



The Influence of the State and Market on Local Level Management of Natural Resources:

Case Studies of Forests, Irrigation and Pasture Sites in South Wello, Ethiopia

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*“They came to tell us that the mountain is naked. They also told us that the mountain’s nakedness is the cause of our vulnerability to drought since imperial times. Trees were seen as a solution rather than our prayers. Rain is in the hands of Allah. After all, trees are not Allah to bring you rain from above. It is **after** these trees were planted that the rain stopped!”* **A peasant in South Wollo**

PREFACE

This report by anthropologist, Alula Pankhurst, was produced as part of the Institute for Development Anthropology’s BASIS Horn of Africa/Institute for Development Research (IDR), Addis Ababa University program on “From Household to Region: Factor Market Constraints to Income and Food Security in a Highly Diverse Environment, South Wollo, Ethiopia.” It provides important analyses of the role of local institutions in managing key natural resources in South Wollo, Ethiopia and complements other aspects of the BASIS/IDR program, particularly an on-going household study in the region that began in June 2000. By collecting excellent qualitative and historical data, Pankhurst and his team of Ethiopian graduate students show how rules and regulations regarding resource use are situated in local historical and cultural structures and are best addressed through actual case studies of resource conflicts and their resolutions. Access to the products of ‘common’ property resources, such as forests and pastures, are a significant key to the survival strategies of impoverished Wollo peasants during times of drought and famine. The findings reported by Alula Pankhurst also point to possible policy actions that the Ethiopian government and other groups might pursue to minimize resource-related disputes and ambiguities and, thereby, improve the welfare and livelihoods of thousands of food-insecure farmers.

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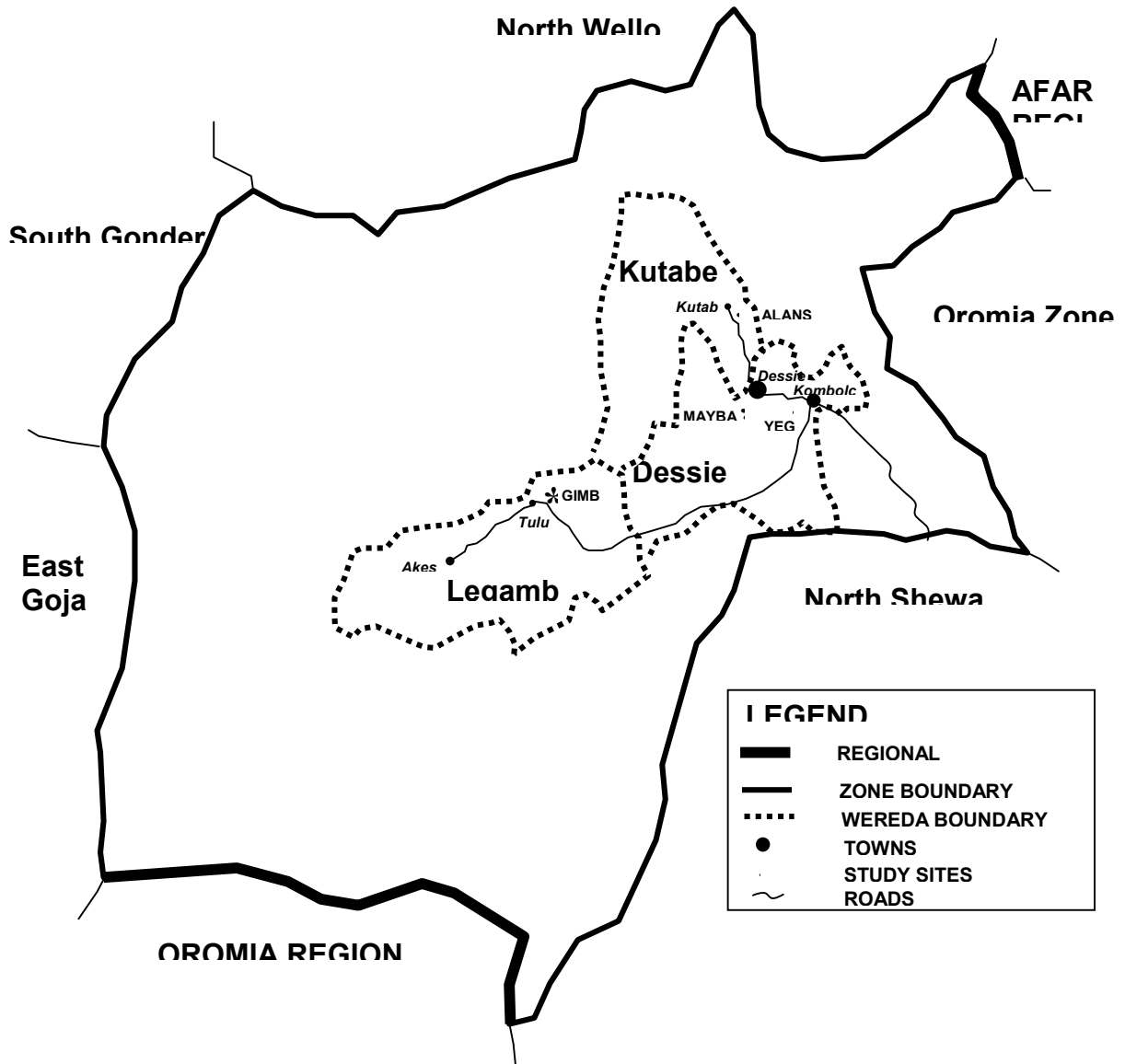
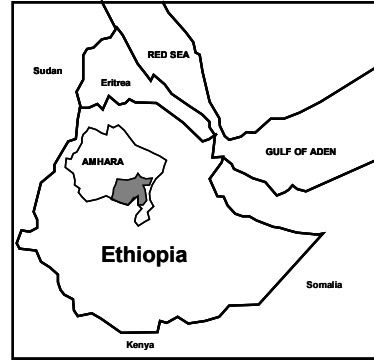
I wish to thank Professor Peter Little for having the confidence that the research would prove to be of interest and relevance to the BASIS South Wello Project and for his constant encouragement and support. Professor Peter Castro accompanied me on one fieldtrip and gave invaluable suggestions from the initial proposal to the final report. It has been a real pleasure to work with and learn from both Peters.

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Map of Study Sites in South Wello Zone, Amhara Region

ACRONYMS

EPRDF	Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front
KA	Kebele Administration
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
PA	Peasant Association
PSC	Peace and Stability Committee

GLOSSARY OF AMHARIC TERMS

<i>Abegar</i>	Muslim religious leader
<i>Adruss</i>	Incense
<i>Andirub</i>	One and a quarter
<i>Atink</i>	Ten days when irrigation repair work is carried out.
<i>Bahl</i>	Custom, tradition
<i>Bahlawi Comitewoch</i>	Cultural Committee
<i>Balabat</i>	Landlord
<i>Bele</i>	Meeting to find out culprit through oath swearing
<i>Belg</i>	Small rainy season, by extension the harvest
<i>Beni</i>	'Open' (in Oromiffa), communal grazing land
<i>Birana</i>	Parchment
<i>Birr</i>	Ethiopian dollar (approximately 8 <i>birr</i> = 1 USD)
<i>Boda</i>	Irrigable land
<i>Buden</i>	Team
<i>Chat</i>	Mild narcotic stimulant used in rituals
<i>Chichisa</i>	Grazing area near settlement
<i>Chiqa(shum)</i>	Tax collector in imperial times.
<i>Dagna</i>	Judge
<i>Debo</i>	Agricultural work party
<i>Dega</i>	Highland
<i>Denb</i>	Rules
<i>Dengoro Dagna</i>	Judge of the digging stick (used for burial).
<i>Derashote</i>	The main crop
<i>Esepa</i>	Workers Party of Ethiopia
<i>Eshet</i>	First fresh produce
<i>Felefel</i>	Pests that attack crops
<i>Gan-gef</i>	Irrigation water manager
<i>Gebbar</i>	Tax paying landlords in imperial times
<i>Gebere Mehaber</i>	Peasants' association under the Derg
<i>Gemja-bet</i>	Store house
<i>Gilegna</i>	Private farmer
<i>Got</i>	Hamlet
<i>Gulbetegna</i>	Forceful person
<i>Iddir</i>	Burial association, generally urban
<i>Injera</i>	Bread
<i>Kaya</i>	Cattle kept for relatives
<i>Kebele Mestedader</i>	<i>Kebele</i> Administration, level of administration under the EPRDF
<i>Kebele</i>	Peasants' association under the Derg

<i>Limat</i>	'Development'; work on government run conservation projects
<i>Masemaria</i>	Place to graze livestock
<i>Meda</i>	Plain
<i>Mehaberat</i>	Associations, by extension forest land of associations
<i>Meher</i>	Main rainy season and its harvest
<i>Mengistawi budin</i>	'Government team', lowest administrative level under EPRDF
<i>Menjilat</i>	Ancestor
<i>Mesal</i>	New religious dispute resolution institution
<i>Mesno</i>	Irrigation, irrigated land
<i>Nech Lebash</i>	Landowner under the imperial regime who obtained land in reward for military services (alternative term: <i>Zemach</i>)
<i>Qire</i>	Burial association
<i>Qolla</i>	Lowland
<i>Quna</i>	Basket and measure of grain
<i>Qunna meyz</i>	'To hold the [grain] measure'; idiom for ostracism
<i>Qunna</i>	Grain measure
<i>Ribbi</i>	Livestock share-rearing
<i>Sedeqa</i>	Religious gift
<i>Shekoch</i>	Muslim religious leaders
<i>Sheni</i>	Elders (from the Oromo word <i>shan</i> 'five')
<i>Shifta</i>	Outlaw
<i>Tef</i>	Uncultivated (or infertile) land
<i>Tegera</i>	A kind of metal currency
<i>Tella</i>	Locally brewed beer
<i>Temaji</i>	Quarter of a hectare
<i>Tsehafi</i>	Secretary
<i>Walka</i>	Land suitable for cereals
<i>Weliy</i>	Muslim prophet or holy man
<i>Weqfi</i>	Land donated for religious purposes
<i>Wereda</i>	Lowest level of state administration
<i>Yager Shimagile</i>	Elders of the land
<i>Yebahil</i>	Customary
<i>Ye-elet</i>	Daily
<i>Yejib wuha</i>	'Hyena water' surplus irrigation water from landlords used at night
<i>Yemote kedda</i>	Land of the deceased without relatives
<i>Yewelmeret</i>	Communal lands.
<i>Ye-Wiste Denb</i>	Internal Rules
<i>Yewuha Abbat</i>	'Father of water'; judge responsible for irrigation distribution
<i>Yewuha Shum</i>	Official elected to oversee irrigation water distribution
<i>Yezemed dagna</i>	'Kin-judges'; elders representing each side in a dispute.
<i>Zawiya</i>	Muslim shrine
<i>Zemach</i>	Landowner under the imperial regime who obtained land in reward for military services (alternative term: <i>Nech Lebash</i>)

1. INTRODUCTION

The following overview is based on four detailed case studies that are appended to the report. The report is divided into ten sections. The introduction outlines the site selection, changes in the research design, the researchers involved and methods used. This is followed by a review of the findings in relation to the initial research proposal which seeks to provide a better understanding of institutions. The third section is concerned with defining and comparing types of institutions. The fourth section takes a historical perspective and compares the roles of formal and informal institutions under three successive regimes. The fifth section considers 'external' and 'internal' threats to common resources, and institutional responses to them. The sixth section outlines how statements, discourses and competition over the definition of key terms are related to different interests. The seventh section discusses state and market influences on local natural resource management. The eighth section is concerned with the effects of drought, famine and periods of transition on natural resource management. Finally, the last two sections comprise a summary of conclusions, and recommendations relating to policy issues.

1.1. Site selection

This research, the proposal for which was accepted by BASIS in November 2000, aimed to understand the role of institutions involved in managing natural resources at a local level and the impact of state and market forces on these institutions. The research focuses on three key resources: forests, pasture and irrigation, all of which require some form of institutionalized management. In order to test the hypothesis that state and market influences can lead to greater institutionalization of resource management it was proposed to select for each of the three resources two sites, one closer to the influence of market and state and the other more distant. The research was therefore to focus on 6 case study sites, at least two of which were to be selected in South Wello Zone of Amhara Region to create linkages with the ongoing Institute for Development Anthropology BASIS research in the area.

1.2. Changes in site selection design

In the course of site selection three slight changes in the initial design became necessary. First, it became apparent that in some cases each of the specific resources cannot easily be treated in isolation but rather are interrelated. Tenure or interventions relating to one resource can affect the others. For instance, land taken for a tree nursery project may affect irrigation, and planting forests can affect grazing areas. Therefore, in some cases it was important to consider all three resources, irrigation, forests and pasture, within the same area.

Second, in some cases a particular site, such as the Mountain of Yegof, could not be fully understood by approaching it from one side and a more complete picture could be obtained from looking at more than one site on different sides. This case study therefore presents data from different sides of the mountain.

Third, for a particular resource a single site could sometimes give a rather unrepresentative picture and may not allow a full understanding of local variations and spatial and temporal changes, in particular in terms of the effect of distance from the market. In some cases therefore several sites were selected for initial study and one became the main area of focus.

Of the six sites four are in Amhara Region and two in the Southern Region. The sites in Amhara region are in South Wello Zone. The sites in the Southern Region are in Gurage and Keffa Zones. (see table 1).

This report focuses on the four South Wello sites, with a view to providing data and perspectives of use to the BASIS South Wello project. However, in each of the South Wello sites, research was carried out in several Kebele Administrations, hamlets and settlements, and in the Yegof case study different sides of the mountain were surveyed.

Table 1: Selected sites by Place, Zone and Region

Principal resource	Place	Wereda	Zone	Region
Forest site 1	Yegof	Dessie Zuria	South Wello	Amhara
Forest site 2	Bonga	Gimbo	Kafa	Southern
Pasture site 1	Gimba	Legambo	South Wello	Amhara
Pasture site 2	Serege	Muhur	Gurage	Southern
Irrigation site 1	Maybar	Dessie Zuria	South Wello	Amhara
Irrigation site 2	Alansha	Kuta	South Wello	Amhara

In this report the Yegof site is considered as primarily a forest site but the irrigation and pasture areas have also been treated. The Gimba sites focuses almost exclusively on pasture resources, the Maybar site focuses largely on irrigation but includes some reference to forest and pasture resources and the Alansha site includes all three resources.

In addition, some reference to the plain of Gerado is made for the sake of comparison.

1.3. Researchers involved

The principal researcher worked with two MA graduates, Mengistu Dessalegn and Gezahegn Petros and two MA students Kassahun Kebede, and Indris Seid. The former were responsible for one site each, Mengistu the Gurage site and Gezahegn the Kaffa site. The South Wello sites were covered by Mengistu, Kassahun and Indris.

1.4. Methods

The research was carried out largely through extended interviews in the selected sites, over a period of one to three months in each site. After identifying the different categories within the communities, representatives from contrasting categories, notably male/female, young/old, rich/poor, resident/returnee etc. were interviewed with a view to understanding different perspectives on natural resource management. An attempt was made to relate different positions within discourses on natural resource management to individuals' social positions and resource entitlements. Narratives concerning resources and their uses over successive regimes were recorded. Current and former leaders formal and informal institutions were

interviewed and cases of internal and external conflicts were considered in depth by considering the viewpoints of different protagonists and mediators.

2. GENERAL FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE INITIAL PROPOSAL

At a general level the proposal to study natural resources focused on understanding the roles of institutions in their management, given collective exploitation of some resources. I was skeptical of the tendency in both academic and NGO literature to view Resource Management Institutions as autonomous entities divorced from the social and cultural context, and sought to question the assumption that they were necessarily destroyed by state and market forces. Instead I suggested that natural resources may often be managed by existing socio-cultural institutions whose role in natural resource management was limited and related largely to dispute settlement. Discrete natural resource management institutions may then have emerged rather than have been destroyed as a result of external market and state forces. To test this assumption I sought to contrast cases of resources that were close to and distant from state and market forces and considered three types of resource: forest, pasture and irrigation, in selected sites in South Wello Zone of Amhara Region, and in Kafa and Gurage Zones of the Southern Region.

2.1. Reviewing institutions

Before considering the hypotheses I started with about resource management institution's in the light of the findings from the case studies, we need to consider what is meant by institutions, and how the research process has influenced views expressed at the proposal stage. The following issues are briefly addressed: the relationship between institutions and organizations, between formal and informal institutions, whether they should be seen as indigenous or local, their embeddedness within local social and cultural values and wider processes between local and exogenous forces, and the extent to which institutions can be seen as forms of social capital.

2.1.1. The relationship between institutions and organizations

I had expressed reservations concerning the dichotomy between institutions seen as 'rules of the game' and organizations as 'the players' suggested by the New Institutional Economics since this can lead to a neglect of the dialectics between normative and behavioral levels, and in particular may lose sight of how institutions come into being, and are transformed. Some researchers have sought to widen the notion of institutions from simply rules to include behavior. For instance Leach *et al.* (1997:26) had criticized the reduction of institutions to rules seeing them rather as "regularized patterns of behavior that emerge from underlying structures or sets of 'rules in use'." Likewise Berry (1989) suggests that institutions may be considered as maintained by people's active investment in them, and regularized practices, performed over time may be seen as constituting institutions. Such approaches widen the scope of institutions by including the ways in which rules are applied and their continued application in practice. However, the emphasis on continuous practice over time could lead to a lack of concern for the emergence and transformation of institutions. As Watson *et al.* (1999:8) point out there is a "danger that in focusing on embedded informal institutions research may contribute towards essentializing these institutions, rather than stressing the mechanics of institutional development". In this research I had therefore set out explicitly to

consider the institutionalization of institutions, and the interactions and discourses between local institutions, state and market forces.

In the course of the research process and considering the findings, I have become convinced that the critique of viewing institutions as rules divorced from the actors who make, apply and change them is fully justified. For rules to be formulated, negotiated, enforced, changed etc requires the active involvement of positioned actors with varying interests and abilities to affect the implementation of rules. The research focus on transformation and emergence of institutions also leads to a questioning of the view of institutions as regularized practices over time. How regular and for how long does a practice have to exist before it can be called ‘an institution’? Some of the practices described in the case studies emerged gradually or recently, but have established rules and practices with effects on natural resource management, and as such should not be excluded from being considered as institutions. At the same time, there is a danger of calling everything - from a rule to an individual practicing it – an institution. I would suggest that the interaction between the collective formulation of rules and their application by actors situated in time and space needs to be central to a better understanding of institutions.

2.1.2. The relationship between Formal and Informal Institutions.

In considering institutions a number of researchers have drawn a distinction between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ institutions, often linked to other typologies such as ‘modern/traditional’ and ‘state/non-state’ (Leach et al.1997). However, this dichotomy tends to neglect interactions, interconnectedness and conflicts between informal and formal institutions (Watson et al. 1999:7). Moreover, it ignores how the latter may have influenced and transformed the former, how informal institutions may have become formalized, and how formal ones may have informal procedures (Blunt and Warren 1996).

The research findings suggest that the dichotomy between formal and informal institutions is problematic. First, the terms give a sense of fundamentally different forms of organization. There has been a trend of ‘informal’ institutions such as burial associations becoming more formalized in terms of procedures, and the formal institutions often make use of informal mechanisms. The key difference is not so much the degree of formality but rather the direction of the relations: outward in the formal institutions and inward in the informal ones. The formal institutions are connected to the state and mediate between internal and external forces, whereas the informal ones tend to represent interest groups within the ‘community’ and revolve around internal intra-group issues. A more appropriate distinction would therefore be ‘state-related’ versus ‘community-centered’, although we need to be fully aware of the complexities of ‘community’, the divided and conflicting interests involved, and the ways in which some ‘community’ institutions may represent certain categories or groups and exclude others. Second, in the Ethiopian context the terms ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ may give a false sense of separation. Over the past few decades, the scope for informal institutions to operate and the range of issues they can address has been largely related to the roles and activities of formal institutions. It would, therefore, be meaningless to try to understand informal institutions without considering them in relation to formal ones. In certain contexts such as transitional periods, when formal institutions have been weak, informal institutions have played a wider role. Formal institutions have at times sought to collaborate with, or more often co-opt, and even, at times, usurp or abuse informal institutions.

2.1.3. Indigenous or local institutions?

Much of the literature on informal institutions considers them to be indigenous, in the same vein as the vast literature on indigenous knowledge (Warren et al. 1995). However, the concept of 'indigenous' is problematic, avoiding issues of interaction, transformation, formalization, etc. (Marsden 1994). This research has used the concept of 'local' (Blunt and Warren 1996) to suggest a groundedness in place, but with a focus on how the local is connected with regional, national and global levels.

The use of 'local' in this research allows us to consider both state-sponsored and community-centered institutions within the same framework. However, one needs to be aware of how 'institutional borrowing', diffusion, and interaction between local and wider institutions are key to understanding the ways in which local institutions manage resources.

2.1.4. The embeddedness of Institutions

Much of the literature on institutions assumes that they exist in a vacuum, and can be analyzed in their own right. However, some research has shown how local institutions are embedded in local social formations (Berry 1989). In addition, this research sought to understand how local institutions are embedded in wider economic and political processes (Manger 2000).

The research findings suggest the need for an understanding of a double embeddedness: on the one hand within local social and cultural values and practices, and on the other in wider processes of relations between the local and the exogenous forces. To neglect either approach would give an incomplete picture of institutions. At the same time the conflicts between the two types of embeddednesses with different interests and logics is crucial to understanding the ways in which resources are managed.

2.1.5. Institutions as social capital.

The literature on social capital has focused on non-material aspects of resources, such as trust, norms and networks (Steward 1996, Harriss 1997). As such institutions can be seen as a form of social capital. However, the view of institutions as representations of 'community' concerns may neglect the importance of power in institutions and the question of control of collective resources by sub-groups, networks and individuals (Bates 1995).

This research suggests that viewing natural resource management in terms of social capital requires caution because of the different local institutions involved, representing various interest groups, sometimes with conflicting concerns. This would imply that issues of representation and legitimacy need to be addressed alongside considering institutions as social capital.

3. TYPES OF INSTITUTIONS, THEIR FEATURES AND INTERRELATIONS

This section seeks to characterize the different informal 'community-focused' institutions and the various formal 'state-focused' institutions. Then interaction and competition between the two types is discussed, followed by a comparison of their characteristic features.

3.1. Informal ‘community-centered’ and formal ‘state-centered’ institutions

Although the distinction between formal and informal has been criticized it is retained in this report. However, I have suggested that a more valid distinction is between ‘community-centered’ and ‘state-centered’ institutions. We also need to bear in mind that over the past century there has been an enduring interaction and some competition between the two types.

3.1.1. Formal institutions

Formal institutions have been initiated by successive governments and have reflected state interests. During the imperial period tax collectors were the main local-level government representatives, and serious disputes were brought to them. Under the Derg Peasant Associations (PAs) soon became a powerful instrument of state interventionism. They had their own judicial committee to oversee conflicts and had the power to impose decisions through fines and imprisonment. Under the EPRDF Kebele Administrations (KAs) were set up bringing together two to three of the former Peasant Associations, with similar judicial powers to the latter. In addition Governmental Teams were established to represent a maximum of fifty households, thus bringing state institutions to an even more local level. Conflicts relating to natural resource management are nowadays often reported to the Governmental Teams and through them to the Kebele Administrations.

3.1.2. Informal institutions

These institutions may be divided into two types, religious and secular, although there is much overlap. Muslim leaders who are dominant in the area, notably the *Abegar* and Sheikhs are involved in conflict resolution relating to interpersonal disputes. The former, play an important role in reconciliation, notably in homicide cases, and their curse is much feared. Their role in natural resource management is indirect, since they conduct ceremonies at shrines under trees and in pasture areas, especially in times of hardship, notably famine. *Abegar* are also involved in propitiatory rituals for the first plowing of each season (Teferi 2000) and are said to have occasionally censured persons plowing communal grazing areas.

Secular institutions consist mainly of local elders, burial associations. Local elders, known as *sheni*, specialize in identifying culprits when no one was caught red-handed. Their main strategies consisted of persuasion and threatening social ostracism. Burial associations are known as *Qire*. These associations became formalized relatively recently as a result of urban influences.¹ Although there is now a prevalent view that these are age-old institutions, this seems to be a form of ‘invented tradition’, and elderly informants in several of the cases note that people were not organized in formalized burial associations prior to the Italian occupation.² The *qire* primarily offer mutual aid in times of bereavement, and nowadays have a roster of members, a leadership with differentiated functions, sets of rules and sanctions, collect monthly payments, and own property such as tents and equipment used at funerals.

¹ In the south Yegof case the establishment of a cooperative seems to have played an important role in the formalization and institutionalization of *qire*.

² The south Yegof case study notes that in the past and still in some areas especially among the elderly the term *dengora dagna* is used instead of *qire*, and that this was a much less formalised institution, without regular meetings and contributions, and with the *dagna* or judge as the sole official.

Qire is the only widespread informal organization with membership based on locality and cross-cutting differences of interest by wealth, social position and sometimes even religion. Almost all community members take part in such associations, which provide a vital forum for expression of belonging. Although the associations are formed largely for burial purposes, they are involved in dispute-settlement, and recently have become more concerned with development issues. The main form of pressure that burial associations can use relies on social ostracism (Pankhurst 1992b). Households offending the community could be refused social intercourse. This is symbolized by threats not to bury their family members. Since the sanction of ostracism is extreme, it is rarely used; warnings are more common and offending individuals may seek reconciliation through elders.

Secular and religious institutions come together in cases where pressure needs to be exerted to seek out culprits, through the *bele* institution where community members were called by the *qire* to a public forum in the presence of the *Abegar* and were expected to walk over symbols of his authority. Each person would have to swear that they were not guilty and did not know who was. If a person lied the curse was believed to fall not just on the individual who would become sick and die but on successive generations of descendants. One individual commented wryly: “*Bele* is our AIDS”. Elders often try to resolve disputes without recourse to swearing, by interrogating individuals separately and seeking leads. They would then call protagonists and seek to obtain confessions. Compensation is often in the form of food and drink served at a reconciliation session. Generally, elders seek to minimize punishments since the main aim is not to attribute blame but to ensure that people who live together can be reconciled.

A third type of informal institution relating only to irrigation is the “fathers of the water” or “water judges”. However, it should be noted that during the imperial times irrigation was limited, generally controlled by landlords and tax collectors, and its management was in most part hardly institutionalized. It would seem that the institution of water judges emerged in some areas in the post occupation imperial period, but more generally during the Derg period. The formation of water committees with timetables, rules and fines was even more recent, in some cases only becoming institutionalized during the EPRDF times.

3.2. Changing relations between formal and informal institutions

The role of informal institutions in dispute settlement has changed over different regimes. In imperial times since there was less pressure on resources and land was controlled by landlords, involvement of informal institutions in managing common resources was mainly mediated through inter-personal disputes. Serious cases of murder and theft would be taken to the state representative, the *Chiqashum*. Under the Derg, with the land reform and the establishment of local state structures, informal institutions were excluded from involvement in land-related issues, but continued to deal with minor disputes. During the early EPRDF years informal institutions played a role in trying to control encroachments into common pastures, and in solving disputes over irrigation. State institutions also sought to involve religious leaders in preventive cursing of tree-cutting and burial associations in identifying culprits. However, this collaboration could tarnish the legitimacy of local institutions. The ‘cultural committees’ established for this purpose are viewed by many as lacking moral authority, and the elders themselves were reluctant to hold confession sessions. After a few years the EPRDF extended its formal structure down to a hamlet level and the role of burial associations was largely curtailed. In one case the associations then became a vehicle for

protest against external threats such as urbanization and private investment, and condoned encroachment of common grazing lands by local peasants. With the banning of the burial association's cultural sanctioning mechanism a new informal dispute settlement institution run by a migrant religious leader emerged a few years ago.

3.3. Comparing formal and informal institutions

In comparing formal and informal conflict resolution institutions, the main differences are that the former have the backing of state power to enforce their decisions, are mainly concerned with externally generated agendas, and may sometimes lack local legitimacy. Informal institutions, on the other hand have limited ability to impose their views, rely on threats of ostracism and cursing to achieve reconciliation, are often grounded in local knowledge and may be considered more legitimate by some categories of local 'communities'.

Table 2: Comparison between formal and informal institutions

Type of institution	Name	Description	Dispute settlement role	Strengths	Limitations
Formal					
	Chiqashum	Tax-collector under imperial regime	Serious conflicts	Enables appeal Ability to enforce decisions	Represents landlords Little regard for interests of tenants
	Peasant Association	Local administrative unit under Derg	Serious cases not resolved by informal institutions	Ability to carry out decisions, through its court and militia	Limited local accountability Danger of power abuse Imposition of leaders' views and repressive state policies
	Kebele Administration	Local administrative unit under EPRDF	Serious cases unresolved at lower level	Ability to carry out decisions through its structures	Large unit Limited local accountability Danger of power abuse
	Mengistawi Budin	Hamlet level unit under EPRDF	Lowest local level disputes	Responsive to local needs	Power to make decisions affecting livelihoods
Informal					
	<i>Abegar</i> and sheiks	Muslim religious leaders	Mainly homicide	Considered legitimate Curse feared	May not represent all interest groups
	<i>Qire</i>	Burial association	Inter-personal within association	Wide representation Sanction	Limited ability to enforce decisions Lack of transparency

				ostracism	
	<i>Sheni</i>	Group of elders	Inter-personal local	Local knowledge of social relations	Dominated by elders and men
	<i>Yewuha abbat</i>	Irrigation leader	Concerning irrigation	Local legitimacy	Concerns only irrigation issues

4. ROLES OF FORMAL AND INFORMAL INSTITUTIONS IN NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT DURING SUCCESSIVE REGIMES

In this section we consider the changing roles of formal and informal institutions under three successive regimes: the imperial, the Derg and the EPRDF.

