challenge the park authority’s imposition of its conservation rules but negotiated in terms of their practices of fishing, such as the case of formal registration and organization as associations. By resorting to criminal activities during the banning
of informal fishing on the lakes in 1990s and later by creating networks with government authorities, the fishermen were able to contest their rights to the resources. Moreover, the government also negotiated its exclusionist approaches by granting the fishermen with fishing permission under certain conditions such as registration and regular payment of taxation.

7.1.3.2. Trapped between Daily Subsistence Needs and the Park – the case of Forest Users

The park has been a source of daily bread for many low-income Arba Minch town dwellers who were engaged in utilizing forest resources from the forest adjacent to the town. According to Dessalegn (2004) and Bayisa (2011), most poor women and youth in the town rely on the park to get income from selling firewood, charcoal and construction materials from the forest. These small-scale forest users provide almost the entire firewood demand of the Arba Minch town. However, an institution that had different interest over the same resource they utilize for their daily bread confronts these social actors. Fierce fines and restriction from park authorities were among the many challenges that these people have faced over the years. Under such circumstances, the people were able to use bribe and personal relations with park wardens, scouts and the police as strategies to enter the park ‘undetected’ or if captured, to escape punishment. According to Tadelech, a woman who has been making her living by selling firewood for the last ten years, it has now become common for some scouts to receive 20 birr (nearly 1 Euro) as a bribe for a bundle of firewood that could be sold for 50 to 60 birr. If she were taken to police stations, Tadelech would pay double the estimated market price of a bundle of firewood and would stay in jail for few days. As a result, according to the informant, paying the money to the scouts was safer and easier but it all depends on the personal behavior and ethnic background of the scouts. As Tadelech noted:

The government wants to control everything. It restricted our children [fishermen] from the Lakes and it chases us from the forest. I lived for the last ten years by selling firewood. It was tough. Sometimes they detain us and other times they confiscate our woods. When I go home without the woods, the entire family suffers. We have no other sources of income. My child sometimes gets fish from Chamo but now he is out of the job (Tadelech Tibeso, June 2011).

African Parks Foundation organized these resource users and employed them to activities such as clearing invasive plants, building and maintaining drainage canals, soil conservation on rugged topographies and collecting dry wood for fuel consumption by the park staff (APF Monthly Report, August 2005). However, following the withdrawal of the APF by the end of 2007, part-time employees of the foundation were suspended and resorted to their former livelihood options – extracting forest resources from the park on ‘illegal’ basis.
Concomitant to the above statement, it is essential to note that the withdrawal of the APF had brought major structural change in the administration of the park. Based upon the intense competition between the two regional states particularly concerning the issue of the Guji, the administration of the park was rolled back to the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA) in 2009. According to some of my informants from different offices in the SNNP regional state, the centralization of the park administration was considered as a denial of their constitutional right over the territory. Some park scouts even observed that Gamo Gofa zone and Arba Minch town administrations became too reluctant in taking administrative measures against the people whom the park found ‘guilty’ of ‘illegally’ extracting resources from the park territory due to their discontent with its centralization. The interdepartmental discrepancies in dealing with the park issue had opened opportunities for the resource users to continue their livelihood in utilizing the resources. As one park staff mentioned, there was no strong collaboration between the park administration and government departments in Gamo Gofa Zone and Arba Minch town. For instance, according to the informant, the police often release people whom the scouts capture with woods, stating that ‘unless the Guji and Koore people stop encroaching the park and killing the wildlife from the eastern side, there was no value to restrict the people who used the forest for their daily bread’ (personal communication with park biologist, May 2012). While the conflictual relationship between the people and the park authority emanated primarily from mismatches between the people’s question for daily bread and the park administration’s ambitions for conservation and tourism development, the interdepartmental tension between the park administration and some SNNP administrations is related to the politics of identity and questions of ownership. Such conflicts opened some windows of opportunities for these low-income town dwellers to maneuver the system into their advantages.

7.1.3.3. Local Tour Operators

As business-oriented local actors, local tour operators have also contributed to the construction of different images about the territory and in lobbying the park administration to follow strict protectionist approach. There are seven different tour operators in Arba Minch town with specific focuses on national parks in southern Ethiopia, namely Nech Sar, Omo, Mago and Maze national parks. According to a chairman of “See us Tour Operator”, Nech Sar National Park is the most visited park among domestic and foreign tourists. Despite problems of security and accessibility, the scenery and wildlife in the park are very attractive for tourists. However, according to the chairman, the presence of the Guji on the eastern side of the park has become a big threat to the park, in terms
of posing security problems to their organization and tourists, as well as degrading resources in the park territory through hunting and cattle trespass. As a result, tour operators in the town have often lobbied the park and Gamo Gofa zone administration to relocate the Guji to a far distance to secure the park (interview with ‘See us Tour Operator’ Chairman, May 2012). As it could be understood, tour operators romanticized/glamorized the park to market the territory to foreign and domestic tourists. Behailu, a deputy chairman of ‘Rift Valley Tour and Travel Association’ described the Nech Sar and other national parks in the south as follows:

Our region is rich with natural areas for tourist attraction. When a tourist sits in Arba Minch town, for example in Paradise Lodge or Bekele Molla hotel and gazes down the valley, the person would love to go to see the beautiful landscape in Nech Sar. Nech Sar has natural beauty that other parks do not have. By the way, it is not only the topography. The wild animals are spectacular. Omo and Mago national parks are far south. Tourists even visit these parks to view the culture. The Mursi, Surma and many other people are tourist attractions. Nevertheless, in the Nech Sar, tourists do not want to see the people and their livestock. Their culture is not like those in far south. Our tour and travel association benefits from making use of the natural beauty of our region. The people, their culture and ways of life, and the wildlife and topography are what we work on. We contribute to our country’s development through tourism. We pay taxation, contribute to development of the country and play our role in building national image (Behailu Ayele, May 2012).

Although they do not have direct administrative relationship with the park authority and local communities, tour operators contribute a lot in shaping the perception of tourists about a particular national park by romanticizing nature and at times exoticizing cultural practices of people who live in or around the national parks. For instance, Laura White, an American tourist whom I interviewed at Tourist Hotel in Arba Minch was briefed by local tour operators about the Omo and Nech Sar National Parks. Based upon the information she received from the tour guides, Mrs. White expressed her impressions about the two national parks as follows:

Last week, we were in Northern Ethiopia. We visited Lalibela, Gondar, Axum and Bahir Dar. These were great historical sites. We were amazed. We arrived here yesterday. Our local tour guides told us about Nech Sar and Omo. I believe these are wonderful natural sites. I saw the two Lakes and parts of the Nech Sar from that Lodge up there, Paradise Lodge. I want to see zebras and other animals. We will have boat trip on Lake Chamo. We look forward to seeing the beautiful culture of the people in Omo valley. We have read a little bit about them but have never visited the place. I think Ethiopia has beautiful places, history and of course good people (informant: Laura White, May 2012, Arba Minch).

When I was in the field in March 2011, few foreign tourists were taken to the Nech Sar plains bordering the Guji people. According to the sources, the tourists saw cattle trespass into the park territory and whereby the livestock were grazing with the wild animals. This became a shock to the tourists because it contradicted their prior orientations about the area as ‘pristine nature’. Upon their return to the park administration’s head quarter in Arba Minch town, the tourists complained to the park officials about the cattle trespass not mainly due to its conservation impact, but rather because