4.1. Institutions in Imperial times

In the context of South Wello during imperial times most land was held by landlords who had control over forests and irrigated land in their possession, but were not involved in much exploitation of water or wood resources. Land over which taxes were not paid were termed *tef* [“uncultivated”] and included communal grazing areas.

4.1.1. Chiqashum versus Qire and Abegar

Official representatives of the state were the *chiqashum*, tax collectors for the government who were also expected to keep the peace and resolve conflicts. They had the support of the landlords, and could impose their decisions by fining offenders. Serious cases were usually reported to them for their arbitration.

Local informal institutions were the *qire*, a burial association and the *Abegar*, religious leaders. Disputes were resolved through the *qire* by *yezemed dagna*, “kin-judges”, elders who were relatives or partisans of each of the conflicting parties. The *qire* was seemingly not at this stage the more formalized association it later became, and did not have functionaries, regular meetings and cash contributions, and its main role was to organize burials and collect food contributions for mournings. However, the *qire* did have a role in dispute settlement, could in theory exclude members and in effect could impose a ban on social relations with an offender, resulting in social ostracism called *qunna meyaz* [seizing the basket].³ This can force the person to apologize and pay compensation at a reconciliation session. A person who had offended the community could be refused social intercourse. This is symbolized by the threat

³ This refers to the practice at funerals of people being expected to provide contributions of grain in a basket called *qunna* which serves as a measurement. Each person’s contribution is then poured into a container. “Seizing or withholding someone’s *qunna*” therefore refers to preventing them from contributing, and thereby excluding them from the institution. In other areas this may be referred to as *dengora meyaz* “withholding the digging implement” with which graves are dug, with the same connotation of exclusion. I wish to thank Dr Teferi Abate for clarifying these points. Other terms for exclusion are *samona*, and *imbidade* (Pankhurst 1992b).

not to bury someone from the offending household, and other idioms include ‘refusing the person coal from one’s fire [to rekindle his]’ and ‘not giving him help if an ox falls over a cliff’. Since this sanction is extreme it would rarely be used and warnings and fines in the form of gifts of local beer and bread to the elders, and, in serious cases, a sheep or goat, would be more common.

The *Abegar* is a religious leader whose blessings were sought and whose curse was much feared. If a crime was committed and the offender was unknown a *bele* could be organized by the *qire* at which each community member would be made to swear an oath in front of the *Abegar* that they were not guilty, by crossing over or holding symbols of his power, including a staff, spear, bones and the narcotic *chat* etc. The fear of the curse resulting from swearing falsely could lead to confessions. Elders often try to solve the problem without recourse to the swearing, by calling protagonists, family members and neighbors individually and trying to obtain leads. If they gain certain insights they would call suspects and seek to obtain a confession. Since the threat of the curse relies on fear and confession, elders do not want to risk ‘cheapening’ the power of the curse by using it too often. Indeed, there is a sense in which the younger generation is beginning to doubt its efficacy.

4.1.2. Roles of formal and formal institutions in NMR in imperial times

It is difficult to reconstruct the role of local institutions in resource management for a period that most informants do not remember well, especially since informants’ views have been colored by subsequent events and by their interests and involvement in more recent conflicts. However, it would seem that neither the formal nor the informal institutions had a very direct interest in protecting common natural resources. In this area it seems that there was an understanding that these plains were in most cases open access for grazing, and that they should not be cultivated. In Gimba myths suggests that the area became a common grazing areas due to prophecy, a curse or increasing population pressure. Although informants suggest that encroachments of cultivation into the communal grazing area were rare, occasionally disputes were said to have occurred between people cultivating grazing areas. Such disputes would be mediated by local elders, and the *qire* and or *Abegar* might be brought in. However, only if the dispute became serious would the matter be taken to the *chiqa* for arbitration. In some cases disagreements may have occurred between the *qire* and the *chiqa*, and the latter seemed to have had more executive power, though the former may have had more legitimacy in the eyes of local people. However, there is a suggestion that the *Abegar* may have been involved in preventing people from cultivating the commons in Alansha.

What is noteworthy is that both informal and formal institutions became involved to solve inter-personal disputes, rather than with the aim of protecting the commons. As such their role in natural resource management was secondary and was largely mediated by their involvement in dispute resolution.

4.2. The transition and the Derg period

Some reports suggest that during the period of transition between the imperial and Derg regimes the insecurity and lack of authority was favorable for individuals seeking access to land to cultivate plots by encroaching into the edges of the commons. Although it is not reported whether this was resisted, the result was that the cultivated areas became part of the redistributed land after the Derg land reform in 1975 and were thus taken away from the

commons. There was also some cutting of forests as the authority of the government and the landlords was questioned. Some of the permanent crops on irrigated land were also destroyed.

During the Derg period the land reform of 1975 and the subsequent land redistributions removed the control of the landlords and entitled tenants to land. Conflicts emerged over resources, notably trees landlords had planted, to which former tenants who were given the land laid claims. In the context of drought and famine of 1973-4 and especially 1984-5 the Derg became preoccupied with “greening the hillsides” and many areas were designated as ‘community’ forests, which in effect were under the nominal control of the PAs. Some forests were designated areas for the mass associations, the women’s, peasants’ and youths’ associations established by the Derg. Tree-planting was carried out through food-for-work and guards were assigned to protect the forests. However, no system of benefit or revenue-sharing was institutionalized, and from the perspective of the peasants all the forests were conceived of as forbidden state lands.

The Derg set up cooperatives, and these were allowed to enclose areas of common grazing lands for their exclusive use, notably for promoting dairy production. There were cases of opposition and even resistance often based on propinquity to enclosed areas and headed by former landlords and richer peasants who stood to lose more. Producers’ Cooperatives also took control over many irrigated areas, taking most of the land away from landlords, setting up nurseries, and sometimes expropriating small-holders who did not join cooperatives.

4.2.1. Kebele versus Qire and Abegar and their roles in natural resource management

The Derg set up *Kebele gebere mehaber* Peasant Associations (PAs), which were initially designed to represent the interests of the peasantry but soon became instruments of government policy. The land reform of 1975 meant that the PAs were given full control over redistributing and managing issues relating to land and other resources. In effect informal institutions were excluded from any open role in resource management and could only resolve disputes when the parties involved were willing to reach an agreement, and as long as the issues were not primarily about natural resources.

However, even the PAs’ ability to make use of resources was constrained. PA offices were often built using wood from forests, but cases of community buildings such as schools, mills, clinics etc were rarer, and the building of religious edifices was not encouraged.⁴ The lack of a sense of community ownership became apparent towards the end of the Derg period when the cooperatives collapsed and forests began to be looted as the authority of the government and the PAs began to wane.

4.3. The transition and the EPRDF period

The EPRDF had gained control over parts of South Wello a year before the final defeat of the Derg. The garrisons of Derg soldiers in the environs of Dessie were said to have been major perpetrators of massive destruction of forests for the encampments and as individual survival strategies in the final stages and once the army was disbanded. The loss of authority meant

⁴ However, in many cases the control over land by the PA meant that if there was a community will to build religious edifices this often did take place. Crummey (2000) has argued that the building of churches increased dramatically during the Derg period.

that control over forests disappeared, and all categories of people, notably former soldiers, displaced persons, including returnees from resettlement, and poor peasants were involved in a radical cutting of forests that had been under the control of the PAs. It is noteworthy that the few exceptions seem to have been cases where local communities had been able to make use of the forest resources, notably for building churches or mosques, and where religious leaders were instrumental in ensuring their protection (see Pankhurst 2001a, 2001b).

The property of cooperatives such as sheep and cattle were either looted or divided among the members and enclosed land was returned to the commons. However, in Alansha there was an attempt in subsequent years by communities living adjacent to the pasture area to seasonally enclose parts close to them and then divide the hay equally among members once it had grown. This was opposed by a coalition of different interest groups, including the landless and livestockless, notably displaced returnees, the younger generation, as well as urban residents of Kuta town (who kept livestock on the commons), and an outlying community, which had been excluded from using the pasture area during the Derg period on the grounds that it was part of a neighboring *Wereda* (district). This coalition was able to obtain a ruling that the pasture should return to its communal status and enclosures were prevented after two seasons.

As for irrigated land, cooperatives were disbanded and the pressure to accommodate more users, notably the displaced returnees and the younger generation of landless led to redistributions and the opening up of new canals. This in turn put pressure on the water resources, stretching the viability of irrigated agriculture, and often leading to increased conflicts between up-stream and down-stream users.

4.3.1 Kebele mestedadar and Mengistawi budin versus Qire and Abegar

During the transition and early EPRDF period there was somewhat of an institutional vacuum that resulted in the destruction of resources such as forests, enclosures, livestock projects and irrigation schemes of cooperatives. The EPRDF set up *selamina marregagat comitewoch*, “Peace and Stability Committees” (PSCs) to restore order and replace the Derg’s Peasant Associations. The EPRDF used the local institutions, the authority of the *Abegar* and the *bele* to locate and seize arms bought from ex-Derg soldiers.

Later the PSCs were replaced by *Kebele mestedader*, Kebele Administrations [KAs]. These were officially understood as part of the state structure, with for paid employees, and were therefore conceived of as different from the Derg Peasant Associations, which were in theory at least supposed to represent the peasantry, although in practice they were agents of state interests. However, from the point of view of most of the peasantry the KAs are seen as the natural successor of the PAs. Although many of the coercive aspects of the PAs seemed initially to have been removed, in many respects the KAs are perceived by many peasants as even more intrusive in local community and individual matters. Furthermore, the government introduced an even lower unit of organization with the *Mengistawi budin*, “governmental teams”, which are supposed to group units of less than fifty households with their own leadership reporting to the KAs. Despite decentralization, in this respect state penetration has reached deeper than ever before into rural society, and can affect vital aspects such as access to food aid and agricultural inputs.

4.3.2. Role of formal and informal institutions in natural resource management under the EPRDF

During the transition and early EPRDF period there are some signs that local institutions played a more important role in resource management than ever before. The case of the role of the *qire* burial association in Gimba in protecting the communal pasture area from encroachment is a case in point. There was also, at least initially, an attempt to involve community institutions in collaborating with the newly emerging state structures. This was notably the case in ways in which the burial associations and religious leaders in several sites were requested to help the KAs to seek out culprits who were involved in illegal tree-cutting, and in ‘preemptive’ cursing of potential offenders.

However, as the EPRDF consolidated its power base there was less need for reliance on or collaboration with informal institutions and some conflicts began to emerge. In the Gimba case the *qire* leadership were even allegedly seen as potential opposition and the *qire* was forbidden from using its sanction mechanism of ostracizing members, and was prevented from having any role in land-related matters. The result was that the *qire* policy changed from seeking to prevent cultivation of the commons, to condoning or even actively promoting it. The *qire* resolved disputes between members involved in cultivation without the knowledge of the KA, whose leaders also seemed to have a half-hearted approach to seeking to prevent encroachments. It is noteworthy that KA officials though representing the government are still community members belonging to *qires*.

As for cases of collaboration between the KA and the *qire* and *Abegar* over tree cutting, the committees set up by the KA came to be seen by many as illegitimate and as betraying the interests of the peasantry. The elected *Abegar* at village level tended to be considered as government representatives and were viewed very differently from the hereditary *Abegar* who maintained greater moral authority. Instead of collaboration the process of involving local institutions was one at best of co-opting and at worst of abusing traditional institutions. The elders involved in such ‘cultural committees’ often sought delaying tactics and were not keen on using the *bele* swearing and often sought to prevaricate. Some peasants began to challenge the legitimacy of the committees.

5. ‘INTERNAL’ AND ‘EXTERNAL’ CONFLICTS OVER NATURAL RESOURCES

The dynamics of natural resource management and the role of local institutions needs to be related to differences between ‘internal’ conflicts emanating from within the community and ‘external’ threats deriving from the involvement of exogenous forces, principally from state and market interests. The latter are of particular interest to this research, which seeks to understand the influence of state and market forces on the institutionalization of local institutions. The response of local institutions has also been different depending on the type of threat and the relations between formal and informal institutions discussed above.

Tensions between local and external natural resource management priorities have escalated over the past few decades. However, the way conflicts have been played out and the parties concerned have changed with different priorities of successive regimes. The following summary present key conflicts and their outcomes. A more detailed timeline is included in the appendix.

Table 3: Summary of Events and Conflicts in Natural Resource Management by period in South Wello Sites

Time	Event/conflict	Consequence	Outcome
Imperial			
19th century	Communal grazing areas defined A regional ruler takes an interest in Yegof forest as a political stronghold Irrigation established at Gimba and assists survival during the 1888-92 famine	Pasture areas deforested Peasants forbidden to graze animals in state forest Those with irrigation survive famine better	Common pasture with open access introduced Conflict starts between state and peasants over forest versus pasture Famine stimulus for irrigation development
Early 20th century	Local rulers exploit communal grazing areas	Pressure on and reduction of communal grazing area	Clashes between state and peasant interests begin
Italian occupation 1936-1941	Sawmills and irrigation schemes set up and farming in grazing areas	Deforestation pasture converted into farmland	Conflict between occupiers and local resource users
1941-1973	Development projects planned on communal pasture by governors and investors Foreign missionaries enter the area Government interest in establishing state forests	Peasant opposition though appeals to governors and/or imperial family or direct action State interventionism in forestry sector begins	Resistance successful through appeals or direct action in some cases whereas it fails in other cases Conflicts over demarcation of state forests
Transition 1973-4	Famine, loss of central authority, fighting, banditry Dispute over delimitation of Yegof forest	Farming encroaches on pasture Peasants uproot seedlings, destroy roads and chase away laborers	Pasture redistributed as farmland Detentions of state forest opposition leaders
Derg			
1974-1991	Land redistributed from landlords to tenants Expansion of state forests, hillside afforestation, cooperatives enclose commons for agriculture and livestock development 1984-5 famine, villagization and resettlement	Conflicts over trees planted by landlords Peasant resistance to state forest demarcation and tree planting on grazing land Conflict between peasants joining and resisting cooperatives Famine used by the state to impose natural resource management interventions Tenure insecurity, evictions and victimization	Tenure conflicts develop Relations between state and peasantry worsen. Leaders of opposition imprisoned. Increasing conflicts between government supporters and opponents Conflicts worsen within communities Competing claims over resources intensify
Transition 1990-91	Cooperative's land redistributed; livestock looted Tree cutting in state and community forests. Large numbers of returnees from resettlement schemes	Grazing land returned to commons Government concern over deforestation increases Conflicts over tenure claims become more intense	Communal grazing e-established New attempts at hill-side enclosures Pressure for redistribution increases
EPRDF			
1991-2001	Further land redistributions	Farm sizes reduced	Increase of agricultural pressure on

	Attempts to enclose or cultivate commons Growth of urban and religious interests in commons State institutions established at a lower level Investors granted land on commons	Burial associations oppose enclosures Peasant resistance to enclosures Conflict with burial associations United community opposition	communal grazing In some cases opposition leaders imprisoned in others succeed. Burial Associations tacitly condone encroachments Some investors succeed others withdraw
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5.1. Internal conflicts

Generally, if conflicts are internal, communities attempt to solve them using indigenous informal institutions and seek to avoid letting the matter reach formal state institutions. For instance, disputes over irrigation tend to be solved by elders, with the threat of sanctions by burial associations in recent years. Only if the matter cannot be resolved informally, or the dispute becomes serious will the case be taken to government institutions. For example, attempts at limiting cultivation of communal grazing areas may be dealt with by burial associations threatening peasants who encroach with ostracism, but if individuals come to blows cases will be taken to state authorities. However, since matters to do with land have been seen as a state prerogative since the Derg land reform, encroachments into forests and pasture areas are most likely to be dealt with by formal structures.

Internal conflicts are often generated by differential interests within ‘communities’ over use of resources. The major dividing lines are on the basis of generation, gender, wealth, residence, and political allegiance. These factors often cross cut but need to be analyzed first separately.

5.1.1. Generation

The most prevalent conflict that has been the engine of the rationale for redistribution has been between the older generation with access to land and the dependent younger generation seeking independent access. Both the Derg and the EPRDF promoted redistributions to entitle the younger generation and win their support, although in the Derg case the initial redistribution was motivated to provide tenants with land taken from landlords and in the EPRDF case redistribution was also aimed at disempowering Derg bureaucrats and remnants from the feudal elite and entitling the deserving younger generation.⁵ Although this conflict was played out mainly in terms of individual holdings it had repercussions for common natural resources. In terms of irrigation, the older generation often had a monopoly of irrigated land and the younger generation wanted to gain access. In terms of grazing land the older generation often had livestock whereas the younger did not. The former tended therefore to be against enclosures by cooperatives, investors, the town etc, whereas the latter tended to join cooperatives and saw benefits from labor opportunities through town development in Gimba.

In general the older generation tends to view the past positively, suggesting that resources were plentiful, disputes rare, that the poor could benefit from relations with the rich. However, some of the former tenants emphasize the oppression of the imperial times. In contrast, the younger generation tend to view changes more positively.

⁵ On the redistributions in Amhara Region see especially Ege (1997), Yigremew (1997), Teferi (2000).

5.1.2. Gender

Gender differences in the rural sector are mediated by the sexual division of labor in which only men can plough, resulting in some dependence of single women on male labor of relatives, or sharecroppers. The dominant institutions, both formal and informal tend to marginalize women from decision-making. Only one case was mentioned when respected elderly women (*Duberti*) were included in an appeal to a regional governor against a landlord seeking to cultivate a communal grazing area.

In terms of common natural resources women may be said to have an interest in access to wood for fuel and water for domestic consumption but this does not seem to have resulted in their expressing differential views on the management of these resources.

However, in terms of pasture areas, single women in the Gimba case, saw advantages in the growth of the town offering labor opportunities, and some of them expressed a wish that the commons should be divided so that they could obtain a share.

5.1.3. Wealth

Wealth is usually locally defined in terms of ownership of livestock and land. In the past there were strong relations between sharecropping and share-breeding institutions, through which relations between the rich and the poor were often mediated by patron-client relations.

Although both rich and poor could make use of communal grazing resources, these were often seen as refuges for the poor who could also collect dung, whereas the rich in some cases did not send their cattle to the communal grazing areas that were considered to be poor quality grazing.

Irrigation can certainly lead to significant differentiation, when cash crops such as sugarcane become important. As one peasant south of Yegof put it: “those who have irrigation are not farmers but irrigation users... We are confident of our labor; they of their money”.

There is often some correlation between generation, gender and wealth. In terms of common resources, older men tended to have more access to irrigated land, and had more livestock and were therefore against enclosures of pasture areas by investors and opposed the expansion of the town in Gimba. Indeed in this case there was a relatively clear-cut cleavage on the question of the town, where the poor and single women saw labor opportunities whereas the elder men and those richer in livestock holdings were against the take over of the grazing lands. However, some poorer share-breeders, who were in a dependent position in relation to richer livestock owners, reflected the latter's interests and views.

5.1.4. Residence

The issue of residence can be considered both in terms of geographical propinquity to resources and in terms of temporal residence as a basis for claims to resources. In terms of propinquity, when we consider common pasture areas, individuals living relatively close to the pastures were more interested to encroach upon them, sometimes resulting in conflicts between neighbors, whereas those living uphill were more prone to oppose enclosures.

In terms of attitudes towards external threats hamlets or villages closest to an area threatened by enclosures by cooperatives during the Derg, investors during the EPRDF regime or the expansion of the town in Gimba recently, reacted in opposition, whereas people living in

areas less close to the threat were less concerned but began to express some resentment of the consequent pressure from livestock of people who had lost communal pasture close to their settlements due to external threats.

In terms of temporal residence a clear divide emerged between those who had left as soldiers, resettlers, or in search of labor opportunities and those who remained in the area. The former were keen on redistributions of irrigated and forest and pasture land, since they generally did not have access to resources or livestock, whereas the latter were against redistributions. The returnees were often among the poorest involved in cutting wood as a survival strategy. Likewise former soldiers often felt marginalized.

5.1.5. Political allegiance

One of the most salient divides in Ethiopian rural society has been political allegiance. In the transition from the Imperial to the Derg regimes the landlords lost out and the tenants were entitled to land. In terms of common resources this resulted in conflict over forest and irrigated land to which landlords had laid claim.

During the Derg period conflicts over common resources centered around the enclosures of pasture areas and appropriation of irrigated land by the cooperatives, the confiscation of land on hillsides for reforestation, and the villagization and resettlement programs that dispossessed large numbers of people. Those who sided with the Derg were able to gain privileged positions within cooperatives and preferential access to irrigated and pasture land, whereas those who remained aloof or in opposition were discriminated against and faced threats of being sent to the army or resettlement.

With the coming to power of the EPRDF, former Derg officials were labeled as bureaucrats and had land confiscated from them in redistributions as did the ‘remaining feudals’ assumed to have retained privileges since imperial times. The younger generation, and those who showed allegiances to the EPRDF were the main winners.

The displaced, Derg soldiers, returnees from resettlement, etc had ambiguous legitimacies as they could seek to portray themselves or could be labeled as either victims of, or collaborators with, the Derg. The extent to which they were losers or winners depended on how they negotiated their positions and who supported them. Kinship or friendship with people in positions of authority has become a vital aspect of livelihood strategies in a context of land and oxen shortage (Teferi 2000). However, in general the displaced seem to have been largely losers. In terms of the common resources, the displaced tended to have less of a stake in protecting common pastures, and pushed for redistribution of irrigated and forest land.

One can also consider the issue of allegiance to external forces in terms of some members of the local communities becoming agents of outside interests, whether they be government, NGOs, investors etc. Such individuals may be viewed by many within communities with some suspicion and in extreme cases may even be considered traitors, such as the case of the guards and agents of investors involved in enclosures, that the majority of the ‘community’ oppose. In the Gimba case this even led to the investor’s agent being ‘excommunicated’ through ostracism from the burial association.

5.1.6. Cross cutting factors

Although the five factors discussed above--generation, gender, wealth, residence, and political allegiance--have been treated separately, of course there are overlaps. A factor such as gender on its own may not explain attitudes of all categories of women. Even the category 'female-headed' may break down depending on wealth, residence, etc. Thus, a female-headed household that is displaced may express interests relating to those of the displaced. An old man who was a resettler and returned to find his land redistributed may have a very different viewpoint from an elderly man who remained and kept his holdings.

Moreover, some categories may express initially unexpected views. Thus share-breeders who are certainly among the poor, may express viewpoints similar to those of the rich in livestock upon whom they depend. Certain factors may tend to go together, for instance political allegiance to the government both under the Derg and EPRDF tended to correlate with the younger generation and a more cautious or conservative approach was more common among the elderly.

5.2. External conflicts

External threats to common natural resources began in imperial times. Conflicts between local landlords and the peasantry emerged mainly over pasture areas. Peasant communities resisted by appealing to authorities, and if this failed resorted to direct actions such as removing boundary markers or challenging enclosures by driving cattle into them. Under the Italian occupation land alienation continued as the occupiers established irrigation and agricultural schemes. The Italians also cleared extensive areas for sawmills (Bahru 1998). As one elderly man succinctly commented: "The Italians used the forest to cook pasta". In the late imperial period external agents attempted to carry out enclosures on communal grazing grounds for various projects including an airport, hospital, school, and a few state forests were established.

In the Derg period conflicts arose when state agents and international organizations proposed addressing famine by converting hillside pasture into eucalyptus plantations through food-for-work projects. As one peasant in Alansha recalled: "We only saw the grain not the consequences of the trees, which ended up evicting us from our residences". Peasants were compelled to move from areas designated for forestry into valleys that had been agricultural or pasture land. Urban expansion also reduced rural land holdings. One peasant near Kombolcha town complained: "The forest from above and the town from below are pressing hard on us" (Bahru 1998: 87).

From the mid-1980s the Derg's agricultural policies resulted in intense conflicts over natural resources. State-run producers' cooperatives monopolized access to irrigation (Dessalegn 1999) and enclosed pasture areas, and peasants were moved off hillsides into villages in the plains. Agricultural and grazing lands in valleys were taken over by village settlements established by the government, and hillside pastures were converted to forests. As one peasant put it: "We live on what we used to cultivate and left our residence to wild animals".

During the early EPRDF period externally-generated conflicts emerged between communities and market forces in the form of investors and urban interests, as well as heightened religious competition over resources. For example, a commercial sheep-breeding enterprise recently enclosed part of Gimba pasture area, generating widespread local opposition. Men who have taken jobs as guards or agents for the firm have been ostracized from the community burial

association. Enclosure of hillsides for individual forests also generated conflict, given overlapping and competing tenure claims.

On the whole, the kind of resource and its significance for peasant subsistence and survival has also been crucial in conflict management. Given the mixed economy based on plough agriculture, the most important resource for peasants has been pasture. In imperial times, irrigation was limited and largely externally-generated and controlled, and the value of forests was not greatly appreciated. Under the Derg, conflicts between forestry and pasture became particularly pronounced with hillside reforestation campaigns. Irrigation expanded and its value became more evident in famine years and as a result of expanding markets. Private tree-planting became an important source of income and a survival strategy in drought years. Cutting trees from state/community forests was limited by guarding and checkpoints. In the final year of Derg and the transition period, with the lack of restrictions, sale of wood from state/community forests became a major survival strategy. Under the EPRDF wood sales have continued and irrigation has further expanded. Communal pastures, however, remain vital and conflicts over them have become more pronounced, especially with urban expansion, concessions to private investors and individual hill-side plantation enclosures.

5.3. Responses to external conflicts

Three types of peasant responses to external threats have been common: 1) appeal to higher authorities; 2) avoidance or boycotts; and 3) direct resistance.

5.3.1. Appeals to higher authorities

This was an important and common strategy in imperial times. Representatives of local communities went to local governors, and sometimes to members of the royal family, regional governors or the Emperor himself. Under the Derg since most threats emanated from measures carried out by the state through the peasant associations, appealing was generally no longer an option. Under the EPRDF people have appealed to district and zonal authorities about enclosures of grazing areas by private investors or communities, generally with limited success.

5.3.2. Avoidance and boycotts

These strategies have been common during all three regimes, especially where state interests have been synonymous with external threats, and appeals are impossible or fail. However, the ability to resist through non-compliance was often limited by prevailing power relations. With greater state control at the local level, avoidance seems less of an option currently than it had been previously, though boycotts may sometimes succeed as in the case when religious institutions proposed building on grazing lands in Alansha.

5.3.3. Direct action

This approach against land appropriation by external agents has been a common, albeit risky strategy. Under the Imperial government attempts to enclose pasture areas for development ventures were resisted by voicing opposition at meetings and removing boundary marks. Likewise, under the Derg, afforestation projects on grazing areas were resisted by uprooting seedlings, an action that was perceived by outsiders as sabotage. During the transition, with the breakdown of state control, direct action was the main form of protest. Large amounts of

forest were destroyed, cooperatives' holdings were divided and enclosures returned to the commons. Under the EPRDF opposition to the development of a town on Gimba pasture area involved destroying houses and a church by night, despite dangers of imprisonment of opposition leaders and threats of withholding food aid from communities involved.

5.4. Resolutions processes

5.4.1. Internal conflicts

The settlement of internal conflicts is usually initiated by the person who considers himself to be the victim. He approaches leaders of local institutions, who seek to convince the offender to apologize or pay compensation, since the objective is to achieve reconciliation among people living within the same community. For a minor case the offender may be pardoned, but if the offence is repeated the guilty party may be requested to provide food and drink, generally bread and beer, and in more serious cases a sheep, to be consumed at a ceremony aimed at peace-making.

5.4.2. External conflicts

The resolution of external conflicts generally involves appeals to higher authorities by community representatives. The major actors in such appeals used to be elders and more wealthy individuals with community backing, although more recently younger literate representatives may be selected. However, leading opposition, especially where external interventions have state backing, has been dangerous and often results in imprisonment and/or fines.

5.5. Outcomes of conflict resolution processes

Outcomes of conflict management depend on types of conflict, who the stakeholders are, and the power relations between them.

5.5.1. Internal conflicts

Internal conflicts are initially handled by informal dispute settlement institutions. The threat of social ostracism retains its power. However, the repeated use of the *bele* institution in seeking out individuals involved in tree cutting seems to 'cheapen' the effectiveness of the curse. Poor peasants may have little option but to cut trees from forests to survive; as one such person put it: "If *bele* kills you tomorrow, hunger may kill you today!" However, the ability of informal institutions to manage conflict over common resources depends on their relations with formal institutions. If informal institutions are excluded from playing a role, they may work behind the scenes on minor inter-personal conflicts, they may become a vehicle for peasant opposition to land alienation, or other informal institutions may emerge, as in the Gimba case.

5.5.2. External conflicts

External conflicts with local communities have often been resolved through appeals to higher authorities, especially in imperial times. What explains whether such appeals are successful? A major factor seems to be the position and power of external agents against whom peasant groups appeal. Communities appealing to regional governors against local landlords often

were successful, as the Maybar case shows. In imperial times direct appeals to the Emperor or royal family were often said to have been successful. However, in one case the Crown Prince was said to have been involved in allowing external agents to make use of Alansha grazing land, and peasants only succeeded in avoiding this by appeal to his mother, the Empress. The success of appeals to governors may have depended on the importance and ‘connections’ of landlords against whom local communities appealed. During the Derg period there was little room for appeals but this option has again become somewhat more common.

The recent cases in Alansha, where local opposition to enclosures was successful, can be contrasted with Gimba where it failed. In Alansha seasonal enclosures were carried out by local communities; opponents included an outlying community that had been excluded from the commons under the Derg, richer peasants with more livestock to herd, older peasants who believed in the sanctity of open access, as well as residents of Kuta town whose livestock are herded on the commons. Opponents appealed against the enclosures, which they likened to the Derg cooperative enclosures, and argued that the pasture was a refuge for the poor and was government land on which tax had not been paid. In Gimba the main enclosure was by an external investor with the backing of the district authorities, with whom he had personal connections, and the government stood to benefit from taxes, and there was a more united community opposition.

Strategies of avoidance and withdrawal tend to involve costs, and became increasingly difficult with growing state interventionism. Under the imperial regime tenants were not in a position to boycott initiatives by landlords. During the Derg peasants opting not to join cooperatives retained independence but lost access to the best land. Under the EPRDF involvement in conservation work has been mandatory; participation in individual hillside enclosures is voluntary, but the limited success of this initiative may be related to lack of enthusiasm due to conflicting rights and community needs for hillside grazing (Tarekegn 2001).

The strategy of direct action can succeed as in the case of numerous projects seeking to enclose the Alansha pastureland. As one elder put it: “This area has constantly been sought after, but solutions have always been found”. However, resistance can be dangerous for leaders, especially in cases of state-supported interventions, involving imprisonment or fines. Nonetheless, repeated resistance can have some effect. In Gimba, after houses were repeatedly pulled down, the District authorities set up a committee and further building was temporarily halted. However, the committee, which included individuals who had built houses on the commons, in effect legitimized existing buildings, and the town later continued to expand. As for conflict with investors, opposition leaders were imprisoned and burial association leaders threatened with loss of food aid. It therefore seemed that opposition failed. However, a second investor, who had permission from the state officials, refrained from going ahead. Presumably, peasant opposition to the first investor affected his decision to withdraw.

6. UNDERSTANDING DISCOURSES AND CONFLICTS OVER KEY TERMS

In a situation where ‘communities’ are divided, as we have seen at least in terms of generation, gender, wealth, residence, and political allegiance and where there are even greater differences between local and external interests, it is important to understand the kinds

of discourses that emerge and the competition over the definition of key concepts relating to natural resources. Let us illustrate these through a couple of examples.

6.1. The issue of taxation: present conflicts reflected in views of the past.

In the Gimba case we can see that there has been a debate over the question whether the communal lands were subject to taxation during Imperial times. Although in fact it seems that these were defined as *tef* [uncultivated] and therefore not taxed, it is significant in the light of more recent threats to the commons, that many informants, particularly those with a stake in arguing against enclosures, insist in claiming that taxes had been paid on this land in imperial times.

6.2. Competing terms for defining the commons: *Beni* and *chichisa*

In the cases of both Alansha and Gimba there has been a competition over the definition of terms to define the common pasture area. In Alansha those against the enclosures by neighboring communities argued that the pastures were “*beni*” [literally ‘open’ in Oromiffa] and suggested that they were simultaneously common and government land. However, in Gimba those against enclosures by the investor argued that the land was not *beni*, since it was used by communities, and that it was almost “*chichisa*”. This term refers to an area near hamlets where residents graze cattle before sending them to common pastures. The local residents have exclusive rights over it and it provides a temporary resting place. By considering the commons as “like *chichisa*” people were arguing that they had rights over it, and that it was not open to all.

7. THE INFLUENCE OF THE STATE AND MARKET ON NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The research sought to consider the role of state and market forces on the institutionalization of resource management institutions. In the context of Wello the influence of the state has been much stronger than that of the market although the latter has also had an effect. Moreover in some respects the influences of these two sets of factors can be considered to have combined effects.

7.1. State influences

State influences can be considered in terms of direct and indirect effects under different regimes. Direct effects have been ways in which the state has become increasingly interventionist by setting up local institutions accountable largely to it. Indirect effects have been ways in which informal institutions have been affected and influences by formal ones.

In imperial times intervention in common natural resources by state representatives was limited and related largely to inter-personal conflicts. However, even in this period there were conflicts with local interests, in terms of using pastures for grazing of sheep, obtaining hay for the palace in Dessie, or attempts to appropriate grazing areas for other purposes such as in the Alansha case for an airport, for missions, or investors. Nonetheless peasant resistance was fairly successful notably through appeal mechanisms. State influences on informal institutions

was also rather minimal and dispute resolution was left to these institutions unless the cases became serious.

During the Derg period direct state influence resulted from both the setting up of institutions, notably the peasant associations and cooperatives, as well as due to agrarian and settlement policies (notably redistribution of land, cooperative projects, villagization and resettlement). The state sought to exclude local informal institutions, that only continued to operate under cover and regarding cases that were not considered serious.

Although informal institutions were largely excluded from natural resource management during the Derg period, a process of formalization of local informal institutions took place that may have been indirectly influenced by formal institutions, and the spread of practices that had become common in urban areas. Burial associations began to include cash contributions, keep list of members, have more functionaries including a secretary who should be literate and a treasurer capable of keeping accounts. Water judges were replaced by water committees with several members, and, as irrigation schemes expanded and the number of users increased, the need for more detailed rules, the threat of sanctions, etc developed.

Under the EPRDF some of the processes which were underway under the Derg became accentuated. Despite decentralization and abandoning the coercive socio-economic measures prevalent under the Derg, the *Kebele* Administrations took on many of the functions of the former Peasant Associations under the Derg, and the establishment of a lower structure responsible to the KAs the *mengistawi budin* or governmental teams, has meant that the government has a greater say and involvement to a more local level than ever before.

In the transitional and early EPRDF periods there was some leeway for local informal institutions to play a greater role in natural resource management and in some cases they even began to be involved to an unprecedented extent in natural resource management as the Gimba case shows. However, gradually the government reasserted itself and informal institutions were either excluded from direct involvement in natural resource management as in the case of the *qire* burial associations in Gimba, or there were attempts to co-opt them as in the case of ‘cultural committees’ formed to seek out culprits accused of wood cutting. The case material suggests that these tended to lack legitimacy. Responses from informal institutions varied from resistance such as the case of *qires* sanctioning cultivation of commons in Gimba to avoidance of bans by linkage with other informal institutions such as the *mesal* being brought in to work with the *qire*.

During the EPRDF period the process of some of the local institutions becoming more formalized, which began under the Derg, became accentuated, with burial associations and water users associations developing more sophisticated rules, differentiated leadership positions, and the use of monetary contributions and fines.

7.2. Market influences

In imperial times there was neither much encouragement nor much threat to natural resources from market forces. Market demand was only beginning to stimulate irrigation development, and the need for wood was only gradually resulting in plantations. However, there were a few attempts by local investors to obtain land in the Alansha grazing area, although these were successfully resisted by local communities through appeals to the government.

During the Derg period market forces influenced the development of irrigation, and the cutting of wood as a survival strategy made possible due to market demand resulted in a big increase in private tree planting. However, the socialist ideology, the setting up of cooperatives, state control over natural resources, bans on cutting wood and checkpoints acted as disincentives for the management of natural resources by local informal institutions and limited the effect of market forces. However, the growing population and expansion of trade, notably the Asab route, did result in an incentive for expansion of irrigated agriculture, as we saw notably in the Maybar case.

During the past decade under the EPRDF, market forces have had more of an impact. This is partly since private investors have taken an interest in obtaining concessions and land grants and have been encouraged by the government, as the Gimba case shows. Moreover, continued incidence of famine, and less controls have meant more cutting of wood, and growing population has provided an impetus for expanding irrigation. In terms of informal institutions, the threat from investors has resulted in cases of resistance led by leaders of burial associations in Gimba, and the associations have thus become more involved than before.

7.3. Combinations of state and market influences

State and market influences can sometimes be seen to combine. For instance in imperial times local governors sometimes favored investors. Similarly, current government policy is in favor of giving concessions to investors on common lands. This is partly since the government thereby gains revenue from taxation on land which otherwise was not providing an income for the government through taxation.

Under the Derg, and even more so under the EPRDF, increases in population have been a stimulus for greater demand both of land and for produce in urban areas. This had led to redistributions of some common grazing areas, irrigation land, and recently of hillsides for private tree planting.

The resettlement under the Derg exposed migrants who returned to new ideas and technologies and some returnees in Maybar expanded irrigation practice producing and marketing cash crops such as oranges.

8. IMPACTS OF DROUGHT AND FAMINE AND PERIODS OF TRANSITION ON NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

In the context of South Wello any analysis of state and market influences on local institutions would fail to make sense of the situation without looking into the effects of drought and famine and the influences of transitions on resource management

8.1. Impacts of drought and famine

The following aspects of how drought and famine have affected natural resource management need to be considered.

First, years of famine, especially under the Derg and also under the EPRDF were times when state interventionism increased. This is related largely to the development of food-for-work and the resultant environmental rehabilitation projects, which served to increase state control.

Local informal institutions were often weakened, and the heightening of competition and conflicts resulting from the drought put a strain on the informal dispute settlement mechanisms.

Second, times of drought and famine have been periods when peasants are much less able to resist state interventionism, for instance in establishing or expanding state or community forests, imposing cooperatives, carrying out land redistributions, villagization and resettlement. This was amply demonstrated in several of the case studies. Likewise, the loss of livestock made the peasants around Gimba less able to argue against enclosures by investors.

Third, times of drought and famine have been periods when stress on common resources are greatest, and may be condoned at least from the community viewpoint and even, to some extent, on the part of officials turning a blind eye. This applies especially to forest resources but also to encroachments onto communal pasture areas. Moreover, access to irrigation in times of drought can be a life saver. In 1984-5 this represented the difference between opting 'voluntarily' for resettlement because one can no longer survive or being forced to resettle despite having produce from irrigated land, as the Yegof case demonstrated. The threat of famine has been a major reason for expanding irrigation during the Derg and the same logic has resulted in further expansions more recently, as the Maybar case showed.

8.2. Impacts of periods of transition

Whereas drought and famine have been associated with state interventionism, conversely periods of transition between regimes were characterized by peasant resistance and a retreat of state interventionism, resulting from the power vacuum. In such contexts informal institutions may play a greater role in maintaining peace and solving disputes.

During the transition between the Imperial and Derg governments in 1973-4, peasants encroached on grazing areas, cut trees from landlords holdings, uprooted seedlings from state forests, and raided irrigation plantations.

Likewise in the transition between the Derg and EPRDF governments in 1990-91 poor peasants ex-soldiers and returnees encroached on forests and grazing areas, cutting wood for sale to urban areas. However, during the transition in the Gimba case the *qire* burial association played a crucial role in preventing encroachments into the commons.

9. SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

9.1. Understanding Institutions

The research suggests that the distinction between institutions and organizations is not as clear cut as is sometimes suggested, and that there is a need to focus on the emergence and transformation of institutions. The collective formulation of rules and their application by actors situated in time and space needs to be central to a better understanding of institutions.

The dichotomy between formal and informal institutions needs to be reviewed since informal institutions have become more formalized and formal ones have informal procedures, and given interrelations between the two types. Although the distinction is maintained in the report, a more valid difference may be between 'state-related' versus 'community-centered'

institutions. The research uses the term local rather than indigenous given the problems with the term 'indigenous' and since the term local enables a framework that considers both formal and informal institutions.

The research suggests the need to consider institutions as embedded both within local social and cultural values and practices, and within wider processes of relations between the local and the exogenous forces. Though viewing institutions as social capital is useful, problems with the notion of community suggest that issues of representation and legitimacy need to be addressed alongside social capital.

9.2. Comparing formal and informal institutions

The main local level formal institutions were the tax collectors during the imperial regime, the Peasant Association during the Derg, replaced by the Kebele Administration under the EPRDF, which added a further lower level structure of Governmental teams. Informal institutions include burial associations, groups of elders and religious leaders, often working in collaboration.

The role of informal institutions in natural resource management has tended to be limited by that of formal institutions, and the latter should be seen as primarily dispute resolution institutions.

The main difference between the two types is that the former have the backing of state power to enforce their decisions, are mainly concerned with externally generated agendas, and may sometimes lack local legitimacy. Informal institutions, on the other hand, have limited ability to impose their views, rely on threats of ostracism and cursing to achieve reconciliation, are often grounded in local knowledge and may be considered more legitimate by some categories of local 'communities'.

9.3. Relations between formal and informal institutions

Relations between formal and informal institutions have varied over time and by resource. At times of strong state control and at times of famine the scope for informal institutions to be involved in partnership with formal ones has been limited, whereas in periods of transition between regimes, informal institutions have played a greater role.

In imperial times informal institutions had a limited role in communal pasture management, but hardly any in forest or irrigation management. During the Derg the role of informal institutions was largely curtailed and resource issues were managed by PAs; however, burial associations in particular became more formalised. During the transition and early EPRDF period local institutions notably burial associations played a key role in protecting communal grazing areas, and the new government sought to involve them in identifying individuals who cut trees from state forests. However, as the EPRDF institutionalised its new administrative structure, informal institutions were once again largely marginalized, the legitimacy of elected religious leaders and 'cultural' committees set up by the *Kebele* Administrations tended to be questioned, and burial associations, which became more formalised sometimes engaged in resistance condoned cultivating the commons, or opposing urban expansion.

9.4. Internal and external conflicts over natural resources

Any attempt to understand local natural resource management needs to be sensitive to variations within the 'communities' in terms of generation, gender, wealth, residence and political allegiance, and how these factors cross cut, and render 'community' involvement in natural resource management problematic. Political changes and the consequent land redistributions and settlement policies have altered relations between generations, wealth groups, and claims to resources based on residence, so that legitimacies have become ambiguous and negotiable and entitlements often depend on allegiances to those in power.

Conflicts generated from external state and market interests in local natural resources have posed pervasive and increasing threats to local natural resource management. In imperial times local landlords and some investors seeking to cultivate commons were the main threat. During the Derg period, the land redistributions, state-organised cooperatives, the reforestation programmes, and the villagization and resettlement schemes, altered tenure arrangements, drastically affected entitlements, and introduced tenure insecurity. In particular the cooperatives were given privileged access to common pasture, irrigation and forest resources. During the EPRDF period interests of private investors notably in pasture land, and the expansion of towns and urban interests had detrimental effects on communal grazing areas, and forests. Redistributions of 'communal' hillsides for individual use seems to have been a hurried 'campaign' exercise that does not seem to have brought solutions either to landlessness or degradation. It is noteworthy that often certain individuals, categories, or groups from within communities may benefit from, and become allied with, external interests.

In conflict resolution processes informal institutions tend to be involved in less serious cases, and the more serious cases become the more likely the issues are to be taken to formal institutions. Appeals to higher authorities were most effective in imperial times, whereas boycotts were more common under the Derg. Direct resistance can have costs and negative repercussions for leaders of institutions involved. The ability of informal institutions to become involved in conflict resolution seems to be linked to their relations with formal institutions.

9.5. Influences of the state and market on resource management

Over successive regimes, state influence has become ever more pervasive to lower levels. The current institutionalization of state structures to the level of less than 50 households, could be construed as detrimental to local level participation in informal forms of organization and partnerships between informal and formal institutions.

Market forces have been playing an increasing role in natural resource management and the institutionalization of local level institutions managing resources. Markets and urban demand have stimulated the development of irrigation, deforestation, and private investment in pasture areas.

Over the past decade the development of irrigation has gone alongside greater levels of conflict between increasing numbers of users and the need for local institutions to mediate. Reduction of forest guarding, removal of controls on wood and charcoal sales, urban expansion and the development of saw-mills, furniture enterprises, and lack of community interest and commitment to preserve forests has fuelled deforestation.

Private investment in livestock enterprises had represented a threat to local use of communal pasture areas, which are particularly important for dry season and drought year grazing.

9.6. Impacts of drought and famine and periods of transition on natural resource management

Periods of drought and famine tend to coincide with greater state interventionism, often increasing conflicts and weakening local institutions and peasant resistance to external impositions. These periods also coincide with stress on forest and pasture resources. Irrigation can be a lifesaver at such times but conflict between users may be exacerbated.

At times of transition between regimes, peasant resistance to state imposed projects increases and imposed state and community forests from which local communities did not benefit are destroyed. However, the potential can increase for local informal institutions to manage resources they value, notably communal grazing areas.

10. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1. Relations between formal and informal institutions

Successive governments have sought to exclude or co-opt local informal institutions and persons in power, notably burial associations, elders, and religious leaders rather than involve them in partnerships. If a more participatory model of common natural resource management is to be sought, ways of involving informal institutions in collaboration with formal institutions should be promoted.

10.2. Internal and external conflicts over natural resources

Both formal and informal institutions may only represent certain interest groups. In appreciating that communities are divided and that there are disadvantaged and minority groups, it is important to seek a balance between entitling the disadvantaged and maintaining tenure security.

Land redistributions have caused considerable tenure insecurity and the moratorium in Amhara Region is therefore judicious. Lessons from the problems with allocation of communal land to private use need to be drawn to consider appropriate forms of tenure for communal areas. The option of a middle ground between open access and individual tenure with group rights may be worth considered.

One of the key areas of concern identified by this study, that should be taken seriously, is the perceived danger to communal grazing lands from private investors. The rights of local people to consultation, compensation and involvement in investment ventures should be given more weight in regional decision-making. Likewise, the problems of urban expansion into grazing areas deserve consideration. Mechanisms and channels of appeal should be more institutionalised.

10.3. Influences of the state and market on resource management

There is a need for more cooperation and collaboration rather than competition and confrontation between formal and informal institutions. The current trend of relying largely on formal structures and excluding informal institutions risks alienating the latter and may limit opportunities for partnership.

There is a danger of seeing irrigation as a panacea and seeking to expand it too rapidly, leading to increasing conflicts between users, notably between up-stream and down-stream users. Mechanisms for water allocation within settlements on a catchment basis need to be developed in which formal and informal institutions cooperate to devise rules and sanctions.

The lessons from experiments in participatory and joint forest management in other parts of the country need to be taken on board (Irwin 2001). As experiences elsewhere show, at the heart of the matter is individual, group and community benefit - and revenue-sharing to provide incentives for forest management. This requires appropriate policy formulation and detailed provisions.

In allocating concessions to private investors in agriculture, and especially livestock development, the rights and food-security needs of local communities need to be given due consideration and priority. The current policy in this respect should be reconsidered so that communal grazing areas are not seen as unproductive wasted resources, but rather as vital sources of grazing, notably in times of food insecurity.

10.4. Impacts of drought and famine and periods of transition on natural resource management

There is a need to protect local institutions from being affected negatively by periods of famine crisis. Formal institutions should seek to involve informal institutions in managing measures sought to enhance food security and provide assistance, rather than bypassing them.

The lessons from periods of transition show that local informal institutions can play a positive role in protecting resources valued by communities if they are given a chance. This history of success is a strong argument in favour of greater cooperation and collaboration between formal and informal institutions. Policymakers must change from a tendency to exclude informal institutions from resource management to seeking ways of involving them in partnerships.

11. TIMELINE OF EVENTS, CONSEQUENCES AND OUTCOMES

Time	Event/conflict	Consequence	Outcome
Imperial			
1830-40s	Talak Birru Lubo responsible for declaring certain areas communal grazing areas	Pasture areas become deforested	Common management with open access introduced
1840s	Queen Werqit makes Mount Yegof her stronghold	Peasants forbidden to graze animals	Fines allegedly imposed
1890s	Great Famine	Those with irrigated land survived better (Gerado)	Stimulus for irrigation development

1910s	King Michael of Wello uses hay from Gerado grazing area	Early external interest in grazing areas	Potential conflict with local users?
1920s	Empress Zewditu's agent Ras Habtemariam keeps cows (Gerado)	Reduction of communal grazing area	Agents benefit
1920s	sheep breeding centre set up by state for palace (Gimba)	No current memories	
1936-41 Italian occupation	Hillsides used for grazing turned into farmland. Establishment of sawmills, irrigation schemes and farming of grazing areas	Deforestation	Conflict with local uses
Imperial			
1940s	Sudanese people who came with the British liberation forces settled at Harbu and introduced charcoal burning	Deforestation	
1953	Attempt to site airport in Alansha	Resisted by pulling up markers	Resistance successful
1954	Attempt by governor to suggest cultivation Gimba	Resistance appeal to Emperor	Appeal successful
1955	Animal disease. A foreigner plants a animal trough in Alansha to bathe animals	Appeal to crown prince	Peasants convinced that the foreigner did not have further motives
1957	Mekaneyesus Evangelical Mission seeks to set up church on commons (Alansha)	Resistance	Succeeded. Church situated on land bought by mission for school
	Foreigners seek to build hospital in Alansha	Protest to crown prince	Hospital sited in neighboring boru meda
1960s?	Appeal to Emperor Haile Sellassie on a visit to Wello against rich town dwellers from Dessie	Opposition to cultivating common land in Gerado	Appeal successful
1960s	Appeal to Emperor against lord taking pasture land from irrigation (Yegof)	Appeal partially successful	Part of commons retained
1960s	Appeal to Empress Menen against rich investors setting up farm in Alansha	The appeal was taken to Addis	Appeal successful
1960s	Appeal to Empress Menen against General Merid who developed irrigation and prevented water	Representatives took symbols of cattle rearing to the Empress	The appeal was successful.
1960s	Appeal to governor of Wello against Kegnasmach Kebede Abate farming Gossie Meda (Maybar)	Appeal	Appeal successful
1965	Proclamation sate forests under MOA		
1973	Yegof state forest and plantations		
Transition 1973-4	Loss of central authority, fighting, banditry	Farming encroachment into pasture areas	Areas end up farmed
1974	Dispute over delimitation of Yegof state forest boundary.	Uprooting seedlings, destroying roads and chasing away laborers	Detentions of leaders.
Derg 1974-1991			
1974?	Famine		
1975	Threat of farmers from Yegof to go to Addis to appeal to emperor against		Threat did not materialize

	delimitation of state forest		
1975	Land reform proclamation redistribution of land from landlords to tenants	Pasture land also distributed but communal grazing areas excluded	Communal grazing lands preserved
1979	Beginning of 'community' forests	Communal grazing lands affected	Reduction of grazing areas
1983	Cooperatives enclose part of commons for sheep breeding	Resistance destruction of buildings by peasants Gimba	Conflict within communities
1984-5	Famine	Resettlement from hillsides	Land reforested
1989	Evangelical Church builds NGO center on commons First house (Gimba)	Resistance pulling down houses at night	Houses rebuilt
Transition 1990-91	Cooperative's sheep looted (Gimba)	Cooperatives' land redistributed	grazing returned to commons
EPRDF			
1991-	Increase in cultivation of commons	Increase in attempts to encroach on commons	Land size smaller
1992	Land redistribution not commons	Conflicts over entitlements	Commons preserved
1992-4	Burial association threatens individual encroaching with ostracism	Some individuals retract	Burial association's role in natural resource management increases
1994	Qire banned from involvement in land matters Growth of towns on commons	Resistance destruction of houses by night rebuilt church destroyed	Burial association's role in natural resource management decreases
1995-	increase in encroachment with tacit approval of qire	Conflict between <i>qire</i> and KA	Grazing areas affected
2000	At a meeting peasants refuse the establishment of a mosque and a evangelical church and even the extension of a school on common grazing area (Alansha)	Resistance reported	Resistance successful
2000	The investor alahmoudi considers setting up a dairy farm in Alansha	Peasants protest	Proposal abandoned
2000	Investor granted land on commons	Resistance and appeal, ostracize representative	Resistance failed
2001	Second investor unsuccessful	Popular protest at meeting	Resistance successful

ANNEX I: SOUTH WELLO CASE STUDIES—GIMBA PLAIN⁶

Gimba is a highland plain (*meda*) in Legambo *Wereda* of South Wello Zone, some 80 kms from the town of Dessie. This case study focuses on the use of the plain for communal pasture, the issue of encroachments by local peasant farmers, by state projects and private investors, and by the development of a town in the middle of the pasture area. The case study considers the issues temporally under three regimes: imperial, Derg, and EPRDF, and focuses on the changing role of informal and formal institutions in the management of pasture resources, and ways in which views and discourses differ according to different societal categories.

1. Imperial times

1.1. Mythological transformations

During the imperial times, Gimba was said to have been a communal grazing area, but there is a myth suggesting that this was different in ancient times. In this myth, the valley was described to have once been a dense forest area. According to one elder who was a *libas dagna* (head leader of *qire*) during Derg:

Our fathers told us that in ancient times, the *meda*, [the plain] was a *wurma* [wilderness] in which there were different species of trees such as *weyra* [olives], *tid* [pines] and *kosso* [*hagenia*]. As was forecasted by *Sheikh Jibril*, every hundred years, the *kolla* [lowland] would change to *dega* [highland] and *vice versa*. Accordingly, the *kolla* changed to *dega* and hence the *wurma* turned into a *meda* and *kebt massemaria* [a pasture area].

According to Adem, an informant who was engaged in trading sheep during the imperial times:

Our predecessors recall that the *meda* [plain] was *wurma* [dense forest]. Once upon a time, a certain woman along with her child went to the *wurma* to collect cotton, and lost her child there. Then, in the name of Allah, she cursed the *wurma* to vanish. Consequently, it changed to a grazing plain.

Bekele, an informant who was a landlord during the Imperial times also recalled:

This *meda* was previously said to have been *nidad wurma* [hot dry wilderness]. Later, however, due to the increasing number of people in the surroundings, it became empty and turned into a grazing land.

There are, therefore, different versions of the “wilderness”, or “dense-forest” myth with regard to its transformation to a plain: a cycle forecast by prophecy; the result of a grieving mother’s curse; or the result of population pressure.

⁶ This case study is based on two reports submitted by MA graduate Mengistu Dessalegn.

1.2 Access and exploitation

Access to pasture resources was generally said to have been open for people living in the surrounding areas. Sheep were the main category of livestock driven to Gimba *Meda*. Some individuals were said to have possessed up to one thousand sheep. According to some informants, this was simply a matter of chance. For instance, Yeshi, a female household head and a sharecropper, stated:

Allah doesn't create people with equal status. Some are created poor while others become rich. *Those who had large herds of sheep were born to become rich; it was a matter of chance.*

On the other hand, Yimam (who is said to have owned large herds of sheep) claimed that it was a matter of hard work. Share-breeding was the main way in which relations between the rich owners and the poor providing their labor was structured. The offspring were divided equally.

1.2.1. The Issue of Taxation

Some informants described the issue of taxation during the Imperial times. For instance, Hassen, a former Peasant Association [PA] official said:

During the times of Haile Selassie, *there was a tax labelled 'ye meda gibir' and we were paying six birr per year.* On the other hand, we were paying fifty *birr* per year for the farmland we possessed individually. When the Derg came, the '*meda gibir*' was abandoned and we were paying tax only on our individual possessions.

Similarly, Mekonnen, who is said to have owned large herds of sheep explained this in terms of *dingay* [stone] *birr* [a reference to Maria Theresa thalers] saying:

During Haile Selassie's time, we were paying one *dingay birr* for the *meda* while paying twenty *dingay birr* for the land we cultivated. It was only after Derg that we stopped paying for the *meda*. *But, before Derg, it was usually suggested that we had to pay tax on the meda otherwise it could be taken over. We were also paying tax fearing that our 'chichisa' [grazing area] would be taken over.* The *chiqa* [tax collector] was collecting the money to give to the *mislene* [government representative].

Apart from the tax levied on individual possessions, these informants claim that there was a fixed tax individuals were required to pay for 'using' the communal grazing area. Any individual, regardless of wealth, who was paying tax on the land he cultivated, was also required to pay tax on the commons. Bekele, an owner of large herds of sheep recalled a case of conflict between the local people and government officials wanting to place the communal area under cultivation:

In 1954, the *wereda* governor and other officials under him suggested that the *meda* was *tef* [uncultivated] and that it should be placed under cultivation by distributing it to tenants or otherwise. *However, the people shouted saying that it was our 'chichisa' and a land on which we were paying tax. Yet, the wereda governor said that it was 'tef' and should be cultivated.* Then, the people assigned two individuals to appeal to the Emperor. Finally, the Emperor ordered that the right of the people should be respected and it remained uncultivated.

The local people were arguing against the distribution of the commons claiming that they were paying tax on it. In fact, Bekele later stated that there was no fixed and separate tax levied on the communal area but the land tax was inclusive of the *meda*. Local officials, such as Asfaw, a *Chiqashum* [tax-collector] argued that there was no taxation on the commons:

Gimba meda was free from any tax. It was simply a communal free area where any one had the right to drive his livestock. It was ‘tef’ [uncultivated] and no one was required to pay tax because it was not individually owned and cultivated. Besides, tax was not paid on any communal land; Under whose name could it be taxed?

Several other different categories of informants with whom interviews were held also agreed that individuals were not required to pay any tax levied on any part of the communal area. The case of taxation may, therefore, have something to do with some sort of ideologies and discourses about the pasture area in terms of recent conflicts over this resource, which will be discussed later. It should be noted that those informants who mentioned taxation were strongly against any enclosure and led protests against such attempts at different times.

1.2.2. Enclosures

As far as can be ascertained unlike in some other areas seasonal enclosures were never practiced in Gimba and the pasture area was open throughout the year. Generally, people in the surrounding area were said to have had ‘equal’ access. However, there used to be a state sheep-breeding project prior to the Italian occupation for which part of the communal area was enclosed. This was located around Jarso-Segno Gebeya and was referred to as Jarso *Yebeq beret*. The sheep were said to have been collected from the local people depending on the size of the herds kept. The center was said to have been a source of sheep for the palace in Dessie, and ceased to exist during the Italian occupation. Although memories about the specifics have faded, to date, Gimba *meda* is still commonly referred to as *yebeq beret* [sheep manger].

1.3. Involvement of local institutions in managing pasture resources

There seems to be little evidence of encroachment into the pasture area in imperial times, due to absence of land shortage and population pressure rather than any institutional interventions. According to Bekele, who had large herds of sheep:

It is recently that people started to cultivate the *meda*. During the times of Haile Selassie, it was mainly used to graze animals, particularly sheep. *People had no shortage of land; therefore, no one was attempting to cultivate to cultivate the ‘meda’.*

Likewise, a female household head and sharecropper said, “Unlike today, *sew albereketem neber* [people were not plentiful], therefore, no one was opting to cultivate the *meda*”. Despite such views others such as a Yimam, a former landlord, asserted that there were some attempts by individuals to cultivate areas close to their farmlands.

1.3.1. Local institutions: the ‘qire’ versus the ‘chiqa’

The *chiqa* was the lowest level government official responsible for carrying out overall administrative tasks including tax collection. The main local informal institution is the *qire*

[burial association]. Although it was not a formalized organization, it could intervene in dispute settlement by involving *yezemed dagna* [kin arbitrators], i.e. elders related to the protagonists. There are differing viewpoints regarding the *qire*'s role in managing the communal grazing area. Yimam a former landlord stated:

When certain individuals attempted to cultivate the *meda* close to their farmlands, the *chiqa* [tax collector] might control and punish them. *The qire never had any role in protecting the cultivation of the meda. The qire was mainly a meqebaberia [a burial association].*

On the other hand, Atalay a *qire* leader during the time asserted:

Two individuals might quarrel while attempting to cultivate the *meda*. If one beat the other, he might report the case to the *qire* accusing the other of attempting to cultivate the *tef* [uncultivated] land. Then, *yezemed dagna* [kin judges] would punish the guilty one and settle the case. As a form of punishment, such individuals were commonly required to pay a sheep.

Asfaw was a *chiqa* during the Imperial time who also suggested that disputes could arise while attempting to cultivate the commons and that the *qire* might arbitrate cases. However, he questioned the power of the *qire* to punish:

Conflicts might arise between two individuals while cultivating the *meda*. This mostly happened when one individual cultivated the 'meda' vertically and another [his neighbor] happened to do the same but horizontally. In the meantime they might fight and one could report the case to *qire*. The *Qire* might also settle the case but didn't have the power to punish. Rather, the case would be passed over to us in case the accused refused the *qire*'s arbitration since we had the power to punish.

On the other hand, the then *qire* leader described before stated:

The *qire* was able to punish individuals while treating conflict cases. Sometimes, however, the *chiqa* might argue against the punishment made by the *qire* claiming that it was interfering in matters he should preside over. Under such circumstances, the *chiqa* would be given some money to stop complaining.

From the above accounts, it seems that the *chiqa* had more power than the *qire*. Yet, as far as his role in relation to managing the pasture area was concerned, his intervention, like that of the *qire*, seemed to have been induced by conflicts between individuals.

2. Gimba during the Derg

2.1. The transition between the imperial and Derg regimes

During the transition parts of the communal grazing area were placed under cultivation by individuals. Arega, a *qire* leader during imperial times and a PA official during Derg noted:

Just after the Derg took over power, parts of the *meda* were cultivated by individuals. Before, there had, of course, been certain attempts. At this time, however, a large number of individuals went down to cultivate the *meda*. There

was also fighting between *shiftas* [outlaws] and the Derg soldiers. There was no law and order.

Individuals were taking advantage of the unrest. This land grabbing had consequences when the nationalization took place soon after.

2.2. Land nationalization and redistribution

The communal grazing area was said to have been kept out of the distribution during the land redistribution following the land redistribution nationalization in 1975. However, parts of the commons were affected since it also took effect on areas cultivated prior to and during the transition.

Adem, who was engaged in trading sheep during the Imperial regime and now works as a guard for an NGO said:

Though it was small in scale, some individuals sought to cultivate the *meda* at different times during the Haile Selassie period. During the land distribution, these areas were included but the *meda* in general was not distributed.

Thus, although the land nationalization didn't affect the communal area directly, it had an indirect impact due to previous encroachments that were included in the redistribution.

2.3. State sponsored enclosures: the sheep breeding project

A sheep breeding project was established on part of the commons found in *Kebele* 025. The project was established in 1983 by enclosing 176 hectare from the communal grazing area. The project was under one Service Cooperative that was organized under the then *Kebele* 05 (which is now split into three Pas). Members of the association were said to have contributed 3-5 *birr*, and additional funds were provided by the service cooperative. The total starting capital was said to have been about 2,000 *birr* with which sheep were bought from Gugufu and Debre Berhan to start the project.

2.3.1. Resistance to the enclosure

The sheep breeding project met resistance particularly while the enclosure was taking place. It was said that the local people were against the enclosure on the grounds since it would take over parts of the communal area. An informant who was said to have been engaged in trading sheep recalled:

From the beginning, the *kebele* officials themselves clearly knew that the *meda* was where we commonly graze our livestock. Yet, those who planned this project simply went on taking the *meda* to breed sheep separately. The people appealed to higher officials but nothing was achieved.

The resistance was admitted by Muhe, the then leader of the service cooperative who said:

The people complained while we were starting to set up the center. They were arguing that this should never be done in the area where they drove their livestock. They pulled down what was being constructed for this purpose. Later we erected it again with a guard to prevent destruction.

Such accounts may suggest general resistance, but do give a sense of how widespread it was and how it was organized. Yimer, who now owns a mill house and houses to rent in the area had the following to say:

During the Derg regime, part of the *meda* around *kebele* 025 was taken for the state sheep breeding center. When this started, the people in the surroundings opposed it--saying that it would occupy the area where they drove their livestock. *This was led by some individuals who had a lot of sheep like Bekele.* However, this became a futile attempt since their appeals to justice resulted in nothing.

The project was, thus strongly opposed, particularly by those people living close to the enclosure, who used to graze their livestock in the vicinity and led by certain key figures (the 'rich'). Since the local people contributed in cash for the sheep breeding center, it might be assumed that from the beginning they knew about the enclosure. However, it appears that the local people were simply urged to make the contribution for another purpose. As the then chairman of the service cooperative put it:

When they were urged to make cash contributions, the people didn't know that the collection was required for the purpose of establishing the sheep breeding center. They were simply told that the money would be required to buy certain items for the service cooperative association.

According to Bekele, one of the 'rich' ringleaders, the way the project was disclosed was another form of deceit:

We were against the sheep breeding center and reported the case to higher authorities. We were also planning to make a further appeal. In the meantime, they told us that the sheep breeding would belong to us since the money we contributed would serve this purpose. Also, they told us that sheep would be brought from America and be given to us for free after breeding. With this promise, the *meda* was enclosed and sheep were bought. Then, the sheep started breeding and we were also hoping that we would benefit. However, this never happened. They fooled us. In fact, it was because of our cash contributions that we believed them. Anyhow, we were fooled. Otherwise, we could have appealed up to Mengistu like we appealed to Haile Selassie before.

2.3.2. Collapse of the project

The project collapsed at the time of the transition between the Derg and EPRDF. One year before the EPRDF fully assumed power, its forces had already controlled this area. As far as the assets, particularly sheep are concerned, one informant, who established a shop in the area just two years before the time under discussion, claimed that the sheep were looted by individuals who took advantage of the disorder which existed. On the other hand, mentioning that there had already been 950 sheep at the time, another informant who was a veterinarian in the project reported that EPRDF soldiers confiscated the sheep. Though the opinions differ with regard to who actually did it, both indicated that the project was dispossessed. The chairman of the service cooperative stated:

When the EPRDF controlled our area, we took away the sheep from the center and shifted them to Chiro primary school where they were temporarily kept. However, the EPRDF came to the school and took over the sheep. Then, they

drove some of them to Akesta while they sold others here in Chiro-Kidame Gebeya. When we insisted that the sheep belonged to us, they told us to get organized and ask them. Later, we appealed to the officials in Dessie. Yet, they simply responded that it was difficult to clearly identify who could be responsible.

One of those who led the protest against the enclosure from the start had the following to add:

When EPRDF came, they took over the sheep and sold them at prices they specified. A single sheep was sold for 40-60 *birr*. They also urged us to buy saying that the money in any case would belong to us. We did so. They told us that a total sum of 60,000 *birr* was collected from the sale and this would be soon distributed for us. However, we achieved nothing.

As far as the cooperative's landholdings were concerned, the 176 hectare enclosed for this purpose were reincluded in the communal grazing area and became open for access to pasture as used to be the case before the enclosure under Derg.

2.4. Local institutions in resource management: *Kebele* versus *Qire*

The Derg set up *Kebele* (Peasants' Associations) as the local organization that soon came to represent state interests. The terms KA (Kebele Administrations) and PA (Peasant Associations) can be confusing as both terms refer to community associations. The PA term refers to associations during the socialist Derg period and the KA term refers to associations during the current period since the change of government in 1991. The *qire* was generally said to have hardly had any role in resource management under the Derg. Relations between the local institution and state structures were said to have been characterized by coercion. For instance, Teshome a share-breeder recalled:

After the coming of Derg, the *qire* had nothing to do with land issues. *The Law became the judge of land. The Qire could not intervene.*

The 'Law' refers to the *kebele* and the *Wereda* state structures. Shibeshi, who is known for keeping large herds of sheep said:

After the Derg took power the officials suggested that the *qire* was only a burial association. They insisted that the leaders could not judge any dispute-- particularly that of land. They told us to be judged only by them.

Yimer, a representative in the current KA [*Kebele* Administration]⁷ went further in claiming that Derg was against culture:

The *qire* could not become involved in issues related to the *meda*. It could not judge issues related to land in general. During Derg, people were not judged through cultural ways. During that time, if you insisted on culture, you could be punished.

Atalay a former PA official suggested that the *qire* had no mandate for this purpose.

⁷ The Peasant Associations (PAs) set up by the Derg to mediate between state and community relations were disbanded when the EPRDF took over and were replaced by Kebele Administrations (KAs) with similar functions.

During Derg, *qire* leaders could not intervene in disputes related to land. *This was not their mandate.* Even, in other conflict cases too, any individual had the right to report his case to the PA; he could not be forced by the *qire* to report his case to them. *Disputes of various natures were generally treated under the Law and the PA had this mandate.*

Overall, it appears that the *qire* was excluded from intervening in resource management. This was related to its declining role in dispute resolutions at large, resulting from the increasing power of state structures that assumed overall administrative roles including in natural resources management.

With regard to PA's role in resource management, different categories of informants held the view that during Derg, the PA assumed the responsibility to protect the cultivation of the communal area. Yet, there was the view that some cultivation of the communal grazing area occurred. From this, it may be argued that individuals might go on cultivating the commons if unnoticed, thereby leading to the assumption that PA's controlling mechanism had been lose.

2.5. Urbanization and the *Qire's* role in opposition

Events toward the last phase of the Derg regime and the process of urbanization, which further continued in the present regime, precipitated the involvement of the *qire* in a manner seemingly not experienced before. In 1984, the process was set in motion by one individual member of the area. This man was the first to build a house in the communal area. People got organized under the *qire* and marched to the area and destroyed the house in a group. The area under dispute was in the vicinity of *Kebele* 026 and the people who stood against the attempt were also from this *kebele*, particularly from Kermame village.

It may be argued that in times of pressure on a given part of the commons, the people in the vicinity tend to develop a sense of 'ownership' and become more concerned than others; though, in principle, access to pasture resource usage has never been restricted in terms of proximity. The special concern developed under such circumstances may be due to the tendency that individuals often prefer to use the grazing area in the vicinity.

3. Conditions under the EPRDF

3.1. Trends of 'urbanization'

The trend of building houses at the point in the communal grazing areas where two valleys meet, and close to the hills, which gave their name to the town Tullu Awliya, began at the end of the Derg period, and grew during the transition and early EPRDF periods, in part because of speculation that the area would be selected as a *wereda* capital. A former PA official recalled:

Following the coming of EPRDF, it was rumored that Tulu Awliya would become a *wereda* capital. This motivated individuals to occupy areas as early as possible and later claim permission. It was with this intention that the houses were built illegally. We were not able to stop them because we had already lost our positions.

Bekele, who owned large herds and led the protest against sheep breeding project said:

It was first started by Mekane Yesus (an NGO). We shouted saying that it is our place for driving livestock and should not be given. However, no one listened to the people. Mekane Yesus led the way and others followed suit and scrambled to destroy the *meda*.

The head of the NGO (Washera project), which was established on part of the communal area just two years before the transition, had a positive view of their role:

Our project was a big factor to the expansion of the town. When the project was under construction, there were many people working in the construction. These workers were looking for something to eat and drink and certain other facilities as well. Those individuals who had already built houses in the area provided such facilities. As a result, they were able to generate income. This encouraged others to do so and take part in the business. Expecting that there might emerge other possibilities, some others also opted to build houses and take advantage of the situation.

Another informant who owned a shop and a small 'hotel' established on the commons also said:

In 1989-1990, the first individual who built a house in the area and two other individuals who followed him rented their houses to individuals who came from another area. These individuals also started to serve food and tea. Learning from this experience, several others from the locality also tended to build houses on the *meda* to rent. Individuals also came from far places like Sayint as well as near places like Akesta to rent houses from the local people.

Generally, some sort of 'market' values seem to have capitalized on the process of urbanization thereby leading to individualize parts of the commons. A number of houses particularly those located along side the main road were said to have been erected in the two or three years after the transition. These houses were built randomly without securing 'formal' permission from any responsible authority. The formal process enabling one to take land and build a house was said to have started two years after the Zone decided to include most parts of Tulu Awliya into Legambo *Wereda* in 1996.

3.2. Resistance: destroying houses

The post-Derg growth of Tulu Awliya town faced resistance. From the very start, the local people protested against the construction of houses by destroying houses built on the communal part. Mekonnen, who is described as having kept large herds of sheep and was one among the rich stated:

Everybody knew that the area was where we were commonly driving our livestock. *However, thinking that they would get benefit by building houses, those selfish individuals started building house on the meda.* We were also attempting to protect against the construction of houses. We were coming under the *qire* and were destroying houses. In this way, we destroyed houses several times and tried to save what our fathers and forefathers kept for us. however, we lost any support and it was taken over.

On the other hand, Kassaye, a share-cropper, who may represent views of the poor, said:

In this area, building a house was started by one individual of 026. At that time, the people of his area destroyed the house through their *qire*. Then after, many houses were built and destroyed by *qire*. *The rich destroyed these houses because they wanted it for breeding sheep.*

Though the motives differ the destruction was mentioned by both sides. The recurring confrontations later led to the involvement of the *Wereda*, as Kassaye a PA leader recalled:

During the time, individuals were building houses on the *meda* without any permission. While certain individuals who wanted to take advantage of the roadside were building houses others mainly from 026 were destroying them through the *qire*. Constructing and deconstructing became common things. Such conditions continued up to some two or three years after the EPRDF came. Later, however, the *wereda* organized a committee and banned the construction of houses.

However, there seem to be different views held with regard to the role played by the Committee. According to one Hassen a former PA official who protested against the establishment of houses:

Initially, when the committee was set up, we were told that those houses built on the *meda* would be removed. Yet, the committee didn't attempt anything towards this end. They still remained. *After all, individuals who happened to build houses were also represented in the committee.*

Ahmed, the first person who built a house on the commons and was a members of the Committee stated:

When the Committee was set up, the people who often protested and destroyed houses were told that any house built in the *meda* would be removed. Nevertheless, *this was said simply to make them happy and keep them quiet.* Otherwise, the intention was to ban any further attempts.

The destruction of houses organized through the *qire* was described by an informant who was born and raised at *kebele* 026 and now a teacher in the area:

Following the coming of EPRDF, individuals were rushing to build houses on the *meda* taking control of a certain part along side the main road. Organizing their *qire*, people of 026 were also destroying such houses. Especially one day (in 1992) I remember that people of *kermame* organized their *qire* and destroyed houses. That day, these people were engaged in a *debo* [agricultural work party]. After the *debo*, they started drinking *tella* [local beer] and when night was approaching, they marched to the area and destroyed several houses.

3.3. Impacts of the town

Views about the growth of the town were not uniform. Let us begin with Shibeshi, one of those who are described as having owned large herds of sheep and who may represent views of the 'rich':

This area was meant for grazing animals. It was kept by our fathers and forefathers mainly for this purpose. Now, the town has already covered it so we

are confused where to drive our livestock. In fact, it was first started by our own relative who built a house in the area and led others towards this end. From time to time, we were destroying such houses to protect our *meda*. However, we were finally told that the government decided that the area should be a town. *So, the land was sold and people who came from several places surrounded it at once.*

The town was this portrayed as taking over an area that had been kept for grazing by the forefathers, and the blame was put on the pioneers who built the houses and the government for allegedly selling the land.

On the other hand, Ahmed who used to have a shop in another area but the same *kebele* and also the first one to build a house on the communal area said:

In other areas, I saw the expansion of schools, clinics and other developments. I believe in the expansion of the town thinking that it would bring civilization. My intention as well as those who just followed after me in building houses was thus to show development. Yet, those who were destroying houses accused me alleging that I opened the way for the destruction of the *meda*.

The pioneers who built houses saw themselves as having accomplished something leading to 'development'. Therefore, what happened to the grazing area was not seen negatively. Rather, it appears that it was assumed to be something desirable and inevitable.

There are still other informants who have different views. Let's consider they views of Yeshi, a female household head, who is a sharecropper:

What is now occupied by houses was an empty *meda* before. Houses appeared recently in the area. Many times, *kebertewochu* [rich persons] were destroying such houses. They don't want any thing to be constructed on the *meda* because they want to breed sheep and sell them. They sell a single big sheep for three hundred birr. The poor like us, however, want the growth of the town because we can somehow work in the town and produce something for our survival. We don't have sheep like the rich to send to the *meda* and get money. People like me even gave their own lands to the rich and declined to be sharecroppers.

The kind of dichotomy between the rich and the poor is also reflected in what Amakelech a female returnee stated:

I left for Assosa in 1980 to join my father who had already resettled there a year earlier. *When I left, this area was empty.* When I came back [seven years ago], I was surprised seeing that houses built in what used to be an empty place. *This helped me very much in that now I am working in a mill house and living in a small house that my uncle gave me for the time being.* In this way, I am struggling to survive. Otherwise, survival could have been more difficult because for one thing the land I was given from *ye mote keda* [land of a deceased person] is very small. For another thing, I am too poor to make use of this land by myself. I gave this land to a rich person and I am a sharecropper; yet, what I get from him is not dependable. *For me, the town helps me. Of course, the rich may become against the town. They prefer it to be free because they want to breed as many sheep as possible in it.*

Though the two informants whose cases have been just discussed represent different categories of people, the dichotomy between the positions of the rich and the poor is reflected in both descriptions. The growth of the town is seen by them as having a positive role despite taking over the commons. However, can the dichotomy between the rich and the poor be taken further? In the local context, in addition to sharecropping, the arrangement of share breeding is another field of relation between the rich and the poor. Let us consider the following description by Teshome, a share-breeder:

The town was an area where we used to drive and graze livestock. Now, it is included in the town. We shouted against this but nothing was achieved. *The meda was the means by which we were fighting against nature in times of weather fluctuations. Now, we are left with only a small area. The town has occupied the main meda.*

Based on this description, it appears that the dichotomy reflected previously may not be extended further. Likewise, the discourse produced in this regard may not necessarily represent a fixed category of the rich and the poor. Yet, it could be taken as a point of discourse but may change depending on the field of relation and the social actors involved in it.

To conclude, an attempt was made to present different views regarding the impact of the town. On the one hand there are categories who strongly held the view that the town has taken over the commons and put them at disadvantage. On the other, there are categories who seem to view the growth of the town as having a positive role despite taking over the commons. This doesn't, however, mean that these are two fixed categories of people who entertain these views. Rather, different categories of people may fall in one or the other group mentioned earlier, and views may vary from one individual to another.

3.4. Investment-induced enclosures

In 2000 part of the commons was given to an investor who established a sheep breeding project. This project enclosed a considerable part of Gimba *meda*, which is included in Tenta *Wereda*. The enclosure is located just at the back of the emerging town.

3.4.1. Resistance to private enclosures

The local people protested against the enclosure. Particularly those people in the surrounding organized themselves under their *qire* to take action together, and, for some time, attempted to resist the enclosure by driving their livestock to the area regardless of the investor's enclosure. Some individuals were put in prison for a while. One of these stated:

One day, when we were coming from Maksegno gebeya, we found that our *meda* was enclosed. Thinking that we would lose our *meda*, we discussed the matter under our *qire* and decided to send our livestock out as before. For that matter, we were told nothing about the enclosure. Besides, we thought that the government would rather support us than a single individual. However, we were put in prison, instead.

On the other hand, Yimer a KA official stated:

The people already had the information that the area would be given to the investor. Nevertheless, they simply felt envy towards the investor and kept on

driving their livestock to the enclosed area. This action was unlawful and it eventually resulted in imprisonment.

The agent of the investor also had the following to say:

The attempts to continue grazing animals on the area given to the investor was initiated by some individuals who are rich. They persuaded the *qire* leader and other people to take action in a group. The investor reported the case to the *Wereda* and the main actors were detained.

Based on this description, the rich were the main actors behind the action. However, there are informants who strongly reject the idea that only some individuals were responsible for the action taken. In this regard, Teshome, a share-breeder said:

Everybody was unhappy that our *meda* was given to one individual. Therefore, we agreed in *qire* not to give away the land and continued to drive our livestock onto the area. Nevertheless, the *Wereda* selected only some individuals and took them to the prison. With regard to us, KA officials warned us, including the *qire* leader, who is also a relative of the KA leader that we would be sent to prison and lose our food aid as well.

So far different views have been described in relation to attempts made against the enclosure and it appears that the local institution, *qire*, was, in one way or another, involved. Besides, *quna*, the local cultural sanctioning mechanism was applied, and the investor's agent was dismissed from membership of the institution. Hassen, the agent stated:

I have known the investor since the very the time I went to Ajibar for my post-elementary education. We have close relations so I was facilitating certain conditions when he came here as an investor. Now also, as his agent, I am looking after his project in his absence. This relationship is not liked by my *qire* members who have been against him from the start. They claim that I conspired with him to facilitate conditions and help him take over the *meda*. Based on this assumption, they dismissed me from the *qire* to which I belonged. When my wife died some four months ago, I was denied assistance by the *qire*. Yet, I didn't suffer much since I have already joined *yeketema idir* [the town burial association] here.

It should be noted that *quna*, the local sanctioning mechanism, had never been implemented in relation to the communal area before. It may be argued that this external pressure effected the institutionalization of the local institution, which had hardly been concerned previously with managing the communal area. The enclosure made by the investor's sheep breeding project happened to be a field of relations characterized by conflicts. This was reflected from the very beginning when the project was set up and has been reflected since then on several occasion. Mengistu Dessalegn, who carried out this research, witnessed one such events while in the field and wrote:

One day, at about 6 pm, I heard shots from the area enclosed by the project. A number of people were running to the area. I was one among them. As I arrived there, I saw the confrontation between people of Kermame and the guards of the project. The reason was that their sheep were detained by the project guards for passing over to the enclosed part. When the owners came and demanded their sheep, one of the guards let the sheep out from where they were kept. In the

meantime, the other guard appeared. Seeing his presence, the owners dashed towards him claiming that he was responsible. Later, the police intervened.

Later it emerged that the blame was put on that particular guard due to earlier conflicts. This came about as a result of role conflicts. On the one hand, he is a member of the village in the surrounding area and was expected to support his villagers, or at least not to stand against them. On the other hand, as a guard, he is expected to look after the project. Besides, the villagers claim that this particular guard keeps their livestock out while he freely grazes his sheep within the enclosure. Also, he is alleged to pass information to the investor regarding what the local people discuss in relation to the enclosure.

Another investor came to the area this year. He also planned to set up a sheep breeding project on part of the communal grazing area. This time the chosen part was around Chiro-kidame gebeya, which is part of *kebele* 025, and is included in Legambo *Wereda*. For this purpose, the investor was said to have produced a paper of permission from the *Wereda* officials.

However, the investor didn't succeed to set up the project in this part of Gimba *meda*. As was described by different categories of interviewees, the suggestion was raised for approval at a meeting but the local people refused claiming that the area is where they commonly graze their livestock.

One may wonder how an investment-based enclosure was permitted in one part of the communal area but refused in another part. In addition to the reasons stated above, it may be possible to argue that other factors might have been involved. The fact that the two areas are included in different *weredas* might have been relevant. The two individual investors belonged to different areas. The one who has already established his project was from this area, though his place of origin was far away from the specific locality where he set up the project. On the other hand, the one who failed to succeed was from another area.

3.4.2. Impact of the enclosures

The investment-induced private enclosure precipitated conflicts owing to its perceived impact on the commons. In fact, in one way or another, pasture resource usages have been affected following the practice of privatized enclosures. Views on the impacts differ. For instance, Mekonnen, who was said to have owned large herds of sheep and is considered among the rich, said:

The sheep breeding center has now controlled the vast area where we used to drive our livestock. After its establishment, our livestock have come under serious danger. It is really unjust that our '*chichisa*' [back yard?] was taken over. *During Haile Selassie, we were paying tax on it. Under the Derg, it was our chichisa. I don't understand why it is now decided in favor of one individual. Of course, we know that he went to the same school as the wereda council members.*

Such informants claim that in pre-Derg times, they were required to pay a tax on the communal grazing area in addition to what was levied on their individual possessions. Following the Derg, the communal area was said to have become free from taxation; yet, it remained '*chichisa*', which they reportedly used for common purposes. The enclosures are therefore seen as illegitimate.

In describing the impact of the enclosure, Hassen, a former member of a *kebele* court said:

The area enclosed by the sheep breeding center was our chichisa so that we were freely grazing livestock there. Nevertheless, suppressing a mass of peasants it was given to one individual. Now, we are unable to go to there because it has already been enclosed. Where else shall we go? We are here in Tenta [Wereda] but our chichisa went to Ambaw (the investor) and Akesta [Legambo Wereda].

Teshome, a share-breeder, who may be considered as representing the viewpoint of the 'poor' stated:

The area given to one individual to breed sheep was *our chichisa as well as masemaria* [where livestock are driven to graze]; *it was the means by which we were fighting nature*. Before, we could drive our livestock as we liked; there was no problem. However, we are now experiencing difficulties in terms of restricted options. On the one hand, we are restricted by the individual [the investor]. On the other hand, the town restricts us.

In this description, the communal grazing area is described as both '*chichisa*' and a place where livestock are freely and comfortably driven. Besides, it is considered as a means of survival particularly in times of drought. This possibility is viewed as having been jeopardized by recent conditions affecting pasture resource usage.

Yeshi, a female sharecropper who may be considered as representing views of single women, stated:

Before it was protected, I used to send the few animals I have there; it was in my vicinity. Now, it has been claimed by one individual so I can't take them there fearing that they would enter the enclosure and I would be punished. Rather, I keep my animals mostly around the homestead and feed them by hand. I can't take some two or three animals I have to far areas and look after them all day long. Besides, I don't have any one to support me. If it had not been taken by the individual [the investor] I would have had easy access to that area. *This area was almost our chichisa because our chichisa had already been put under distribution following Derg.*

Based on this informant, it seems that grazing animals has become a more demanding task since the investor's enclosure has affected the hitherto easy access to pasture resources. Here, unlike the previous cases, the communal area is not described strictly as '*chichisa*'. Rather, *chichisa* proper was the grazing land near homesteads that was minimized following land redistributions under the Derg. Hence, the communal grazing area came to be viewed as 'almost *chichisa*' though not '*chichisa*' proper.

What is described by Amakelech, a female returnee, is somewhat different from the preceding cases in that she tended to consider it logical for land to be redistributed from the 'empty *meda*' (the communal area) once it had already started to be given to an individual (the investor). She stated:

Before I left for resettlement and even after I came, this place was an *empty meda*. It was only recently that it was given to one individual to breed sheep. Following this, there was a conflict between the rich and this individual. We are also affected by this conflict since he prevents any one from crossing his area. As a result, we are forced to use a long path if we want to go to the village behind the enclosed.

Otherwise, *I don't have sheep to quarrel with him. Of course, I wish to be given land from the empty meda as it was given to him.* When we came from resettlement, we were told that we would be given land from *yemote keda meret* [Land of the deceased] and we were running here and there to look for *yemote keda meret* and suggest to *kebele* officials. In fact, we were given land but it was very small. *Once an individual has already been given land from the empty meda, it would be good if we were also allowed to have some;* we could benefit. Even if I am too poor to cultivate it, I would give it to the rich person [to sharecrop] and could get more share than now. Or else, I would set aside a certain part of it for hay collection and could rent it to the rich year after year.

As far as KA officials are concerned, they use the concept of '*beni*' [open communal land] while discussing issues in relation to the plain, but they consider '*beni*' as government land. For instance, Yimer stated:

The meda is *beni*, which is a communal area free from taxation. It is a government meda; no one can decide on it except the government. That is why the government decided for the investor when he applied for a place to breed sheep. Nevertheless, there were people who were claiming that it was our '*chichisa*' and should not be given. For that matter, they were given '*chichisa*' when land was redistributed.

So far, we have discussed various viewpoints in relation to pressures on the communal grazing area. The communal area is described in different ways such as: "*chichisa*", "*chichisa* as well as *masemaria*", "almost like *chichisa*", and "*beni*". In short, different concepts seem to be used. Before attempting to reflect on such tendencies, it is worth discussing what the two concepts: *chichisa* and *beni* refer to. Also what concepts were used during the Imperial times to refer to the pasture area.

Based on further investigations made in this regard, "*chichisa*" basically refers to a place where livestock are temporarily kept before they are driven to a grazing area. Such places commonly serve a small group of people (10-15) living in a particular hamlet who have exclusive rights over its use, and are located close to their settlement. On the other hand, "*beni*" [which derives from the Oromiffa term for 'open'] is basically taken to mean a vast free area neither cultivated nor inhabited, and which can be used by anyone. Whereas *chichisa* is a kind of 'domesticated' area, *beni* is more of a 'natural' wilderness.

In order to understand what concepts were used to refer to the pasture area during the imperial times, an attempt was made to grasp the concepts used by informants while talking about the pasture area. Often informants simply use "*kebit masemaria meda*" [a plain where cattle are sent to] while discussing anything related to the pasture area. When questioned further in some cases, the concept of "*tef*" [uncultivated land] was sometimes also used along in addition with the former term. When asked specifically whether "*beni*" or "*chichisa*" were used informants tend to say the communal area was almost like "*beni*" but hesitate to say that it was strictly and commonly referred to as "*beni*". It therefore seems that the use of these terms nowadays has more to do with the current debates about enclosures, such that those trying to argue that communities have rights to the plain liken it to the restricted areas over which hamlets have rights and those who consider that it can be appropriated portray it as unused and without any ownership.

4. External Perspectives

This section presents the viewpoints of external agents including the administration, the investor, the Ministry of Agriculture and an NGO. With regard to the viewpoint of the administration KA officials were interviewed. They consider the investor's enclosure to be 'legitimate' on the ground that *the communal area is a free government meda* on which the government, who decided in favor of the investor, is said to be the sole decision maker. They dismiss the resistance shown towards the investor's enclosure as based on jealousy.

The investor could not be contacted but his agent expressed the view that the protest against the enclosure was initiated by a few individuals. He stated:

It is a few individuals who own large herds who initiated the protest against the investor's enclosures. Others who were involved were simply 'agitated' by such individuals. *As far as the rest were concerned, their problem was only getting sheep; they lost their sheep in the drought. Otherwise, there is no problem of meda.* Had there been a problem in this regard, the government itself would not have given the area in favor of the investor.

Melkaw, a MOA Development Agent, does seem to have a different perspective, and attributes such resistance as typical behavior of peasants. He also noted that the government derives income through taxing the investor, and suggests that local people will benefit:

The meda is a common area so that even a government employee like me can breed sheep in it; no one would prevent him. Yet, when it is about to be given and enclosed by an individual, the peasant would say, "Why?". This is the behavior of peasants in general. Even if they don't have any sheep at the moment [due to drought], they may claim that they dreamed that someone would get sheep and breed there. That is why they opposed the investor's project. Otherwise, this was a free area. For that matter, now the government also gets income from the project. Besides, the local people can also be benefited. For instance, last year, Washera (the NGO in the area) wanted to supply sheep to help local people whose sheep were affected due to the drought. But, getting sheep became a problem and Washera was forced to facilitate the delivery from far areas. Today, however, it would be possible to get sheep from the investor.

From the perspective of the NGO in the area (the Washera project), the state sheep breeding project of the previous regime had its own negative effect on attitudes towards the establishment of the present private sheep breeding project in the area. As described by the head of this project:

Recently, a private investor came to the area and established a sheep breeding project. This condition resulted in conflicts. The local people were against it. *They were claiming that they [the administration] gave the area where they breed sheep to one individual.* The local people's experience with the previous state run sheep breeding project had contributed to this. The previous project was established without the participation of the local people. As a result, the local people were not interested in it and they were against it. Since the people didn't believe in it from the very beginning, they destroyed the project as soon as the regime collapsed and the new forces came to the area. *The hatred that the local*

people developed in relation to the previous sheep breeding project had a negative consequence towards the establishment of the present private investment. However, we envisage that the private investor would work with us in areas that could benefit the local people. For instance, we [the NGO] have had a practice of supplying improved and selected breeds of animals for the local people at a subsidized rate. Nevertheless, this has become a difficult task since it is done at the household level. Consequently, we have now planned to work with the investor and such facilities would be available to the local people through him.

In this description, it is indicated that the local people showed resistance to the private investment induced enclosure on the grounds that it could take over the area where they breed sheep. The conflict is viewed as between two groups having an interest in sheep breeding: the private investor and the local community. The investor is viewed as a potential partner for the NGO to work with and help the local people.

5. The cultivation of the communal grazing area in the past decade.

During the imperial and Derg periods certain attempts were made to cultivate the communal area. What is practiced presently is, however, believed to be wider in scale than before. This practice is generally said to have followed the land redistribution of the present regime. This was implemented one year after the EPRDF controlled the area. This land redistribution was said to have resulted in a relative fragmentation of land-holdings. Thereafter, individuals are said to have opted cultivating parts of the communal area.

5.1. The qire's role in safeguarding the commons (1990-1994)

On the other hand, with the advent of the new regime, the *qire*, the local cultural institution was said to have taken a greater role in dispute resolution, and could intervene in cases related to the communal area and decide against its cultivation. This happened especially in the early post-transition period (between 1991 and 1994). For instance, Nega, a former PA official under the present regime described the following case:

In 1992, a certain man of Chiro cultivated part of the *meda* located below his farm land. Seeing the cultivation, one of his neighbors reported the case to *ye zemed dagna* [a kin judge]. When the individual was asked by the *dagna*, he admitted but claimed that he did so due to land shortage. The individual was warned that *quna* [the exclusion sanctioning mechanism] would be endorsed against him unless he withdrew from that part. Fearing the implementation of the sanction, the man also did accordingly.

Similarly, Yimer who owns a mill house and also houses to rent described his own case:

When land was redistributed, I lost a significant portion of my previous possession. Owing to the land shortage, I cultivated part of the *meda* adjacent to my possession in 1994. However, my neighbors revealed the case to *qire* and I was asked whether I did it. Since I admitted the case, I was warned not to attempt it again; of course, I also gave up that area.

5.2. Expansion of cultivation of the communal area (1995-2000)

In the early post-transition phase the *qire* played a positive role in seeking to prevent individuals from encroaching on to the commons. However, over the past six or seven years, encroachments are said to have expanded. Different viewpoints, narratives and discourses were produced in this respect. Let us begin with Kassaye, a KA chairman:

When land was redistributed in 1991, *hizibu berekete meretim tebebe [the people had become numerous and the land was scarce]*. Thereafter, the people started to go down and cultivate the *meda* below their farmlands. But, more expansion has been witnessed over the past six years. Several times, we tried to prohibit the cultivation. We punished individuals and put boundary signs. Later, however, they would again place it under cultivation. When they are asked, they claim that it belongs to them but only remained uncultivated due to certain problems. *No one would reveal the case because they often cultivate the meda in a group after plotting under the qire. Besides, there is now free democracy so that the people persistently defend their stands.*

In this description, the *qire* is viewed as having condoned or encouraged the cultivation of the communal area and the recent expansion is attributed to the green light given by this local institution. *Qire* leaders, however, strongly oppose this view. For instance, Asfaw a *libas dagna* [overall leader] said:

Whether the *meda* is cultivated is not investigated through the KA itself unless there is some one to reveal the case. This could be easily investigated through *qire* and the cultivation could be controlled. Nowadays, however, it is impossible to control the cultivation of the *meda* through *qire*. *Claiming that the father of land is its distributor; [i.e. the KA], KA officials decided that we should never judge such cases. In a meeting, qire leaders were generally banned from judging cases related to land, be it the communal as well as individualized.*

In this perspective, it is viewed that the KA officials' ban on leaders of the local institution has encouraged and facilitated the mass cultivation of the communal area. Had it not been for the ban, it is, thus, suggested that the local institution could identify transgressions in the surroundings and could have protected the commons from cultivation.

According to Mekonnen, who is said to have owned large herds of sheep and is considered to be among the rich:

Nowadays, the *meda* is let free. Thinking that no one would control it, individuals are going down and cultivate it. Before, the *qire* was feared and could advise and warn individuals not to do so. Over the past five years, however, the *qire* has become weak since *quna* was banned suggesting that we should rather be judged through the KA and wereda. Consequently, the *qire* is not feared as before and individuals ignore its advice and warnings even if it is known that they are cultivating the *meda*.

The ban on the cultural sanctioning mechanism is, thus, described as having incapacitated the local institution to the extent that individuals tend to undermine its advice thereby facilitating transgressions. The ban is viewed as favoring formal government structures suggesting that the *qire* was considered as a competing local institution.

On the other hand, the ban was said to have been imposed on the grounds that *qire* leaders were alleged to have been engaged in “illegal” activities. Nega, a former PA official under the present regime, recalled:

Individuals started to cultivate the *meda* following the coming of the EPRDF. The *qire* was also controlling the cultivation. If someone attempted to cultivate the *meda* below his farmland, another individual would report the case to the *qire* leader and the individual would be ordered to leave the area. Once he was warned that his ‘*quna* could be seized’ [the sanction would be imposed], the individual would leave that part of the *meda*. After 1994, after the ban on *quna*, however, the *qire* has stopped controlling encroachments. The *quna* was banned since *qire* leaders are thought to be engaged in illegal activities and could have been organized. After this, people stopped using the *qire* to protect the cultivation of the *meda*. Rather, they have developed the tendency to come together under the *qire* to agree and cooperate towards cultivating the *meda* in a group. Now, this has become a common practice.

Unlike the previous case, here, the local sanctioning mechanism was considered to have been banned not simply for seeming to be a competitive local institution but since its leaders had allegedly engaged in “illegal” activities, perhaps politics. Like the previous case, of course, the ban affected the local institution. Yet, in this latter perspective, it is further suggested that following the ban, the local people have rather shown a tendency to resort to *qire*-based cultivation.

5.3. “Qire-based” cultivation, conflicts and resolutions

Based on field observation it is clear that parts of the commons have been placed under cultivation. This may be referred to as “*qire*-based” cultivation in that it is said to have been practiced after discussing the matter in *qire* and deciding to cooperate in doing so. The different viewpoints regarding this issue and ensuing conflicts can be presented as follows. Some informants claim that such practices are already agreed upon in *qire*, and there is no room for conflicts. An informant, who is a farmer and is also employed in Washira (NGO) as a guard, said:

After the land distribution, there was shortage of land and in several places a group of people turned parts of the *meda* into cultivation. Since everybody wants to cultivate the *meda* there is no condition leading to conflicts. *For that matter, this is practiced based on agreement and swearing made in qire and there is cooperation. Besides, the meda is cultivated in such a way that everyone moves down to the meda just following the sides of his farmland.*

On the other hand, some informants claim that there are certain conditions whereby individuals may be engaged in conflicts. For instance, Belew, who described himself as a former cadre of the previous regime stated:

The *meda* is now being cultivated commonly after agreeing under *qire* and swearing not to reveal the case. Accordingly, everyone moves down and cultivates the *meda* just below his farm land. Sometimes, however, someone may attempt to cultivate the *meda* located just below another individual’s farmland. This condition leads to a conflict. *At this time, the latter will claim that the*

individual (often his neighbor) cultivated the meda that he is supposed to go down and cultivate. Or else, he may claim that the individual blocked him from going further and cultivating the meda. Such cases may be reported to *qire* and resolved in such a way that the individuals will be made to share and cultivate the area under dispute. For example, last year, two individuals of Kidame gebeya quarrelled in this way. One of them went down and cultivated the *meda* located below the other's farmland. This case was reported to *qire* and what was already cultivated was decided to be shared. Such cases will not, however, be reported to KA since all will be accused of illegally cultivating it.

Here, conflicts are seen to emerge despite the agreement made to cultivate the area commonly. Such cases are also said to be resolved in the *qire* but not will be taken to the KA for fearing the possibility that everyone will lose his claim.

Conflicts may however, be taken to the KA or *wereda*. According to Kassaye, a sharecropper:

The *meda* is cultivated by competition. When one cultivates, the other one also follows. In this way, what was *meda* before has been cultivated in a group. This is mostly done based on an agreement held to do so in a group. Accordingly, everyone moves bit by bit from his farm land down to the *meda*. However, some individuals' farmlands may not be adjacent to the *meda*. While others go down to cultivate the *meda*, such individuals will, therefore, remain up in their farmlands and may complain that they remained up there while others went down to cultivate the *meda*. Then, they may claim that they have also the right to cultivate the *meda*. This condition may even lead to physical fighting. For example, some three years ago around Kurfa area, individuals were moving down to cultivate the *meda* in competition. Some remained behind others and the two groups started fighting. This case reached to the *wereda* and I remember that those involved in the fighting were punished a hundred *birr* each. The people in the surrounding were also warned not to cultivate the area. The punishment became a lesson for people in the area not to cultivate the *meda* thereafter.

As was described, while those who have access cultivate the commons, others may lack outlets to follow suit. This may result in physical confrontations, thereby leading the case to be revealed to the KA or the *wereda*. Otherwise the case may not be taken to the authorities. As Yeshi, a female household head, said:

The *meda* is cultivated in cooperation and this may not be investigated by the *wereda* unless individuals come to fight each other in terms of conflicts over cultivating the *meda*. Even if someone becomes poor and is unable to cultivate the *meda* like others, he will not reveal the case because this is a government *meda* and it is none of his business.

A farmer who also acts as a local 'lawyer' suggested that it was not poverty or lack of interest but other factors such as envy that led individuals to report encroachments.

Due to some sort of envy or other factors, individuals who have become unable to cultivate the *meda* may tend to reveal the case to the KA but they often shy to do so fearing the endorsement of the *quna* [sanction]. There is a saying 'ager kemichaneh gara yichanah' (It is better for a mountain to press down on you than

the land [i.e. that your community should ostracize you]. For example, last year, a group of people from kebele 025 put the meda in their vicinity under cultivation. One of the few individuals of the area who didn't participate being unable to do so reported the case to the kebele. The kebele also strictly warned them not to go beyond their farmlands. Yet, they simply remained holding part of the meda. In the meantime, they 'seized his quna' [implemented the sanction] against that individual saying that he betrayed them and also with the intention of discouraging him from making any further attempt. Later, the individual was forced to request an excuse.

With regard to the recent expansion of cultivating the commons, the ban on *quna*, the sanctioning mechanism, is considered to be a significant factor. Whether the expansion would not have happened without this ban is open to question. If the ban is considered as having resulted in an expansion of the cultivation, it is possible to argue that this was due to its impact on the local institution's role of dispute resolution in general, which in turn may have affect its role in resource management.

5.4. External perspectives

5.4.1. NGO (Washira Project)

With regard to the cultivation of the communal grazing area, the head of this project said:

Nowadays, the pasture resource areas are being cultivated. Over the past seven years, such areas that did not used to be farmlands before have been placed under cultivation. If this trend continues, it is very likely that sheep will not exist in the area. The *qire* doesn't protect the commons. Rather, the cultivation is based on agreement under the *qire*. The *Qire* itself is involved. In fact, the *qire* intervenes between individuals when they come in to conflict upon cultivating the *meda* and resolves the conflict by deciding that the individuals should cultivate following down the *meda* down from their respective farmlands. Sometimes, I hear that the *kebele* administration punishes individuals for cultivating the pasture area. Nevertheless, what I see from time to time is that the trend is increasing; so, I think that the KA is also reluctant to stop it.

5.4.2. The MOA perspective

As far as the MOA perspective is concerned, Melkaw, a Development Agent, stated:

It is in agreement that people cultivate the *meda* found in their surrounding. When we ask them why they do so, they often claim that it belongs to individual possessions but was covered with grass and was not cultivated before due to problems such as lack of oxen and seed. In terms of the law, the KA has the authority to protect the commons. Yet, they don't often do this because the officials are either taking part in the cultivation or they are bribed. In one way or the other, they could be benefit and do not stop the cultivation.

6. Informal institutions in pasture management

6.1. The Qire

In the study area, there has never been any informal institution responsible for mainly managing the pasture area. The *qire* is a local institution, involved mainly in burial but also engaged in dispute resolutions. This is a village-institution organized under the leadership of the *Libas dagna* ([the head of the *qire*] and other *Zemed dagnas*, [kin-judges] representing specific areas.

6.1.1. Role in resource management

During the Imperial times. With regard to managing the communal grazing area, the *qire* didn't seem to have had a role directly aimed at protecting and controlling transgressions related to the commons. Yet, it could have some sort of involvement particularly in case individuals came in to conflict and were engaged in physical confrontations over cultivating the commons. Following such circumstances, the disputed part could be reincluded into the communal area. Yet, this seems to have been given less emphasis since cases were usually reported primarily seeking compensations for alleged physical damage due to confrontations. Overall, if we could talk about the role of *qire* in resource management, its involvement seemed to have aimed at resolving conflicts precipitated over cultivating the commons, rather than having had a direct role aimed at protecting abuses from the onset.

During the Derg. During the Derg period it appears that the local institution did not have a role in resource management. This was related to its declining role in dispute resolutions following the establishment of PAs as emerging actors assuming an overall administrative role including resource management. In the aftermath, the local institution's subsidiary task of dispute resolutions was weakened and consequently its role in resource management was even more insignificant than in imperial times.

On the other hand, what happened towards the last phase of the Derg regime precipitated the involvement of the *qire* in a manner seemingly not experienced before. The attempt by one individual of the area to build a house on part of the commons resulted in opposition organized through the *qire* to destroy the house. Also, the local people protested against the enclosure by a state sheep breeding project during the same regime. It may therefore be possible to argue that, though their previous role in management of the commons was limited, local institutions may tend to become active in protecting the commons under the circumstances of such pressures.

During the present regime. Since the time of the transition period onwards, the communal area has been affected by several pressures that triggered the local institution to become organized and react against such pressures. One such pressure was the trend of urbanization. A number of houses were built on the commons, and opposition was organized through the *qire* to try to destroy the houses. Enclosure induced by private investment was another pressure. Part of the commons was enclosed for a sheep breeding project established by an investor. Here, too, the local institution was organized to react against the enclosure in such a way that the local people decided under *qire* to come together and resist the enclosure by driving their livestock onto the enclosed area. This even led to the application of the local cultural sanctioning mechanism against the investor's agent (a member of the locality) for allegedly conspiring with the investor. Before this external pressure, the local sanctioning

mechanism had never been implemented in relation to the communal area. From these conditions, it is possible to argue that local institutions may be triggered to react against such pressures though previous local use and management of the commons had been seemingly less controlled.

The local institution also got involved because of the cultivation of the commons which was said to have increased in scale following the land redistribution carried out in the transition period, i.e., when the EPRDF had controlled the area but not yet the entire country. For some three or four years following the transition, the local institution somehow attempted to protect the cultivation of the commons. The local institution's role in relation to the communal area could be seen in terms of the reinitiation of its dispute resolution roles at large, which may be attributed to certain enabling factors in the advent of the new regime.

Over the past six or seven years, however, this emerging role of the local institution in terms of protecting the commons didn't continue because of the ban on its sanctioning mechanism, *quna*, and/or its leaders for certain reasons. Thereafter, "*qire*-based" cultivation of the commons seem to have been practiced instead. This is said to have been practiced after discussing the matter in *qire* and deciding to cooperate in doing so. Conflicts may arise between individuals while cultivating the communal area. Under such circumstances, cases may be reported to the local institution and may be resolved in such a way that the individuals would be made to share and cultivate the part under dispute. On the other hand, individuals may decide under the *qire* to cultivate the communal area to some extent but certain individuals may happen to go beyond the already decided limit. Under such circumstances, the local institution may stop those who passed the limit. As was described, this is done for fear that the land would be considered as an individually owned possession and in case land is redistributed in the future, it would be redistributed to others and they would forgo the land in terms of cultivation and grazing animals as well.

6.2. Mesal: emergence of a new institution?

Mesal refers to an institution led by an indigenous religious leader and supported by some three or four elders, his colleagues. This institution treats dispute cases that are done under cover and lack any witness. Under such circumstances, the 'victim' reports the case to the *mesal*, located in Chiro area, presided over by certain sheik. Then, he will receive incense (*adrus*) which will be given to the individual who is suspected to have been guilty. After receiving this, the suspected individual will go to the *mesal* and the leader asks him whether he admits. He will be required to make a oath holding on to such things as incense (*adrus*), bones (*atint*), a staff with a iron tip (*ankase*) and prayer beads (*musbaha*). If the individual is guilty he is believed to confess rather than risk the consequences of the curse.

Mesal came to the area only some six years ago. The leader was said to have been the assistant of the leader of a similar institution found in another area, Chefa. This leader was said to have ordered his assistant to go and serve his people in his local area and thus the assistant came to Gimba accordingly.

6.2.1. Role in resource management

With regard to the pasture area, the institution of *mesal* may have no role. Yet, it has its own role with regard to another alternative to pasture resource. This refers to the case of hay for which farmers are distributed land in a group and each has his own portion from which he

collects his own hay. The kind of dispute arises in this regard is that someone may steal the hay belonging to another individual or he may set it on fire. Since this is often practiced under cover, it is difficult to know who actually has done this. Therefore, the ‘victim’ will go to the *mesal*.

6.2.2. Relations with qire

No one is allowed to go to the *mesal* unless given permission by the *qire*. Therefore, the ‘victim’ first reports the case to the *qire* and when it appears to be beyond the capacity of the *qire*, the case will be sent to the *mesal* in such a way that the victim will be permitted to go there and report the case. From the *mesal*, the victim receives incense to summon the accused. This incense will be first given to the *qire* leader and it is through him that the accused will receive it.

It seems that the emergence of the *mesal* may be related to the ban on *quna*, the local sanctioning mechanism. In this connection the *bele*, in which an individual is required to swear that he is not guilty was also banned. It is perhaps no coincidence that the ban on *quna* as well as *bele* coincided with the coming of the *mesal*.

7. Entitlement Issues and related discourses

7.1. Issues related to the local people’s tendency to graze in the vicinity of their settlements

As far as Gimba *meda* use (pasture resource use) is concerned, there is no restriction in use, in that anyone has the right to graze animals in any part of Gimba *meda* regardless of the specific corner of the locality where one has come from. When it comes to external pressure on a specific part of the commons, however, it often happens that the local people in the surrounding area are the ones who strongly protest. The special concern developed under such circumstances may be due to the tendency that individuals prefer to use the grazing area in the vicinity though no one is restricted from grazing his livestock on any part of Gimba *meda*.

In relation to the recent tendency of “*qire*-based” cultivation, those who live in the vicinity are the ones who are allowed to take part. Based on such conditions, it may be possible to argue that, the people located in the vicinity of a given part of the communal area have seemingly developed a sense of ‘ownership’ as far as that part is concerned. Owing to this, sometimes individuals of a given area may tend to reflect their unhappiness, at least jokingly, when individuals located in another part come and graze animals. For instance, this was reflected in the description by one informant who was strongly protesting against the establishment of a church in the vicinity and even taken to prison in this connection:

Before the establishment of the church, we used to graze our livestock in that area. When the church was to be established, we therefore showed our resistance believing that it would take over the place where we could usually drive our livestock. However, they considered our action as against religion and took us to prison. *Now, our area has already been taken by the church, and we have nowhere to take our animals. Of course we drive our livestock to other areas but such areas are not as near as our part which was taken by the church. The people in such areas also often berate us saying ‘you are coming here after giving over yours instead of protecting it’*

7.2. Issues related to viewpoints by category of wealth: do the poor have one viewpoint?

The poor may have only a two or three animals which they send to graze on the communal area. As Yeshi, a female household head and sharecropper stated:

Before it was protected, I used to send the few animals I have there; it was in my vicinity.... It was almost our *chichisa*....

This informant is against the investor's enclosure since it affected the previous relatively easy access to pasture resource for her animals. With regard to the town, however, she said:

....The rich don't want anything to be constructed on the *meda* because they want to breed sheep and sell them.... The poor like us, however, want the growth of the town because we can somehow work in the town and produce something for our survival...

In this case, she viewed those protesting against the town as being the rich. But, is it really a matter of being rich and poor, and does the dichotomy work, or is it a matter of interest developed on the grazing area? Let us consider the case from the viewpoint of a share-breeder. Like sharecropping, the relationships between the rich and poor vis-à-vis share-breeding are often described according to the local context. Accordingly, one who receives sheep from the rich for breeding can represent the category of poor. In this regard, as was described earlier, a share-breeder stated:

....The *meda* was the means by which we were fighting against nature in times of weather fluctuations. Now, we are left with a small area. The town has occupied the main *meda*.... On the other hand, we are restricted by the individual [the investor]....

In the local context, this share-breeder represents one category of the poor. Yet, unlike the previous case, he is against both the investor's enclosure and the growth of the town since affecting his means of 'survival'. Therefore, the issue doesn't seem to be a matter of being poor and rich and the situation is more complex. It seems to be a matter of interest in the communal area and the discourse produced in this regard also reflects this.

ANNEX II: SOUTH WELLO CASE STUDIES—ALANSHA VALLEY⁸

Alansha is a highland valley some 20 kms from Dessie Town. At the northern tip of the plain lies the town of Kutaber and the valley falls within the *wereda* with the same name. The valley is an important communal pasture resource, the mountains above have been afforested and irrigation is practiced from the springs in the mountains. The case study considers resource management by type of resource and under different periods: the imperial, Derg and EPRDF governments, and the interrelations between different types of resources: pasture, irrigation and forest. The case study seeks to show how discourses are related to different societal categories.

1. Resource Management by type of resource

1.1. Pasture

1.1.1. Origin myth

In the past Alansha was used exclusively by two brothers who subsisted from cattle rearing. In the area people multiplied and those who wanted to use the pasture increased. However, the users used to punish not those who grazed but those whose livestock passed through the pasture. While this was the case a certain *weliy* [religious prophet] came from Gojjam on his way to other parts of Wollo. As revealed to him he tried to consult Abba Dullo on the general condition of the people as he was the most influential and rich person owning cattle in hundreds. He called him to a place and ordered him to arrange a meeting with the seven villages neighboring Alansha pasture to discuss conditions in the area. Abba Dullo then communicated this to the seven villages and a *wedaja* [religious ceremony] was conducted for about seven days in the middle of the pasture. Among the points discussed with the *Weliy* was the issue of pasture. The religious man and a representative from the seven *got* [neighborhoods] held discussions over the issue. It is believed that it was the discussion about the future of the pasture which consumed much of the seven days' *wedaja*. The religious person, whom the people were afraid to mention by name, convinced the people to make the land communal property, especially for the poor. The people were impressed about his concern for the poor. He is quoted to have said, 'Let poor people who are landless take *ribbi* [share-breeding] animals there and subsist'. He promised them to send malaria away, which was very severe in the area. From then onwards malaria was 'ordered' to go to Yejjju, and he made the land peaceful as the communities accepted his proposal of making the land communal property. At the end of the *wedaja* he disappeared from their view and the people believed that he was sent from Allah. They accepted his proposition and were made to swear to ban any individual trying to make it private property and *Abba Dullo* took the responsibility to communicate this to the whole community. Sometimes the name *Abba Dullo* is used interchangeably with *Alansha*. The pasture area was made the property of all *wefqi* [land grant] and a curse was made that any individual trying to use the pasture should give birth to

⁸ This case study is based on two reports submitted by MA student Kassahun Kebede. Local people often pronounce the name as Alasha.

black dog. Cutting grass for any purpose was forbidden. Then Alansha pasture came to be considered as *yedeha kebt marbia*, “A place where the poor rear cattle.”

The above account is interesting in a number of respects. First it suggests a move from restricted to open tenure at a specific point in time resulting from an increase in the number of users creating a need for making the pasture area open access. Second the rationale for making the area communal property was explicitly in order to provide a means of livelihood for the poor. The mechanism of share-breeding *ribbi* is specifically mentioned. Third, the role of the *weliy* prophet giving supernatural sanction to this decision, is in line with ways in which collective decision-making is often represented. Fourth the use of the Islamic term *waqf* a grant to the poor, is common in local parlance. Fifth, the use of the curse is the mechanism, par excellence, through which community preventative sanctions are enforced. The reference to ‘giving birth to a black dog’ is a common idiom in cursing, notably in Wello. Finally, the myth specifies that cutting of grass was forbidden, reinforcing the notion of conserving the area for collective use.

From the beginning this area was believed to have been the exclusive property of two brothers who subsisted from rearing animals on the area. Abba Dullo, who is believed to have lived in a subsequent generation is said to have owned more than a hundred head of cattle excluding other livestock (horses and mules). In the Alansha myth Abba Dullo played a key role in instituting the divine request that the pasture be given to the poor. In relation to this Shek Said Tegegn quotes a verse from the Quran which compelled Abba Dullo to make the pasture the property of the poor and helped him to gain acceptance from Allah, “One inherits the kingdom of heaven if he gives to others what he loves most.’

In addition to making the area communal property, the area was apparently seasonally closed to outsiders [defined as those not belonging to the seven ‘rivers’ (*sebat lega*)⁹ who attended the initial meeting]. This closure of the pasture area takes place in the wet season (July to September) to allow the grass to grow. The starting date is referred to as *Gubben Abbo*, which falls on the 4th of the month of *Hamle* [mid July]. From then on *guadegn* animals had to be taken off the grazing area. Cattle of relatives *kaya* from other areas, notably areas dependent on the main rains agricultural produce were supposed to be returned and it is said that the burial associations may have been involved in enforcing this. In other areas seasonal enclosures at the same time involved exclusion of all users (Yeraswork 1995).

Encroachments onto the pastureland were apparently rare on account of the curse and the belief that any grass taken would result in the death of the animals fed with it or their offspring. Although encroachments for cultivation and houses were rare informants remember an instance when a *abegar* [religious leader] came to the area to solve a case in which an individual was ordered to move his residence built close to the pasture area.

The community concern for the pasture area used to be reinforced by annual sacrifices (*sedeqa*) for the saints *Awliya* held in January of a red bull and white heifer, bought through contributions of grain and money. In addition coffee ceremonies have been held on Fridays, with contributions revolving between the villagers using the pasture permanently.

⁹ These were Tawa, Warqarya, Darimu, Lcucho, GoroMendera, Tabela, and Tewlehedere.

In the past it is said that sheep were also excluded from Alansha on the grounds that they graze the grass from its roots. The urine of sheep was also seen as negatively affecting the growth of grass. Hence sheep were taken to market using other routes or on the back of the owner. The introduction of sheep in the late imperial period attributed to a certain Adem Dawu was justified on the grounds that sheep breed faster increasing the benefit from share-rearing, and that the importance of mules and horses declined with the construction of the road, and that increase of pressure on the pasture reduced its value for equines.

1.1.2. External threats by period

External threats to the pasture areas have been common, and specific cases have been mentioned during the Italian occupation and in the late imperial times.

The Italian Occupation. During the Italian occupation of 1935-40 it is claimed that part of the area was cultivated by the Italians with barley and wheat, with local people employed as laborers. There were apparently frequent disputes resulting from livestock straying into the cultivated fields. An Ethiopian who was in the service of the Italians aged 85 claimed that the Italians divided the grain among the people, a claim denied by others.

The Late Imperial Period. During the late imperial period five specific incidents involving external threats are mentioned by informants. First, the area was selected for an airport in 1953, but this was cancelled due to local opposition. Second, in 1955 an animal skin disease called kokeni broke out in the area. The agricultural office took the case to Dessie for possible intervention. A certain foreigner came to build a dip (genda) to treat the animals. This created uproar on the part of the people fearing the land would be taken from them. They petitioned the governor, the Crown Prince. In the end the people were convinced that the measure was meant for their benefit and the dip was built (see picture). Third, in 1957 the Mekaneyesus Church wanted to establish an education program and tried to introduce Protestantism in the area. The pasture area was proposed as a site for a school and church. Once again local people opposed this plan, and the missionaries were forced to buy land from private individuals for about 480 birr and started a literacy campaign, which developed to Grade Four level. Later the Governor was said to have attempted to sell the land first to a foreign mission wishing to build hospital which ended up being built on the neighboring plain of Borumeda and then to investors from Dessie town planning to establish an animal farm. The first attempt failed due to the protest of the people to the Crown Prince himself and in the latter case the people took their appeal to Empress Mennen in Addis Ababa. According to the informants the Crown Prince's mother decreed that the land belongs to the poor and she sent a message to her son 'not to make the poor cry'.

The Derg Period. During the Derg period, the higher areas were largely taken over by cooperative farms, and separate areas were reserved for growing hay, for oxen and for cows to graze. Peasants were pressured to join the cooperatives and some of those who refused were forcibly taken to resettlement areas. Those who did not join could only make use of the central part of the valley along the Armene river. Fines of up to ten birr were levied on non-members whose cattle entered the land reserved for the cooperatives This is said to have weakened share-breeding activities by the poor sections of the community.

During the Derg period, a school was built in 1975, with some assistance from Mekaneyesus Church on the pasture with permission from the government. However, in the construction process the local people refused to dig the land thinking that curse of Abba Dullo would work

against them. Kebede Hussein, who is the school director, and a convert to Protestantism took the initiative to dig the land. He recalls that, “the people expected my death. If during that time I had a serious headache or one of my relatives died they considered it as the action of Abba Dullo. Even now they are expecting some danger to befall me.”

The EPRDF Period. With the overthrow of the Derg, the cooperatives were disbanded and the land was divided among the cooperative; members divided the land held by the cooperatives into household shares used for hay making, and apparently included other community members who had not been members of the cooperatives.

However, a disagreement arose between those who were convinced of the benefits of enclosures and those arguing for a return to open access, notably the elderly, the rich, and returned displaced people, and a community on the eastern side that had access to Alansha through the valley of a small tributary river. During the Derg period, this area had been defined as belonging to neighboring Tehuledere *Wereda*, and was thus excluded from forming a cooperative in Alansha, which was defined as belonging to Kuta *Wereda*. Therefore, they were even forbidden from bringing their animals to the pasture.

After the change of government the Tehuledere community took their case to the government structure’s claiming customary rights to use the pasture area. They also obtained assistance from the elderly and the rich within Kuta area who were in favor of restoration of communal pasture for different reasons. The elderly upheld the view that the area has been defined by their ancestors as property for the poor. They argued that individual use would be detrimental for the people and the animals, as this was cursed. They cited the example of the collapse of the Derg cooperatives, which sought to make the pasture the property of the few, as due to the ancestral curse. This even resulted in conflict between fathers and sons, as the former sought to convince the later not to take a share of the land. For example, Ayalew recalled that he had quarrelled with his father but admitted that his father turned out to be right, as many of his animals had died after they grazed on the pasture. Since they have more animals than the rest, the rich opposed dividing the land, as they benefit from communal use. Members of these two groups allied themselves with the Tehuledere community. The authorities decided in favor of the Tehuledere community but assigned the area as part of Kuta Ber *wereda*. It was decided that the land should be considered *Beni*, communal pasture ground with no tax involved. The official rejection of enclosures is seen by some as confirmation of the power of the curse to prevent encroachments from imperial times to this day.

External threats continued in recent times with the Mekaneyesus mission seeking to build a church, Muslim religious leaders wishing to build a mosque, the school in Kuta seeking to increase the size of its holdings and rumours that the national investor Alahmoudi (Allamoudin) was intending to establish a livestock farm there. The Mekaneyesus mission called a meeting and apparently obtained some consensus. However, when they took their proposal to the *Wereda* officials, it was opposed on the grounds that the Muslim community was also seeking to build a mosque. At a meeting called by the administration the local peasants opposed the requests by both religious groups. The Church therefore built the Church on land it had acquired in imperial times. Even the decision to give two further hectares to the school was suspended.

Although the notion that the pasture area is communal property has been maintained in the 20th century, it has moved from being seen as a ‘refuge for the poor’ guaranteed by local

religious institutions, through the mechanism of the curse, to land being viewed as ‘government *beni*’, with the government guaranteeing that it will not be not taken over. The annual feasts (*sedeqa*) and weekly ceremonies (*wedaja*) no longer take place.

1.2. Irrigation

Irrigation in Alansha is relatively recent and limited in scope. Population and ecological pressure as well as market forces have recently resulted in a development of irrigation. The advantages of those with access to irrigation has certainly created differences in terms of food security. Conflict has increased over competition between local users and the government nursery established during the Derg period, which continues to limit the potential for irrigation.

In imperial times, some individuals planted crops (mainly barley and to some extent potatoes) close to springs and rivers, and sought to prevent livestock using these green areas in dry seasons from making inroads into fields. However, this could hardly be described as irrigation proper, as there were few users and local institutions were not involved. After the Italian invasion, the practice of irrigation was started with the involvement of government workers. Some individuals with connections to government agents started irrigation on the Borkena River, where they planted both annual and perennial crops. However, this was resisted by local people arguing that the irrigation had taken over their pasture.

During the Derg regime, irrigation was developed by cooperatives seeking to improve food security and raise living standards. However, in Alansha irrigation remained under individual holdings, but conflicts emerged as the government which established a nursery using water previously used for irrigation. The irrigation practice in this area also increased in size. It was during the Derg period that irrigation crossed the road built by the Italians, this has taken part of the Alasha pasture.

After the end of the Derg period, the number of users increased especially given fears of drought. Conflict with the nursery has continued and became exacerbated by an increase in numbers of users. In particular the furthest users who are downstream below the road are finding they cannot get enough water to make irrigation worthwhile. One old man stated: “All wanted to use irrigation and compete over the water because of the drought. To be fair in the sharing of the water we established a committee. Everyone wanted to get a share and they prevented us from benefiting”.¹⁰ A water user group was established with a ‘father of water’ who controls distribution. If a user does not release the water on time in theory he would be punished 50 *birr*, though apparently this has never occurred. The numbers of water users are relatively few and localized close to the stream. However, the users clearly have advantages in terms of food security. At the time of this fieldwork, they were harvesting barley. Some of those without irrigation remarked that while they were staring at the sky in the hope of rain the fortunate ones are about to eat their barley.

¹⁰ *hulum ligejabat belo alashela ale*, literally ‘every one said let me enter into it and they did not let us eat from it’.

1.3. Forestry

Like the pasture, the question of forest management has an extended history since the imperial times and more importantly starting from the Derg period. During imperial regimes there were indigenous trees, mainly acacia, which were believed to have been common even in the plain, which currently is exclusively a treeless pasture area. The way these indigenous trees were managed is not clear, and local institutions seem not to have been much involved. Forest ownership was in the hands of the few, like the irrigation. However, the relative abundance of trees, private tenure and limited household use for trees, meant that there was little need for local institutions to be involved in this sphere. There has been a gradual and marked shift towards planting eucalyptus trees, which started after the Italian occupation. Changes of government, of tenure, and ecological and market factors have resulted in the institutionalization of forest management.

With the Derg land reform a conflict emerged over ownership of trees. Former landlords whose land was redistributed claimed rights over eucalyptus trees they had planted. Peasant Associations intervened declaring such trees the property of the PA. Though viewpoints differ the trees were cut arbitrarily as the efforts of the PA to preserve them produced little result. While the dispute was going on, a program called, ‘greening the mountains’ came onto the scene. Peasants were ordered to leave the mountain so that the trees could be planted, ‘to combat desertification and attract rain’. Opposition is reflected in the following quote:

“They came to tell us that the mountain is naked. They also told us that the nakedness of the mountain is the cause of our vulnerability to drought since imperial times. Trees were seen as a solution rather than our prayers (*duayi*). Rain is in the hands of Allah. After all, trees are not Allah to bring you rain from above. It is after these trees were planted that the rain stopped.”

In one instance, it was said that Chairman Mengistu was about to visit and tree planting was to be implemented. When people living in the vicinity of Alasha refused, people were brought from other areas to plant the seedlings. Making use of a food shortage, the government used food grain as an incentive for tree planting. Trees planted through the food for work program were called the government forest.

The Derg government also sought to organize the people along lines of age, gender and occupation. Peasants, Youth, and Women’s Associations were made to plant trees on and given as individual holdings at the time of the land redistribution. The trees planted by the Associations were referred as *Mehaberat* (Associations’). In addition when the villagization program was implemented people living on the mountain side were forced to join villages on the lower slopes and trees were planted on their holdings. Planting of eucalyptus on holdings, particularly close to homesteads became a common strategy. This led to a distinction of tree tenure into three: government, associations, and private. In practice the Peasant Associations were responsible for both the government and associations’ forests, and sought to prevent them being cut and sold through the institutions of controls at checkpoints. Given the conditions of famine, there was a constant struggle by individuals seeking to eke a living through selling wood and the government trying to prevent tree-cutting. However, local informal institutions were not involved in forest management.

The period of unrest prior to the overthrow of the Derg and until the EPRDF government established its power base resulted in large-scale cutting of forests. The return of displaced groups, particularly from resettlement areas, without land or other sources of subsistence

accentuated this process, since they sold wood as means to purchase food. The KA was given the mandate to protect the state and association forests and could punish offenders. Together with the agricultural office they also established *Bahilawi Comitewoch*, 'Cultural Committees'. These made use of the traditional *bele* institution to attempt to identify culprits. This mechanism had previously been used in murder cases and was presided over by the religious leaders known as *Abegar*. The KA and agricultural experts formed a committee with seven members. They were to call meetings at which individuals would not only swear that they were not involved but would also expose the offender as custom dictates.

This solution was seen as having benefits both for the community and the government. Many individuals admitted guilt for fear of the curse, but also since the *bele* has the advantage of punishment in the form of provision of bread *mugera* and if the action is repeated, payment of a sheep. The KA, on the other hand, could imprison or fine individuals. Some Ministry of Agriculture officials were disparaging of this initiative suggesting that this option was an easy way out that did not lead to protecting the forests as the punishment was not commensurate with the crime; they referred to the saying which used to be common under the Derg: 'taking the life of a tree is like taking the life of a person'.

Given the problems of drought and food security, selling wood is a common survival strategy and tree planting and the demand for trees has increased. The saying, *zafyelelew rehab nechew* 'he who has no trees, is struck by hunger' may indicate this. Therefore, those individuals with few trees and those having no trees resort to cutting wood from the government and association forests. As a result, there is reluctance to expose oneself or others. As some youngsters say: 'If *bele* kills you, it is tomorrow, but hunger may kill you today. Therefore it is better to die today than tomorrow.' Moreover, the elders who were selected to serve on the committee also became reluctant to hold these unpopular sessions and began using delaying tactics.

In addition individuals who had been given the land on which trees were planted by the Associations were attempting to reclaim the land and the forest. They sought to obtain a consensus to raise the matter with the government, but most of the people did not own such land and did not give them their support. Wood from the *mehaberat* forest was sold for about 4,000 *birr* to contribute to funds for the war with Eritrea. Those who used to have holdings on this land felt that they alone had contributed, whereas others were relieved that this measure saved them from having to provide extra contributions.

1.4. Interconnections

The three resources (pasture, irrigation, and forest) are interconnected, and this interdependence has been increasing. During imperial times the land was in the hands of landlords but the pasture area was communal. During the Derg the enclosures of pasture areas by cooperatives, the forestation of hillsides and the establishment of tree nurseries created pressure on all three resources. The expansion of forests reduced grazing land and required planting nurseries, which reduced the scope for irrigation. In the past the land which is now covered with the forest served as additional pasture known as *beni*, and access to the hillsides for pasture was said to have been limited during the rainy season. With the forestation program the *beni* was alienated and pressure increased on the valley. In addition to this much of the pasture area in the plains was given to cooperatives.

2. Differing Discourses

2.1. Internal differences

Viewpoints and discourses of the local people differ on the basis of residence (returnees and ex-soldiers), gender, age, wealth, and position (official and unofficial). The views of each group about the other groups is also very important. The following section looks into the views of these categories.

2.1.1. Residence

Viewpoints differ on the geographical proximity and claims to resources, as well as to continued residence. Thus, in Alansha (in terms of pasture) the interests of the Tehuledere community that had been excluded under the Derg played a key role in the return to communal pasture. In terms of forests, individuals who had been given land under the Derg redistribution which was later taken for planting trees by the Associations, recently sought to lay claim to the land and trees, but were not supported by the rest of the community without this interest. In terms of irrigation, the interest of the inhabitants close to the irrigation stream in opposing the tree nursery was not supported by others not benefiting from access to irrigated land.

In terms of right to property and residence the displacements imposed by the Derg through villagization and resettlement had lasting impacts with the return of displaced and the collapse of the villages. Returnees who came back found that their land had been redistributed, and generally were assetless; they tend to suggest that they were forced to leave and resent finding their land redistributed. They have become principal scapegoats for forest destruction, but feel they are entitled to land in the forests, and should get a share of the pasture.

Those who remained, especially the former PA officials, tend to take the view that the resettlers were sent to the resettlement villages because of hunger. They argue that if they did not come back they would not have faced hunger again. The saying *saychegirachew metetew ezih chigare yilitewal* 'having returned without facing hunger now hunger ravages them' expresses this viewpoint.

In addition to those displaced from resettlement, the previous government's demobilized soldiers have returned. This category is divided into two. The first are those with land called *militia*; they were sent while the community was made to help their families. The other were the *medebegna*, mostly youngsters with no land previously. When they came back from the war front the first category did not face problems because they owned land. The others sought to claim land since they had previously been dependents of household heads.

2.1.2. Age

The elderly sought to protect the communal nature of the pasture while the young do not accept the view that individual use of the communal land is cursed. Whereas the elderly tend to show less interest in forest preservation, and see trees as resources to be harvested, some of the young seem to espouse the ideology that trees are necessary and should not be cut down.¹¹

¹¹ This was expressed in the saying *yehe zaff gizena weqiti yitebiqal* "These trees have to wait for time and condition to be cut".

2.2.2. Wealth

Although specific wealth ranking was not carried out, there are clear differences between the rich and the poor in terms of their viewpoints. Among the former land holding families who are still better off, one individual said, “the majority became land owners yesterday. They want to be the first in all cases. The Derg has made the residential land the home of wild animals and turned the farmland into villages.” They tend to argue that the position of the majority in resource ownership is not legal. Especially, in relation to pasture they hold that the poor are working against the poor. As one elder put it: “All have become landowners and they want to share the land that Allah allocated for the poor”.

The former officials of the *Derg* have been labelled as *birocracy*, ‘bureaucrats’ and the current leadership views them as having abused their positions to monopolies access to resources. Most of those interviewed who were members of the cooperatives and working in the peasant association tend to view the role of the government as positive notably in introducing the forestation program. Members of the cooperatives were already using the land privately or in groups and they want to preserve that position despite the change of government.

3. Key statements Embodying Discourses by resource type

Pasture is at the center of understanding discourses revolving around the study of resource management in south Wello. This is related to the key role that prevailing cattle ideology and the role cattle economy played in the past to supplement or complement subsistence. Valuing other resources or the involvement of societal institution in other resources like forest or irrigation is a relatively a recent development, mainly resulting from external influences (largely from state and market forces) which brought irrigation and forest to the scene. Such developments directly and indirectly affect communal pasture.

3.1. Alansha Pasture: a symbol of community justice for the poor

Alansha, commonly called *metaya* ‘the throwing place’ with reference to the pasture has been at stake since imperial times. Forest and irrigation development in one way or another affected the communal nature of the resource supported by government initiated activities. The poor are seen to have benefited. As Birega Ali, a former wealthy person, put it: “Any poor person could benefit keeping his cattle”¹².

As to the origin of the idea that Alansha is a refuge stated in the rhyme *Alansha, yedeha Meshesha* Alansha a refuge for the poor, Birega states that it is the free pasture which attracted them to the area.

Some of the young and educated view Abba Dullo as having made the area communal in his interest since he owned many cattle and was the principal user of the land and so that he ‘cheated’ the people. The son of a former *chiqa* tax collector and a convert to Protestantism, Kebede Hussen is a school principal at Alasha Primary School. According to Kebede Hussen, Abba Dullo must have faced pressure from the community to share the pasture. He relates this to the story that Abba Dullo owned more than one hundred cattle (the kraal at Alasha is a

¹² *ye-manem deha kebet asadobet teteqeme.*

living witness) and his attempt to benefit from the land by making it communal. He said, “Abba Dullo was a psychologist.” Kebede Hussein added: “Abba Dullo made it communal land for his own benefit seeing that they would not realize this. If they were right the students who enrolled in this school [built on the pasture land] would have failed exams. However many of them have become doctors, managers, etc.”

3.1.1. Original land holders and migrants

At Alansha there is the notion of *original land holding groups* and those who obtained land after Derg land redistribution. Members of the original land holding group mention that all others came as migrants. As a result they do not respect each other as they are ignorant of their backgrounds. Yesuf Wadi one of the descendents of the original groups state that: “there is no respect at Alansha.” Yimer Said and others list the way these individuals came to the area.

The gradual increase in population is seen by some members of those who consider themselves as the original land holding groups, as having been promoted by the availability of ‘free’ pasture, unlike in neighboring areas. Reasons for the in-migration, according to Yimer Said, are said to have included. 1) Some individuals came to stay with their relatives (mainly married sisters) and started using the pasture, and became land owners during the Derg. 2) Others came to the area as *gebere* (employed farmers). They started building a hut close to the homestead of their employees and used the pasture area. 3) Some landowners brought their daughters’ husband to the area so that their daughters would inherit the land.

3.1.2. The Kaya Cattle: Interdependence between *belg* and *meher* dependent areas

The rearing of *kaya* cattle is related to entitlement. Elders mention that, Alasha used to be dependent on *Belg* crops during the imperial period. Most of the inhabitants sharecropped land from *meher* dependent areas and vice-versa. Mostly, *meher* area face shortage of fodder during May and June. At Alasha it is the time during which *belg* is harvested and animals are needed for threshing. With such common interest many send cattle and others accept them. On the other hand, some individuals bring others cattle to benefit from the pasture as a favor that they obtained *ribi* from the one who gave them *Kaya* cattle. However some individuals want to stay with the cattle which needs the involvement of the *Qire*. In this case a neighbor might report to the *Qire dagna* the burial association judge that his neighbor refuses returning the cattle to the owner.

3.1.3. The view of elders that the sacred nature of the pasture will prevail

Many elders see the preservation of the communal pasture as a sign of the strength of tradition over change as reflected in the statement: ‘This area has always known problems but there have always been solutions’.¹³

3.1.4. The View that the pasture is wasted and underutilized

Some of the educated elites view the pasture as unproductive and ‘wasted’ A schoolteacher who is a member of the Mekaneyesus Church stated “They have been [simply] hogging such a [productive] land for ages, so that it could not be used for development”.¹⁴

¹³ *Yihe botta chigirim attoti ayaweqim mefitihem sayagegn qerto ayawegim.*

3.2. Forest

Views on the importance of trees have changed--as can be seen from the following saying: "Daughters and [eucalyptus] trees look after you in old age."¹⁵ That forests are seen as a means of survival as is clear from the following statement: "We won't go to bed on an empty stomach while this tree is here".

Views of the people and the government are in opposition. The people's view suggests that the trees were planted ostensibly to attract rain, but the rains failed after the trees were planted. They view this as proof that religion was ignored. 'The mountain was covered with forest and we were told to go down the mountain. We live on what we used to cultivate leaving our residence to wild animals'.

Some people consider that they were duped by the food aid into losing their property as is expressed in the following statement: "We only saw the grain not the consequence of the trees, which ended in evicting us from our residences".

The use of the cultural *bele* institution to seek culprits for finding those who cut trees is viewed as devaluing the institution as is reflected in the following statement: "They introduced bele to prevent tree cutting. The level of hunger is getting worse. Who will go to bed in fear of Bele and the government? It is better to die tomorrow than today."

¹⁴ *Yehene yemesele meret le zemenat taqifewet le limat sayiwil qere*

¹⁵ *Set lijina zaf yitoral*

ANNEX III: SOUTH WELLO CASE STUDIES—MAYBAR LAKE AND IRRIGATION¹⁶

Maybar is located some 40 kms from Dessie town in Dessie Zuraya Wereda. The area has a lake with irrigation going down to the lowlands below, forestry in the hills above, connected to the Yegof State forest, and a pasture area to the North. The case study focuses on irrigation but also considers forestry and pasture resources in different historical periods. Conflicts and narratives are related to the viewpoints and discourses of different sections of the population under successive regimes. The role of various formal and informal institutions in natural resource management is considered as well as their transformations over time.

1. Discussion by type of resource

This site was selected because of its irrigation, it also has significant pasture resources and is close to the Yegof state forest. Although as we shall see that the three resources are interrelated, for the sake of analysis they need to be treated separately.

1.1. Irrigation

1.1.1. Mythological origins

Although Maybar is now a lake, it was believed to have been once a very small spring. According to a legend the spring had a lid with a lock, and one day a woman who was breastfeeding and had left her child at home to fetch water in the evening and in her haste forgot to lock the lid, and the spring overflowed and formed the lake. It is believed that the lake had been blessed by Getaw Seid, the Sheik of Maybar, and has medicinal properties; every Friday people from different parts of Wello come to bathe in the Lake and are often said to recover from various illnesses. (Hussein Ahmed, 79 years, Shek Ahmed Seid)

1.1.2. Development of irrigation¹⁷

According to elderly informants, some irrigation existed in the area prior to the Italian occupation; however, it was limited in area and variety of crops. Coffee, oranges and *chat* were the only permanent crops cultivated, and cereal crops (notably barley, wheat and oats in the highlands, and maize in the lowlands) were more common. Irrigation prior to the Italian occupation was limited to the Gisir river and small springs. Bananas were introduced by *Shek* Ali Husen who brought them from Dessie at the time of the Italian occupation. Carrots and cabbages were introduced during the Derg period at the Doye Ager irrigation on Dafatit river with seeds provided by the MOA for cooperative producers. Irrigation from the river out of Maybar Lake began in the final years of the Imperial regime in the Albore area. The first major irrigation ditch away from the river valley was dug in 1970 by Seid Ahmed, who was a *chiqua shum*, a leader appointed to collect taxes. Seid's father had the ambition to start irrigation but failed and it took his son many years to put his plan into practice, mainly because of opposition from *kegnazmach* Abate who had a mill on the river. Moreover, local

¹⁶ This case study is based on two reports submitted by MA student Indris Seid.

¹⁷ See sketch map below.

landlords had to be persuaded to allow the canal to pass through their land. He dug the canal by mobilizing the local community through work parties (*wuju*). The digging took one week. More lands became irrigated farms and at least ten households benefited.

During the Derg period, in 1984 a new big canal was constructed by a food for work program to bring water from Maybar to Albore area with the coordination of the Dessie Zurya *Wereda* PA chairman Sheh Hussen Jemal, and the number of users increased. The surrounding villagers were stricken by recurrent drought and famine and this pushed them to find alternative solutions. Hussen Seid, one of those who became involved, recalled:

For several years, we did not have sufficient rain and had poor harvests. Sheih Hussen Jemal mobilized us to construct canals and to bring water from Maybar to be used by us for irrigation purpose.

The market also played a role in motivating people towards using irrigation as Seid Ahmed noted:

Two years ago, orange production was good and the cash from the sale of it was very attractive. In addition, we started growing onions also for sale. However, for the last three years we have experienced pests, inadequate local market and fluctuating prices, hence, unstable income.

Returnees came with new ideas and experience and this also brought in the expansion of irrigation practice. Hasen Mohamed, a returnee recalled:

Prior to the resettlement program, oranges were produced for personal consumption but now it is becoming a cash crop. I am engaged in buying and selling oranges. I have one donkey I bought to transport oranges.

Under the EPDRF, another canal was recently developed and water was taken by residents of 034 KA east of Maybar; the use of irrigation by this community began as of March 2001. The management of the irrigation included committees and a *kot dagna*, a neighborhood judge who was a KA official, and *mengistawi budin* government team leaders were responsible for dispute settlement. It can be anticipated that conflicts will arise and need to be resolved between the users of this new canal and the former users.

1.2. Communal Pasture resources

Near Maybar there is a large valley, which is a communal grazing area referred to as Gossie Meda or Birru Meda.¹⁸ Elders claim that the area, like several other plains, which were previously forested, was declared communal grazing by *talak* Birru Lubo, a ruler of the Qallu area of South Wello in the mid 19th century. The communal grazing area was apparently open throughout the year, but could not be farmed. There were also areas that were seasonally closed during the rainy season (from the months of *Hamle* to *Hidar* [July to November]), and again between (*Yekatit* and *Mizazyza* [February to April]). Likewise the hillsides that were owned by landlords were closed during the rains (from the 5th of *Hamle* to *Hidar*). Thereafter the grass was harvested and anyone could graze their cattle there.

¹⁸ Other plains converted to grazing at the time included Gerado Meda, Felana Meda, Cheffa Meda, Kombolcha, and Beke Koratie near Ancharo.

During the late imperial period a landlord called *Kegnazmach* Abate sought to farm part of the communal grazing area but encountered resistance on the part of the community who elected elders (including *duberti* women) who went to Dessie and successfully appealed to the governor. The communal grazing area was apparently safeguarded by annual visits by the *Abegar* religious leader, who would inspect the area and inform the community if there were transgressors who could be punished. However, no specific cases were mentioned.

During the Derg period, the PA distributed land--including some of the grazing land in 1976. The distribution was done on the basis of the number of livestock. This meant that those with more livestock got more land and this was considered unacceptable so a second distribution was carried out. In 1978 the PA enclosed part of the grazing ground for farming barley and more in 1980 for collecting grass which was sold to provide funds for the army (1,200 *birr*). The community successfully appealed to the *Wereda* administrator in Dessie, Kasaye Gabisa, and the PA prevented individuals from farming the grazing land. Under the EPRDF, controls have been lax and some areas of the communal grazing land have been farmed. Another reason for converting grazing land to farmland was the famine of 1985.

1.3. Forestry

In imperial times Yegof mountain was covered with forests and different species of plants. The forest was demarcated in the late imperial period (Bahru 1998). There was also a forestation program conducted by the state in the last years of the imperial period through a food for work program. In the past local people cut trees illegally for agricultural tools only, but the sale of fuelwood was not common and there wasn't a shortage of fuelwood. However, people were illegally using the open and accessible space in the forest for grazing. The Yegof forest was harvested by the state for timber for the construction of offices.

During the Derg period the entire area around Yegof was demarcated for forestation, and this included areas which were customary grazing lands. Some areas were confiscated from private owners like the mountain nearest to Maybar Lake. Tree planting was started in 1984 by local communities through food for work, although there was much community resentment. Local people were involved in uprooting the seedlings, they were also planting seedlings carelessly. The MoA assigned forest guards who were responsible to report offenders to the PAs. It is generally believed that the forest was better protected than more recently since there were many more guards, and illegal cutting was considered to be a very serious offence. There was even a saying that one tree should be considered equal to the life of one person.

Community forests were planted through a food for work program on land confiscated from landlords such as W/ro Yeshiemebet and W/ro Aselefech Shibeshi. Each farmer was obliged to plant 300 to 500 seedlings. They were supposed to be managed by local communities. However, in practice they were under the control of the PAs which seldom used them except for obtaining income for the office, for construction of national contributions such as for soldiers.

During the period of transition from the Derg to the EPDRF, there was much deforestation of both state and community forests, although the community forests were even more affected. This was because the control of the PAs was weak at the end of the Derg period notably in 1989 and 1990. Moreover, the Derg soldiers camped around Tosafelana were cutting trees

from both state and community forests for fuelwood and landless returnees after the collapse of the Derg relied on sale of trees as a survival strategy.

Under the EPRDF state ownership of forests has continued though there has not been any new tree planting in the state forest. When trees are cut, guards report to the MOA development agent (DA), but only if the guards have seen the cutting themselves or have witnesses. The DA reports the case to KA.

If there are no witnesses the *bele* institutions may be employed. In this case three, five or more elderly people are elected by the community. They are referred to as *sheni*.¹⁹ Every member of the community is asked to swear as they cross over three things: a spear, *chat* and a rope, which are placed together, side by side, There is a strong belief that if a thief crosses and swears falsely he will die some days after, as will his relatives. If someone is reluctant to cross he is suspected.

Some of the former community forest areas have been redistributed after the *yewel meret* proclamation on the distribution of communal lands. Although some of those who received land for tree planting have planted seedlings and have been caring for them, it is too early to predict the likely outcome of this program.

2. Conflict perspective

An institutional analysis of three conflicts over irrigation water shows that both informal and formal institutions can be involved. Informal institutions consist of the water judge, and the *qire* burial association. Formal ones consist of the *mengistawi budin*, the Government Team and the Kebele Administration. The perceived advantage of the more informal institutions is that resolution in ‘cultural ways’ can bring a lasting solution and reconciliation, and involves provisions by the guilty party of bread or sheep,²⁰ which are consumed together and can bring about reconciliation, whereas resorting to the government structures can involve heavier fines and may not resolve the antagonisms and could even exacerbate them.

As for institutional roles in conflicts over forests only formal institutions were involved. The Kebele Administration brings those accused of cutting trees to its Social Court and in one case fined two persons who were identified as culprits 150 *birr* each. Two forest guards were also fined 50 *birr* each. One of the guards argued that the punishment was unfair since the area they have to cover is large and the villagers threaten them if they want to report illegal cuttings. One of the accused also argued that the accusation was unfair, and stated:

I was accused and fined by the KA social court without any concrete evidence. The KA official came to my house along with forest guards, and they found poles around my house which I had harvested from my own eucalyptus trees and did not trust me and I was taken to court and punished. Finally, I appealed to the Wereda Council and they came and examined the situation and they were able to confirm that the wood was harvested from my eucalyptus trees and the only mistake I did was that I cut my trees without the knowledge of the KA. But they

¹⁹ From the Oromo word for ‘five’ though informants are not aware of the connection.

²⁰ In one of the cases discussed the ‘guilty’ party was fined two sheep.

told me the punishment could not be reversed by the Wereda once it had been carried out by KA.

In one case in December 2000, in a *bele* a former forest guard under the Derg (who was expelled from his work since his father was an official of the *wereda* peasant association) admitted to cutting a tree from the state forest rather than swearing and walking over the objects. He said he did to give it to give the pole to a friend who was building a house. There were four other culprits and they were asked to buy a goat as punishment.

3. Entitlements and narratives

Views concerning natural resource management differ according to who the speaker is. The perspectives of the rich and the poor in terms of land and livestock, of women and men, returnees and ex-soldiers, peasants, officials, forest guards etc., can be contrasted. The opportunities and constraints have also changed from imperial times until the present. The following section explores some of these differences over time.

3.1. The late Imperial period

In imperial times the pressure on grazing lands was relatively low and the communal grazing land was considered to have been more important for the landless. Everybody had access to use the *beni* which was open throughout the year. The poor had only the communal grazing land but the rich in land had extra grazing lands, and even had separate areas land for different categories of livestock (for cattle, oxen and pack animals). The poor had access to sharecropping and migration options. A former landlord, Assefa Yimer, recalled:

Prior to the Derg (nationalization of the land), landlords did not drive their oxen and cows to the *beni*, they sent only horses and mules there because the quality of the grass of the *Beni* was poor and unsuitable for the health of the animals (causing *kulkul*, a swelling around their throats). And there was also excess pasture owned by the rich and there was no shortage of grazing land. The scarcity of grazing land became serious after the Derg. Land was nationalized and distributed to all members of the Peasant Association [PA], and population pressure, famine, and the conversion of the customary pasture land into state forest contributed to a shortage of pasture. During the 1985 famine, more animals died as a result of lack of pasture, and then private grazing lands were converted into farms. Trees were planted on hillsides by the state and the grass in open areas of the forest were closed throughout the year.

A landless person, Yimer Tesema, who used to make his living from share breeding animals recalled:

I was landless and had nothing to produce. The survival of my family and myself could have been impossible if the *Beni* had not existed. I was depending on it as I had more than 20 sheep and two cows. I took my share of the grown sheep and heifers and bulls and sold them in order to purchase food items.

Sharecropping at that time was also not limited to one area as Mohamed Ibre recalled:

I had the opportunity to arrange sharecropping with people who were rich in land and you could take this arrangement anywhere out of your village (*Mofer Zelel*)

which was difficult during the time of the Derg when you were restricted to within one PA.

However, sharecropping was not easy, as Yimer Habtu a landless tenant in imperial times noted:

I used to look after the cattle of the landlords and plow their farms and my mother was also grinding grains and fetching water for them. We did this work for them because we were poor and landless and mainly because our house was built from land we got from them. I was fed up with that life and to escape from it I went to Addis Ababa to search for labor work.

Although landlords controlled the hillsides, they did not prevent the poor from grazing there after they had harvested grass. Seid Ahmed, an 82-year-old man, recalled:

In Haile Selassie's time, although the most parts of the hillsides were under the ownership of the landlords, these were open to everybody after the harvesting the grass from the month of *Hidar* up to the end the month of *Sene*.

It seems that attempts to encroach on the communal areas were rare and resisted by the poor. Ali Yesuf, aged 59, recalled:

During the imperial times, no visible attempt was made to cultivate the communal grazing land (Biru Meda) by individual farmers. Well, the landlords tried to snatch our communal grazing land but they had failed because in the past we had a co-ordinated effort and a common interest to resist them and everybody joined hands to appeal to the higher official up to the level of the imperial office.

Gender relations in agricultural production was one factor which resulted in specific problems and arrangements by female-headed households as Aminat Ali recalled:

Because I am female and was oxless, my land was infrequently ploughed, and yields were low. I was forced to give it to others, as it is not culturally accepted for me to plough. My private grazing land was mostly used by my brother to graze his oxen. There were some female-headed households who used to make arrangements to exchange grass freely for those who ploughed their farms. As a woman, I had a lot problems related to boundary conflicts, as my land was often taken by men with land close to mine. The problem was resolved through *yehager shimagile* (local elders).

3.2. The Derg Period

During the Derg period, some of the communal pasture land was taken by the PA, and some was redistributed as farm and or grazing land, although holdings were very small.

Yimam Ahmed, who described himself as rich in livestock during the Derg period recalled:

After the land nationalization, those who were landless received farm and pasture land and there was a demand to rear animals as share-breeding (*yeribbi*). I gave cows and sheep as *yeribbi* to the poor and I reared some myself as well.

Seid Abegaz, an informant who became poor during the Derg period said:

At the beginning year of the Derg period, which was in 1978 parts of *Beni* of Birumeda was taken by the PA and was converted into farm land and the grazing

land which I received was very small and insufficient to support or produce sufficient animal feed, so that I could not rear animals even through the share-breeding arrangement and I became poor.

Encroachments into the communal pasture have become more frequent as Ali Yesuf recalls:

But now most parts of the *Beni* are taken and cultivated by individual farmers. The cultivation of the *Beni* is due to the population pressure and it decreases grazing land for the community herds, putting more pressure on open grassland of the state forest since the community needs grazing beyond the fields during the crop season.

In the Derg period, the cooperatives created divisions and conflicts over resources. Yimer Habtu, who had left as a wage laborer and returned to the area at the time of the Derg, said:

Two years later, land to the tiller was proclaimed and I got the chance of receiving land. I became a member of a producers' co-operative. At the time of Derg, I was producing enough to eat.

Hussen Kasa, who did not become a member of the cooperatives, said:

The fertile and the best land was brought under the ownership of the co-operative. We individual farmers were thrown to the hilly and stony area. To be a member one had to have at least an ox and agricultural implements such as a plow and yoke that I lacked.

The villagization also created disruptions by moving people off the hillsides and pushing settlements closer to the pasture area, as Yimer Ahede recalled:

We lost our pasture land and eucalyptus trees planted around our homestead when we moved to new selected villagization site. In the settlement we did not have enough pasture land so that feeding animals was difficult. To construct houses we harvested our trees so that this also contributed to deforestation. We were also instructed to build latrines but it was not our culture and it is a new practice.

3.3. The Post-Derg period

Land shortages have been exacerbated by the return of soldiers and returnees from resettlement. Yimer Hussen, a former soldier, stated:

I was at the warfront from 1976 until 1982. After many years, I received land when reallocation of land was made to returnees and ex-soldiers. When my father died, his land was divided between me and two other returnees.

Returnee women faced particular hardships, as Lubaba Shikur lamented:

I divorced my husband because of poverty. We agreed to divorce and live separately because we don't have land. We have two children, one is living with him and the little one with me. Both of us are returnees. I face problems to make a living. Concern [an NGO] provides some food for my child.

However, some informants complained about their land being redistributed to returnees. Yimer Habtu who had been a member of the cooperative under the Derg stated:

Now I cannot produce to sustain my family because during the reallocation of land, much of my land was given to returnees and ex-soldiers.

Newly married households are also suffering from land shortage, as Ahmed Seid, one of them, pointed out:

After I got married, I asked the KA officials to give me land three years ago but still there is nothing. Without land, my life will be dark and hopeless.

Shortage of farmland and the current drought has forced people to illegally cut the state forest to sell wood and buy grain. Hassen Yimer, a forest guard, stated:

The last three years, there has been drought and there is nothing to gain from agriculture. At first the surrounding community cut their own trees for sale and then they began to engage in illegal cutting of trees of the state forest; until last year the wood was sold for planks. In the month of *Megabit* [March 2001], all members of the surrounding village undertook a *Bele* and then cutting of trees for *Tawla* [planks] stopped. Because of the fear of the *Bele*, people have shifted to burning wood to produce charcoal. The landless youth and school boys are the major ones involved. Things are beyond out control; we are only two (forest guards) and the coverage of the forest is too big to control. The existing system does not allow guards to accuse somebody unless he has eyewitnesses. In the Derg time, the guard had the right to take culprits involved in illegal tree cutting to court.

Yeshi Reta, an MOA Development Agent, mentioned that tree cutting worsens in bad years. She felt that the new decision to provide individual hillside plots was a possible solution:

We could not avoid the problem and we tried different mechanism, like *Bele*. We also distributed hillsides to landless people who are responsible to care for trees planted in the given area. The redistribution of the *Yewelmeret* to individuals is hopeful and it should be encouraged. Some people have planted trees and protected them well. The individual farmers can use the grass for their own needs. The grass in the state forest is not used by community. It is sold and the money obtained goes to the Ministry of Finance. Sometimes when there is a need the grass (from open areas of the state forest) is given to elderly and militia people for thatching their houses.

According to Ali Musa, who is a KA official:

Individuals who received *yewelmeret*, are expected to plant, take care of and protect trees and avoid the state and community forest. It is beneficial for individuals because they can use the grass from their own plots.

The state forest is seen as underused. Mohammed Yimam, who was a former forest guard during the Derg, stated:

The eucalyptus should be cut at least every three years. So far they are not harvested, neither the state nor the community get any benefit from them. Unless children are pinched and Eucalyptus are harvested, they do not give benefit.²¹

3.4. Different viewpoints according to categories

3.4.1. Wealth

Generally the poor view the imperial period as a time of plenty without famine and where common grazing was plentiful and sharecropping and migration were viable options. However, this is a somewhat romanticized view. The other extreme highlights the oppression of the landlords. The wealthy tend also to view the past as a period of abundance and emphasize increasing impoverishment.

3.4.2. Age and generation

The elderly also subscribe to the view that things were better in the past, when there was no shortage of land, plenty of grazing, good yields and little population pressure. They stress the fact that the poor could gain a livelihood by working for the rich through sharecropping and share-rearing. Customary institutions such as the religious leaders (*abegar*) and the burial associations (*qire*) are seen as having lost their role, and the state is seen as increasingly intrusive.

3.4.3. Returnees/ Former soldiers

Returnees from resettlement lament having been forcibly sent away, and that their land was redistributed. Upon returning, they have generally not been able to gain access to much land and remain among the poorest. They sometimes obtain food aid and some were employed as guards but this is limited and they see no option but the sale of wood for survival. They often have to rely on relatives for gifts of grain. Former soldiers tend to feel that they lost out, since they have very small plots of land, and have few livestock.

4. Institutional transformations

4.1. Qire

4.1.1. Institutionalization

Although some informants saw the *qire* as an age-old institutions others were able to provide evidence of its transformations and institutionalization. Changes in the *Qire* institutions were discussed by Yesuf Yimam, aged 85:

When I was a child, the number of *qire* members was small and the contribution was grain and *injera* to be served to people attending the burial ceremony.

Although two informants (Seid Ahmed aged 82, and Ali Muhe aged 78) claimed that their fathers were *qire* members, Fantie Abegaz, aged 100 stated:

²¹ *Lij kalteqonetete, Bahirzaf kalteqorete tikim ayisetim.*

I remember that people were not organized in *qire* before the Italian occupation. At that time when someone died, he was buried by his relatives and neighbors. Women residing nearby were involved in baking *qita* (flat bread) and roasting *qolo* (grains) to be served to people attending the burial ceremony. Gradually, after the Italian occupation, residents of some villages began contributing *tire* (grain) and salt (used to purchase coffee). They established *qire* and selected their leader. The *qire* became important with increasing population and the expense for burial became unaffordable economically and socially. Members have been participating in different activities - some serve as messengers and others dig graves.

This view was supported by Seid Refaw aged 82:

The *qire* became more formalized recently during the Derg; before that the *qire* was led by a *dagna* (judge). After the Literacy Campaign [1980], a secretary and treasurer became committee members working along with the leader. But in imperial times, the *qire* played more of a role in resource management than under the Derg because the *qire* collapsed along with the fall of Haile Selassie. The *qire* lost its role and everything was run by the government.

4.1.2. Role in natural resource management

How far did the *qire* have a role in natural resource management? Several informants argued that in imperial times the *qire* did play a role in managing the communal grazing area. Yesuf Yimam argued:

The *qire* had an important role to play in protecting the communal grazing land in imperial times. Both *qire* and *Abegar* were working together, going from corner to corner to see whether the *beni* was taken by individuals, and if so, they could punish offenders.

Seid Ahmed, a *chiqa shum*, an official under the Imperial government, said:

In imperial times, the *chiqa* consulting the *qire* before implementing anything coming from higher officials. But this was not legally accepted and we did it informally for the sake of the people in their interests and to give priority to the community.

During the Derg, the *qire* was excluded and although some attempt has been made to involve *qire* leaders over state forest protection in recent years, this has had limited success. Arage Yimer, a *qire* leader for 12 years (from 1970 – 1982) had this to say about the changing role of the *qire* in natural resource management:

In imperial times the *qire* had no direct involvement in land issues and management of communal grazing land, but it played a great role in co-ordinating and in bringing common interest for the community towards using and protecting communal grazing land. During the Derg, the *qire* had no role in resource management which was the concern of the PA and even today the *qire* does not show any interest in protection of communal grazing land. The current government (EPDRF) has given it a special position to play in resource management but the interest of the government is only in state forests. The *qire* leader is one member of the cultural committee (*sheni*) responsible for punishing culprits involved in illegal cutting of trees from state forest.

Abegfat Ali, aged 85 years, explained the changes and the failure of the *qire* even in managing communal grazing lands in the following way:

In Haile Selassie's time, the people through their *qire* had unity to appeal to protect their common property and to use commonly. During the Derg, the *qire*'s role was taken by the PA and this government has given it an artificial position and it is working on the governmental side. During the transitional period from Derg to EPDRF, the *beni* was cultivated (the cultivation for common grazing land continues) nobody tried to protect it. The *Qire* was supposed to but was incapable because it lost its role and confidence and lacked experience.

4.2. Abegar

The *Abegar* is a Muslim religious leader, whose position is hereditary. Under the EPRDF there has been an attempt to involve persons referred to as *abegar* in a 'Cultural committee' which among other things seeks to identify culprits of tree-cutting. Yosef Yimam, an elderly informant described the *abegar*'s role as follows:

In the past, the *Abegar* was a religious, respected and honest person who worked for the community not for his individual benefit. The *Abegar* was involved in big issues such as murder and mediated to find lasting solutions. The title of *Abegar* was not given to any one. It was inheritance from generation to generation (passing from father to son, from relative to relative). In the past, you could not find many *Abegar* as today. This current government has tried to involve the position of *Abegar* in resource management to serve in the *sheni* committee.

Endris Yimer, who is a member of *sheni* cultural committee explained its role as follows:

The objective of this committee to fight against harmful traditional practice such as rape, theft and to promote useful ones. Besides, through the *bele*, it is involved in identifying criminals that have been cutting trees from state forest illegally under the cover of darkness. Of course, during imperial times, *Abegar* worked with *qire* and *chiqa shum* but that was something of their will and interest, not the pressure from external bodies.

4.3. Water Dagna/water judge/committee

The two names, the water Dagna and water committee are used interchangeably by local water users. The former term was used earlier referring to a single person who was appointed at the beginning year to see to administer irrigation. As the number of users increased, committees were formed included a judge, secretary, and members.

Recalling the institutionalization of irrigation Seid Ahmed, aged 82, recounted:

Irrigation is not new, the practice started long before the Italian occupation, however the coverage was small and only coffee and *chat* were grown by few users. There was no water administrator up to the time of Derg. This began very recently due to the expansion of irrigation after the development of new canals and bringing of water from Maybar to Albore area.

Yimam Ahmed (who was a former PA official and used to serve as water administrator at the initial stage when canals were constructed) recalled how the responsibility was moved from the PA to local committees under the Derg:

In 1980 as a PA official I was in charge of distributing and supervising irrigation. At the beginning it was easy to manage but later the issue of irrigation became a difficult matter, there was a shortage of rain and the number of water users was increasing resulting in completion. When I was away or in my absence some sought to use water when it was not their turn leading to conflicts. It was very difficult for me to administer, so I asked the water users to appoint a water judge to replace me. Finally they selected one in 1982, and later they set up a committee.

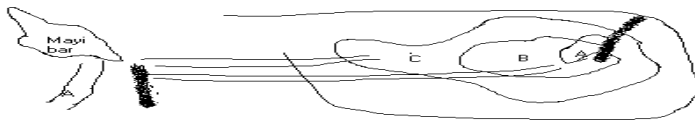
Under the EPDRF, water committees continued to function and became more complex with increases in users and new canals. The lowest level of government structure, the Government teams became responsible for overseeing the administration in cases of disputes. Yimam continued:

During the EPDRF, the water is not only administered by water committee alone, but with the governmental teams monitoring on the top.

Ibre Mohammed, who is currently a water judge, confirmed this view:

I am responsible to allocate water and supervise the users to ensure they use the water according to their turn. I report any case found to be violating rules and abuse to the governmental team.

Rough sketch of canals developed around Albore area



Irrigation was in Area A before and during imperial time, the water source was Gisir river.

Irrigation farm was developed using Maybar water in the last year of the Haile Selassie regime.

A new canal was developed, and a large area came under irrigation farm during the Derg, the canal was constructed through a food for work program and community participation.

During the EPDRF, March 2001, an irrigation canal was dug by residents of 034 PA.

Table: Time of events and conflicts

Time	Events	Consequence	Outcomes
1957	Kegnasmach Abate trying to farm Biru Meda	Community appeal to government of Wello	Appeal successful
1970	The residents of Albore were asked to pay two separate land tax by church and state	Appeal to the imperial government	Appeal successful
1977	Albore community developed irrigation using Maybar	Conflict over use of water between upper and lower stream	Resolved by discussion and agreed to ration the water.
1978	The PA converted parts of the Biru Meda communal grazing land	The community particularly the poor appealed to Dessie Zuria <i>Wereda</i> Administration office	Appeal successful
1980	Shortage of rainfall and overuse of irrigation	Conflict among water users	Formation of water <i>Dagna</i>
1999-2000	Failure of crops due to famine	People engaged in cutting trees	Deforestation

ANNEX IV: SOUTH WELLO CASE STUDIES—YEGOF MOUNTAIN

This report is based on three cases studies of Mount Yegof in Dessie Zuria Wereda of South Wello Zone. The first part relates to forest management.²² The second to irrigation on the eastern side of the Mountain and in particular a site called Albati;²³ The third part relates to the southern part of the Mountain, and in particular the pasture and irrigation at Wedayi and Weraba.²⁴

1. Yegof Forest

1.1. Historical origins

The historical origins of the forest, as Bahru²⁵ points out, are somewhat nebulous, but informants made claims to early intervention by royal leaders (Bahru 1998:107-8). One of Bahru's informants alleged that the ramparts on the summit were the enclosure of Emperor Lebna Dengel's sixteenth century palace. Others claimed that Queen Werqit of Wello, an opponent of Emperor Tewodros in the mid-nineteenth century, used the summit as her stronghold. One of Bahru's informants suggested that *Dejazmach* Birru Lubo probably under Werqit, prevented peasants even from grazing livestock on the mountain. Some of our informants claim that some forestation was carried out at this time and under the protection of the *chiqa shum* "tax collectors", but that peasants were allowed to graze animals there. Italian reports mentioned fines of up to fifty Maria Theresa thalers for unauthorized cuttings by guards posted there from the time of Emperor Menelik. These accounts fit with the theme illustrated in Bahru's paper of royal control over forests, and an antagonism between interests of the peasants and the state already in imperial times.

Bahru also stresses the connection between political and religious authority, noting that there were annual sacrifices (*wedaja*) of a red bull on the summit, which was believed to induce rainfall. In addition there are graves of holy men (*adbar*),²⁶ on the slopes. The summit was apparently considered sacred. Bahru notes that informants referred to the forest using terms such as *Ifur* and *kebriya* attesting "to its protected and hallowed nature" (1998:108). According to one of our informants²⁷ on the summit there is a large clay incense burner (*gach'a*) allegedly one meter high by which the sacrifices were performed.

²² Part of this section has been published in Pankhurst 2001b.

²³ This section is based on work carried out by Mengistu Seyoum. The study area is included under one PA referred to as Kebele 029. The users belong to three different villages: Abadia-Ager, Sherif-Ager and Chatu-Genda. Each village is organized under one *qire*.

²⁴ This section is based on two reports by Kassahun Kebede.

²⁵ I should like to thank Professor Bahru for kindly allowing our team members to make use of the photocopied files from the Ministry of Agriculture in his possession.

²⁶ Referred to as *Hujub* by our informants, who mentioned in particular those of *Sheh* Yassin Durih and *Sheh* Mejele at Atirshign.

²⁷ Mekonen Aklog of the Dessie Zuria Forestry Department.

1.2. The Italian period

The question of the extent of deforestation in Wello has been the subject of controversy, and Crummey (1998) has argued on the basis of comparing photographs taken during the occupation with recent ones, that there was already a considerable extent of deforestation and that there is now more tree cover. The photographic comparison provided by Crummey shows that many areas of South Wello have a greater tree cover in 1997 than when Maugini photographed them in 1937. From the photographs, the environs of the Kombolcha plain seemed to be fairly denuded with some bushes and euphorbia. Although Maugini took photographs from Kombolcha airport and one is in the direction of Yegof, it is too far away to ascertain the extent of forest cover.²⁸ Despite the inconclusive photographic evidence, Yegof can be assumed to be an exception which must have been forested. Crummey notes that the Forestry Commission for Italian East Africa which was looking for woods to use for bridges, housing and furniture was “extremely disappointed and note only two ‘real’ forests of consequence Yegof and Albuko” (1998:14). Moreover, as Bahru points out, the Italians set up a saw mill to exploit Yegof, which must have meant that there was sufficient potential. One of his informants performed “a vivid re-enactment of the process by which big trunks were pulled by a dozen people and oxen and then made to roll sown straight to the site of the sawmill” (1998:109). One of our informants even claimed that the Italians planted a pole on top of the mountain and used a pulley system to bring logs down.

We can therefore conclude that the Yegof forest must have been heavily exploited during Italian occupation, and presumably increasingly thereafter due to the growth of Kombolcha town. To this day the impact of the town can be clearly seen.

1.3. The imperial period and the imposition of the state forest

Discussions with informants in Bekimos Kebele Administration (KA) on the eastern slope of Mount Yegof suggest that there was no clear traditional communal forest management in Yegof in imperial times. There were a number of officials acknowledged or established by the State,²⁹ notably the local tax collectors (*Chiqa shum*), and some landlords paying tribute in kind and later tax in cash (*Gebbar*). The state also assigned functionaries such as the *Abba bidra* who collected payments in kind and labor from peasants and the *Atbiya dagna* responsible for local judicial matters. However, though the latter was supposed to have nominal jurisdiction over the forest area, in fact no rules for forest use or sanctions against abuse seem to have been instituted apart from people having to ask permission to take wood for graves (*lahid*), and, at times, the authorities tried to prevent livestock grazing. Although the summit was considered sacred, and sacrifices were performed there, these seem to have been mainly about invocations for rain rather than forest management.

Yegof was declared a State forest in 1965 and some limited planting occurred prior to the 1974 revolution. Indeed Bahru notes that it is one of only two out of thirty-nine state forests in Wello that had plantations before the revolution. Bahru also points out the 1972-3 drought raised official consciousness about the need for conservation. Afforestation began in earnest

²⁸ I should like to thank Marc Wilks and the staff of the Istituto Agronomico d’Oltremare who e-mailed me scanned images of the photographs from Maugini’s collection identified by Crummey.

²⁹ For details see Yeraswork (1995:101-2).

that year, particularly under the Governor, *Dejazmach* Mamo Seyoum, who visited the nursery regularly. Up to a thousand workers were said to have been employed on the Yegof site.

Conflicts between the state forest and the local people arose with the afforestation programs, and the delimitation of the forest area. As the MoA files discussed by Bahru show, this involved establishing which areas were considered *beni*, or common land, which areas were considered *gebbar*, land on which taxes had been paid and which should be considered *mengist*, or state land. Local elders were involved in the process, which resulted in much conflict with local people.

1.4. The transition from imperial to Derg rule, drought and urban expansion

It is probably no coincidence that the land use conflict became most heated at the time of the transition between imperial and Derg rule. Bahru quotes MoA records showing that farmers argued that it was doubly unjust that they should be detained for farming and grazing cattle on “*rist*” land to which they had claims on the basis of descent and on which they had paid tax. The high point of the conflict, was in the months of April-July 1974. A clear resistance to state authority emerged. Farmers uprooted seedlings, destroying roads and chasing away laborers. Interestingly Bahru notes that after the 1974 drought, which was blamed on intrusive officials, one of these was expected to provide a red bull to slaughter on the mountain to propitiate the spirits. This was quite a remarkable concession to the power of local institutions. In August 1975 farmers were even threatening to go Addis Ababa despite the rains to appeal to the Emperor against the appropriation of their “*rist*” land.

During the Derg period, too, it was at the time of the 1985 famine that the concern for afforestation and the conflict with local people became most salient. A number of factors were at work. The expansion of the town of Kombolcha and especially the textile factory from below, the delimitation of the forest from above in 1986, and the removal of people living on the slopes, taken to resettlement, and volatized in the lowlands were the most salient. Just as informants mentioned to me in 1987 (Pankhurst 1992a) the sense in which they felt hemmed in from the town on one side and the forest on the other the same feeling were voiced to Bahru in 1997.³⁰

1.5. The Derg period and the dynamics of resettlement differentiation

The case of Yegof shows some of the complexities of community-state relations, when it came to the villagization and resettlement. The villagization sites were in the lowlands, and at the southern foot of the mountain people were settled on a communal grazing area where malaria was rife and a Producers’ Cooperative took over the grazing area. As soon as they were able, people abandoned the villagization sites. Resettlement from the Yegof area was already carried out in 1978 by the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission to Bale. Men were taken forcibly, some even at night, many of whom were not suffering from famine, apparently through victimization, and their families were allowed to join them only two year later. For instance, informants from Bekimos Kebele Administration claimed that forty-two households

³⁰ Bahru quotes the following statement: “The forest from above and the town from below are pressing hard on us” (1998: 87).

were taken, forty of whom have returned. In 1977 there were also some young men taken forcibly to work on state farms in the Setit Humera area.

The 1985 resettlement from the Yegof area included *both* people who wanted to leave because they were famine victims and had no food left and households taken against their will. One of the former, Said Hussen, made this clear: “I wanted to save my children, the authorities did not touch me”.³¹ Others mentioned that once they had sold their oxen they did not see how they could remain independent farmers. However, even among the famine victims not all really wanted to go. As one man pointed out “I would have preferred the hyena and the kite of my country to eat me, but there was the propaganda (*qisqesa*)”, suggesting that there would be renewed famine.

The coercion was ruthless, a salient example of how the idea of a harmonious community can be myth. Some mentioned that they had left ripening crops in the fields, and one woman recalled that she was seized from a grain store where her brother had been hiding her to be taken with her husband; others mentioned that their children were kidnapped from the marketplace to ensure that the parents left.

At first sight, it seems strange that from the same area there was both voluntary and coerced resettlement almost simultaneously. Three factors account for the difference. First, there was a difference between the earlier and later periods. Those who left in late 1984 and early 1985 (from November 1984 to April 1985), most of whom were taken to Assosa, Wellega and to Illubabor generally left voluntarily, or with little pressure. However, in 1985 the rains seemed promising and peasants did not want to leave. In May 1985 with a long way off before the harvest and many of the poorer people starving, there were volunteers as well as coercion. By October with the harvest in sight the resettlement was entirely forced (mainly to Gojjam).

A second factor relates to the kind of land peasants had. Those with irrigated land had managed to grow crops despite the failure of the rains (Pankhurst 1992a: 69). Bahru presents figures of resettlement from four Peasant Associations around Yegof. A total of 714 peasants (households) were resettled out of 3,749 (19 percent). Of these 255 (35 percent) were living in the forest and had a plot there, 137 (19 percent) lived in the forest and had a plot on the slope, and 375 (52 percent) were living in the forest and had a plot on the plain. It seems likely that the middle category were those who were more prone to victimization as they are more likely to have had irrigated land. In one area a former PA leader was able to obtain a fairly large area of irrigated land that he still retains.

A third factor was bitter conflict within the community and score settling through which those in leadership positions used their power to send their rivals and enemies to resettlement. Those in power could then give the land of the resettled to their own relatives and allies. In other words, the resettlement was used as a means of premeditated victimization. One informant made this point very evocatively: “They had [already] distributed the land among themselves in their heads”³² There were also allegations that land was given to those able to bribe officials. Although officially the resettlement was meant to remove people from the state forest area, not all of those who were resettled lived or had land in the forest area, and

³¹ *Lij awet'alehu biye, dagna alnekagnim.*

³² *Meretun bechinqilatachew tekefalewit neber*

many compounds and fields from which settlers were taken were then reoccupied or redistributed, which confirms this interpretation.

1.6. The transition between Derg and EPRDF rule and the issue of returnees

Bahru notes that although worries about deforestation appear in the MoA files earlier during the Derg period, large scale deforestation was associated with the breakdown of political order in what he terms ‘the period of retreat’ at the end of the Derg period. The declaration of the mixed economic policy in 1990 “emboldened peasants to cut trees with impunity and utilize forest reserves for farm and pasture” (Bahru 1998:106). More significantly, Bahru notes, the escalation of the civil war and the stationing of large military units “wrecked havoc on the forests. Notorious culprits in this regard were the *Zendo* (Serpent) and *Azo* (crocodile) units camped at Sulula”. They were cutting trees indiscriminately not only for firewood but for sale, but also, as the narrative goes, “for the benefits of their mistresses”. In the last stage before its downfall the Derg did attempt to hand over forests to communities but this generally did not have the effect of preserving them.

In the period of uncertain conditions until the EPRDF consolidated its power, there was apparently serious destruction of forests. Like the Derg the EPRDF at first attempted to hand over forests to communities, again seemingly with little success in terms of preserving them. However, gradually the need to re-establish forests and forest guarding was recognized by the MoA under the new government. There was a clear awareness that extensive destruction had taken place. The blame was often put on returnees and ex-soldiers, although they were no doubt not the only culprits. In fact another category that has been accused was the armed forest guards themselves, who found themselves without salaries, and whose food rations were often seriously delayed. In one case a guard supervisor was even accused of collusion with officials, and the matter was taken so seriously by the administration, that it went beyond the zonal level to the Region.

However, as Bahru suggests, the fuelwood and construction interests of Kombolcha town and the commercial saw mills are undoubtedly the driving force behind the logging and abuse of the state forest. With prices of wood at 2,500 *birr* per cubic meter in the year 2000 and having reached 4,000 *birr* in 1991 the incentives are high. Some of the plantation areas that are considered mature for harvesting have recently been auctioned off to businessmen with the capacity to exploit them.

Returnees include those who came back from resettlement, Derg soldiers, wage-laborers returning from work on state farms and in Asseb, and refugees from the Eritrean conflict. The exact numbers and proportions are unknown. However, data obtained from officials of three Kebele Administrations (KAs) on the slopes of Yegof, if accurate, would suggest that returned settlers may represent a little over ten percent and ex-soldiers less than one percent of the households.³³

Generally, returnees are amongst the poorest section of the population and suffer from shortage of land and livestock. Returnees in Yegof as elsewhere found that their land had been redistributed. In some cases relatives had obtained the land, but more often it had been given to strangers (*ba'd*). Returnees were generally able to join a relative and obtain land to

³³ For details see Pankhurst 2001b.

build a house. One settler referred to this as “A seat for my bottom”³⁴ But even where relatives had kept or obtained their land, that did not necessarily mean that the relatives were willing to hand land back to returnees, as they too suffered from land shortage. Some returnees bitterly complained about being let down by even very close relatives. On the whole returnees were able to get small backyard plots of 20 m. x 30 m. to grow a little fresh maize (*ishet*). Some were provided *yemote kedda* “land of the deceased”. However such land was often of poor quality. Some returnees complained about the label ‘sefari’ settler being still applied to them.

In a group discussion in Bekimos Kebele Administration, out of 36 returnees only 4 had more than two *t'imad* (half a hectare), 20 (more than half) had simply a *bota*, the house and backyard plot, and a third (12) had no land at all and were relying on relatives (*tet'egiten*).

Returnees have, therefore, been among those arguing for land redistribution. In Dessie Zuria *Wereda* land redistribution was carried out in 1997 in 15 *Kebele* Administrations (22 of the previous Peasant Associations), apparently selected on the basis of average land holdings being greater than half a hectare in these PAs. A total of 7,254 households obtained 6,314 hectares, i.e. 0.8 ha per household. Data does not seem to have been collected on how many of these households were returnees or settlers, as opposed to other categories of landless, notably newly established households, which suggests that returnees have not had much political impact and that the issue is not considered important, and has not been made part of the political agenda.

However, it seems that where redistribution did take place settlers were beneficiaries. In two KAs within the Yegof area where redistribution did occur settlers gained about half a hectare of land and are therefore in a better position than in neighboring KAs where distribution was not carried out. Data for Atari Mesk suggests that eighty-eight out of 200 people (44 percent) who gained land in the redistribution were former settlers, and apparently all settler households gained some land.³⁵ In some areas returnees who came back early in the transition period were given positions of authority in KAs since they were not considered to be tarnished by involvement in the Derg administration. This, in turn, led to their having better access to land.

Returnees not only suffered from smaller land holdings, but also own less livestock than before they were resettled. In a group discussion with 30 returnees in Bekimos KA, half claim that they did not have any cattle now, whereas only 20 percent did not have any before they left, and only a third now have one ox or more, whereas half had an ox or more previously.

Given survival difficulties, returnees resort to selling and charcoal. Some of the women collect dung for sale as fuel and grass to sell as fodder. Other options include wage-labor notably in peak agricultural seasons (weeding at a rate of 3 *birr* a day), wage labor in Kombolcha town, and sharecropping and livestock share-rearing on unfavorable terms. A few are involved in crafts such as a weaver, and some women spin. Those with some land produce vegetables for sale in Kombolcha. One exceptional returnee was able to gain employment in the textile factory owing to literacy skills he had gained in the resettlement.

³⁴ *Yeqit'e meqemech'a*.

³⁵ 25 of the 200 who gained land were former soldiers.

Returnees and ex-soldiers have also been seen to be returning to hillside areas within the state forest from which they were removed and even of encroaching further into the forest. Data was obtained from 3 Kebele Administration officials and a field visit was made to a fourth. In Bekimos KA on the eastern side of the mountain KA officials claim that there are no people living or cultivating within the forest boundary, whereas in Metene KA the officials claim that there are two persons with houses in the forest. In Atari Mesk, a KA on the northern side of the mountain officials gave the figure of 11 households out of whom 7 were former settlers. It may be that since the information was officially requested, the numbers have been underestimated. Visits to the southern part of the mountain by members of our team in July 1999, in February 2000 and March 2001 suggest that there may be more ‘illegal’ settlement there.

1.7. Appropriation and resistance of local institutions

The relations between the state and the communities have been marked by the attempt of successive governments to coopt local leaders and institutions. We have seen how already in imperial times the state sought to impose its control on the forest especially through demarcation and plantation. Local elders were involved in the demarcation process that resulted in much conflict. However, in the transition between the imperial and the Derg rule peasant resistance became stronger. There was also the case of an official providing a bull to be sacrificed by spiritual leaders. This suggests an appreciation even by administrators of the importance of working in ways that are understandable and appreciated by the people.

During the Derg period, the penetration of the state to the local level through the formation of Peasant Associations enabled the state to impose its will to a greater degree. It seems that the only involvement of indigenous institutions was when culprits responsible for wood cutting could not be found. Since the number of guards was limited (65) each of whom had to patrol large areas (90 ha) and illegal cutting often occurred at night the chances of a guard catching the culprit were limited. Then the state officials expected local institutions to play a role. This included the *qire dagna*, the burial association leader who was expected to bring members together for an oath taking ceremony *mehalla*, and people had to walk over the *bele* stick of a sheik swearing they were not involved. If caught a culprit could be excommunicated through ostracism (*semona*). Some grave disputes could be taken to the *Abegar* spiritual leaders who are called *dem adraqi* “blood-dryers” to be solved by their ‘court’ (*berekebot yifetta*) but this does not seem to have been common for resource management issues.

During the period of transition, in addition to infringements and tree cutting by farmers, returnees, soldiers and later ex-soldiers, the forest guards whose salaries were suspended were themselves accused of involvement in tree cutting. With the reassertion of control by the government, the guards began their work once again. Culprits could be taken to court by the MoA and could be imprisoned for three months plus 300 *birr* convertible into time in prison for tree cutting and could be fined five to ten *birr* if caught grazing cattle, and had their sickles and ropes confiscated if found cutting grass.

Perhaps the most interesting example of an attempt to involve local institutions in forest management occurred after the transition in July 1991. In connection with an “international tree day” MoA officials invited religious leaders (including the powerful Muslim leader of the shrine at Geta, and a Christian monk by the name Aba Mefqere-seb) to join them on an outing on Mount Yegof, where sacrifices and prayers were made for rain and forest conservation. A

video of the whole outing was produced. Like the case mentioned earlier during the transition from imperial to Derg rule, this suggests that it is at the time when state authority is weakest that there are attempts to involve or co-opt local religious leaders.

2. Irrigation at Albati

During the Imperial times, the irrigation land (*mesno*) was under the monopoly of certain key figures, who were landlords. Also, unlike today, the users were mainly from a single village. This particular group of users used to irrigate their farmlands as long as they wanted, supplying their crops with water without restrictions. Irrigation usages were not based on scheduled patterns and seem not to have been institutionalized.

In post-Imperial times, irrigation became more institutionalized and arguably was transformed. A time-table was introduced and each user would be required to irrigate his farmland only during his turn. The position of *Yewuha dagna* “water judge” emerged.³⁶ The holder of this position is responsible for arranging a users’ time-table as well as managing the distribution of water accordingly. This transformation could be attributed to the 1975 rural land redistribution and its repercussions. Also emerging market forces played a significant role in the institutional development of irrigation.

Nowadays, irrigation use and management is run by institutionalized mechanisms, the transgression of which may incur punishments. The ‘water judge’ plays a crucial role in arranging matters and ensuring the proper implementation but does not have an exclusive power to punish transgressors, and the *qire* [burial association] is called upon. The “water judge” would approach the *qire dagna* “the burial association judge or leader” for his support to punish transgressors. If the case is serious, the KA may be approached to resolve the matter. This shows institutional connections between informal and formal institutions.

2.1. The beginnings of Irrigation

The practice of irrigation in this area dates back to the Imperial times, and specifically to the Italian occupation period. According to informants, the Italians had a settlement camp around Dagna Sefer, and one of them used to plant tomatoes through irrigation channelled from Albati, which is about thirty-five to fifty minutes’ walk from where they settled. A member of the locality was said to have attempted to plant tomatoes by irrigating his farmland after “bribing” the individual who was in charge of channelling the water to the Italian’s plantation. His son recalled as follows:

The *Ferenj* [foreigner] had a guard controlling the irrigation area and no one was allowed to irrigate his farmland. Yet, my father bribed the guard and planted *komidoro*³⁷ (tomatoes) through irrigation. One day, for instance, my father gave him a chicken along with ten eggs and irrigated his farmland throughout the night. However, this was understood by the *Ferenj* and he accused my father of stealing water and irrigating his farmland. Then, he put him on his motor bicycle and drove to the place of the brigadier to report the case, but my father’s *gabi* [cloth]

³⁶ This position is sometimes referred to as *Yewuha astedadary* “water administrator”.

³⁷ This term which is still in use in Wello derives from the Italian word Pomodoro.

got caught in the spokes of the wheel and both of them fell down and were taken to the hospital instead.

The knowledge about irrigation seems to have been disseminated through the Italian who introduced the practice. In terms of crops tomatoes were the major crops on irrigated land. However, tomatoes had been planted before the Italian occupation on non-irrigated land. Emebet Tiruneh, a landlord played a role in disseminating the practice. She had a control over the area and was the wife of Dejazmach Yosef who was a governor. She was said to have brought tomatoes from “Tigre-Asmara” and gave them to one individual who was able to sell his crops when the Italians came for three hundred *tegera birrs* “Maria Theresa Thallars”.

With regard to the local practice of irrigation, the occupation period could be seen as a time of experimentation, particularly by the first individual who pioneered the local experimentation. Only after the end of the occupation was the local practice of irrigation said to have been “widely” practised. Tomatoes and potatoes were sold to the “Arabs”. Local people used to take these to Dessie to sell to them, or the latter used to come to the area to buy them. Generally, tomatoes, potatoes, cabbages, lettuce, onions, chilies, and coffee were said to have been planted during the Imperial times; yet, unlike the case of tomatoes, how each was disseminated is not well remembered.

2.2. Pre-Derg Irrigation: relations between users, conflicts and the role of institutions

After the expulsion of the Italians, the *mesno* irrigated-land, particularly the higher ground on the streams coming down the mountain was said to have been controlled by the *balabats* “landlords”, who thereafter assumed full control over irrigation. They used to irrigate their farmlands as long as they wanted supplying crops with water. Irrigation was not practiced in terms of a scheduled pattern. Tenants and the “poor” hardly make use of irrigation since they didn’t have land to cultivate and/or the *balabats* had already controlled vast areas and had first say over use of the water. Other users were said to have been relegated to make use of *yejib wuha* “water of the hyena”. This refers to water available through the channels when there was a surplus. Yet, individuals often competed with one another to come first and divert the water in to his farmland. This struggle over *yejib wuha* usually happened during nights, explaining the nature of this competition and the reference to the hyena. This competition sometimes led to conflicts and physical confrontations and the case would be reported to the *chiqa* “tax collector”. More often than not the *chiqa* was said to have resolved such cases by arranging compensations for any physical damage and the guilty party could also be fined a certain amount of money which had the purpose of serving *ye wuha metecha*, “water drink” [a euphemism for alcohol], for the *chiqa*.

Overall, irrigation was initially experimented with at the time of the Italian occupation and later practised after the restoration of the Imperial regime. However, this was not institutionalized in the sense that at least there was no pattern of schedule based on which users could irrigate their lands as they can today. With regard to conflicts over irrigation usages, competitions over “water of the hyena” were described as the main conditions leading to conflicts. Under such circumstances, the office of the *chiqa-shum* was the main institution arbitrating such cases and the role of the *chiqa* was described as having focused on arranging compensations for physical damages.

2.3. The Derg period

During the Derg period, land nationalization and market forces contributed to the institutional development of irrigation. The land nationalization proclaimed in 1975 led to rural land redistribution and altered irrigation use and management. According to Mekonnen Ali, who was a *chiqa* during the Imperial times:

After the fall of Haile Selassie, the Derg redistributed land and gave the *balabats*' lands to the poor. Consequently, the previous system totally collapsed and the poor who used to have no access to water were able to have access to water as well as land. Also, the *chiqa* was no longer the *dagna* [judge] of water. Instead, they elected *ye wuha dagna* [water judge] who thereafter started distributing water in terms of the time allotted to each user.

Beyene Shifa, another informant who described himself as having been a *balabat* "landlord" during the Imperial regime, said:

During Haile Selassie's time, 'water distributors' did not exist and this was not necessary. Rather, any one who held possessions of the *mesno* [irrigated] land could irrigate his land until he finished supplying it with water. However, when the Derg came, it gave authority to all and redistributed land. Then, the landless secured land and got access to the water. Also, there came to be a 'water distributor' and the previous unrestricted usage became impossible and each person could only use the water during the specified time allotted to him.

These descriptions generally indicate that the previous practice in relation to irrigation usages was altered. This was partly due to the collapse of the Imperial regime and the subsequent loss of power of the *chiqa*, but also due to the redistribution and increase in numbers of users. Some informants tend to attribute the trend of institutionalization to conflicts and perceived market interests. For instance, Mohammed Adem, who was described as having been a member of the "revolutionary guard" during the Derg regime, stated the following:

Under the Derg, the land that had been held by the *balabats* was redistributed to others and shared by many. Since the *mesno* land was divided between a large number of people, shortage of water was experienced. This necessitated introducing a rotating usage. Therefore a *yewuha dagna* [water judge] was also required. Otherwise, people could go on fighting one another since water is just like blood. Besides, there was a competition to plant vegetables such as tomatoes, chilies, potatoes and onions. The traders were collecting such vegetables from us and were transporting them to Asab for sale since they were in high demand there.

Firew, who is a farmer as well as well as a carpenter and recently built a house in the vicinity of the Kombolcha town with the intention of exploiting rural as well as urban opportunities, had the following to say:

During Haile Selassie's time the *mesno* land was held and used mainly by the *balabats*. The users were generally from one particular village, Medin area. During the land distribution other villagers claimed access to the water and the *kebele* decided that any one had the right to make use of the water as long as it could reach to his area. Then, many people wanted to make use of the water since they wanted to produce vegetables to sell to traders, and the water became weaker

and weaker when shared by this large group. Eventually, this forced us to implement user's turns as arranged by *yewuha dagna*.

Generally, the land nationalization policy and market forces seem to have played roles in institutionalizing the practice of irrigation usages. In the first case, following the rural land reform land was redistributed and the irrigated land that had been previously controlled by the landlords was redistributed to others. Besides, unlike before, other villagers were also included and gained access to irrigation water. In effect, the users became larger in number and this ultimately precipitated competition over resource usages. In the second case, there was a growing demand for vegetables in Assab since traders were coming to the area to buy such vegetables and transport them to Assab. This opportunity might be related to the government's shift of emphasis to use the Assab port. These conditions generally prompted the introduction of a regularized pattern whereby irrigation use and management could be governed, thereby contributing to the institutional development of irrigation. Accordingly, there emerged the introduction of a position referred to as *yewuha dagna* "water judge". The holder of this position is responsible for managing the distribution of water on the basis of a specified time schedule which itself was also a new introduction.

2.4. Current relations between users, conflicts and the role of Institutions

In Albati irrigation users are from three villages: Abadia-Ager, Sherif-Ager and Chatu-Genda. Each village is organized under one *qire* and each village has its own "water judge/administrator". Every year, the three villagers come together to construct irrigation canals and to draw time-tables for each village. The total duration may vary from village to village depending on the size of land-holdings. Also, they elect their own water administrators who, depending on their activities, may remain in position or step down when reelections are made. Last year, for instance, the leader of the Chatu-Genda village was said to have stepped down due to some sort of "incompetence".

Each water administrator is responsible for arranging a users' timetable and ensuring fair distribution accordingly. Attempting to irrigate one's farm land beyond the already specified time by withholding water is said to be the main condition leading to conflicts. Such attempts may incur punishments. For example, one member of the Chatu-Genda Village [Mohammed] reported the following case:

Some three years ago, a member of our village named Aragaw repeatedly made use of the water beyond his turn. Then, another individual reported the case to the water judge accusing him of destroying crops due to his repeated reluctance to comply with the rules. The judge also reported the case to the *qire* leader and they decided together that the individual had to pay a *korma* [big goat]. However, the punishment was changed later and the individual paid fifteen *birr*.

Here we see that the "water judge" relies on the *qire* burial association to resolve persisting conflicts. The role of the water administrator therefore, seems to be mainly to arrange water distribution and report transgressors to the *qire*, which may impose a fine. If a transgressor refuses to abide by decisions, it was reported that "his *qire* will be seized", meaning that he will be ostracized; or else, the case may be referred to the KA. Nevertheless, no such cases were reported as having occurred. Here also, the inclusion of the KA may indicate another form of institutional interconnections.

3. The Southern foothills of Yegof

3.1. Pasture management

3.1.1. The imperial times: conflict and cooperation between the elites and communities

In this area the land was called Weregenu having no owner or users paying tax over it. Yimer Mohammed who owned many cattle during the imperial period explains that there were large numbers of cattle on the pasture, which came from different directions without any restriction, since there was much land available.

Historically, this land was used by the cattle of *Nigus* Michael [the early 20th century ruler of Wello] in close association with cattle of the community members. The king had cattle grazed here obtained from raids in his fights with the ‘Tigre’ and ‘Adal’. The cattle were given to the *gebbar* [tax-paying land owners] or to tenants to rear. In relation to this *Shek* Mohammed Beyan gave the following account:

Once *Nigus* Michael brought a huge quantity of salt from Assab and scattered it on the grass. This was done to make the cattle graze very well. With increasing size of cattle *gebbar* (tenants) were made to rear the cattle taking turns. The responsibility of supervising the proper management of the cattle was given to the *chiqa*. Those rearing the cattle used the oxen for farming and the milk for consumption. But part of the milk products was shared with the *chiqa*. Those rearing the cattle devised mechanisms to make the cattle their own property. They used to buy cattle skins from the market and report that an ox or a cow died. They then take the cattle to relatives living elsewhere. This enabled many individuals to own oxen and cows.

The above situation ended with the coming of the Italians when the cattle were shared among government officials. Thereafter the Weregenu land was used by the poor without external threat until the Italian occupation came to an end. A new threat emerged with the liberation when Ibrahim Sultan was given the land as a favor for his performance, i.e. fighting the occupying force, and he developed irrigation. Some individuals bought land from him and some poor people became his laborers. This led to resistance on the part of the community. They appealed to the Emperor during a visit of his to Wello, stopping his car on the road, and took their case to Addis Ababa through representatives drawn from main users of the pasture, i.e. Waraba, Miawa, Hisira and Tegage villages. In response to their appeal about 120 hectare was reserved as *beni* [open common land] apparently by the order of the Emperor. This remained a source of subsistence for the poor until cooperatives was introduced.

3.1.2. The Derg times: Cooperatives and the beni commons

The Derg government established cooperatives to which the response of the local community was negative. The plains were selected as favorable for introducing extensive mechanized agriculture. Large areas of the pasture land were converted into farmland. Some grazing land was left for members of the cooperatives to graze their oxen. Several cooperatives took land adjacent to one another and only the villagers of Waraba had access to the pasture since the others could not cross the fields with livestock. After the harvest was collected some villagers brought cattle to the area but children at Weraba scared the cattle away unless able-bodied people herded them. The villagers of Weraba developed a sense of private ownership of the

pasture which is not accepted by other villagers. In any case, it has become the only village with *beni* commons of significant size.

Internal pressures on the pasture is related to the encroachment of farming. Peasants were forbidden from farming the commons; some were even taken to the PA court which forced them to desist from farming the commons. One individual succeeded in getting permission from the PA court to farm the commons on the grounds of being disabled. Even he was taken to the PA court several times and was imprisoned, and as a result he, too, gave up trying to farm the commons.

3.1.3. The EPRDF period: the threat from investors

The main external threat is investors trying to take the land, the point of attraction being the sugarcane plantations. The KAs treat the common land at Weregenu as ownerless and respond positively to the request of the District Administration for extra land for investors. Out of three investors who came to the area two of them succeeded in getting the land.

The first is a woman who was given up to eight hectares of land without the consultation of the community. They say,

“Our land is taken since she contributed money for the war. The fact that we do not pay tax for the land should not be the factor. We did not refuse to pay tax. We know that no one pays tax for *beni* [common pasture] in Wello. Our chairperson whom we elected argues against us that, “The government can plant whom it wants and uproot whom it wants”³⁸ a statement which sounds like the period of the Emperor”

The above view is not equally shared by other villagers, especially Tullu village, as they did not use the pasture. For example, they were the first to rent oxen to the investor as the members of the Weraba village refused to do so. Some of them even say that the land was owned by the members of the cooperatives and does not belong to Weraba residents. Weraba villagers are seen as asking too much as they are the people with large size of irrigation land. Three men from Tullu village are farming the land given to the investor. They get 20 *birr* on a daily basis. One of them, Ahmed Ali, explained that members of Weraba refused to rent their oxen to the investor because they are rich as they get more money from the irrigation. He stated: “After the cooperatives were disbanded, the sun came out from them, they divided the irrigation of the cooperative among themselves.”³⁹

Another investor came from Dessie and the villagers were called at a meeting for consultation. They expressed resistance and created havoc as many of them recall. They mentioned that their sons are landless while others are made the owner of land and that returnees were returning to resettlement villages due to shortage of land. Ayalew said: “What is this investor? Is it Meles’s [the current Prime Minister’s] Cooperatives trying to take our land?” Ahmed Ibrahim remembers the moment of the meeting: “We acted like madmen and said to the representative of the district take us to the resettlement”

³⁸ *Mengist ye-felegewen teklo ye-felegewen mewngel yichilal.*

³⁹ *Amrachi ke ferese behuwala tsehyi wetalachewu, ye-amrachin mesno tekefafelu.*

This attempt was stopped. However the members of the community seem to have realized that their land is inevitably going to be given to investors and decided in favor of an investor whose father is resident of the Village. The investor is called Said Hussein and works in the Agricultural Office of the district. He is the son of Hussen Ahmed, who argued that “it is better if a man we know takes the land rather than a foreigner, as we may get support when we face problems”. At Weraba, issues concerning the pasture are dealt with at the KA level as the size of pasture has diminished and the community members either want to share it or make it communal property with no external intervention.

3.2. Entitlements and narratives

3.2.2. The imperial period

During the imperial time there were three major categories of land ownership or entitlement. First, the *Gebbar* were those who developed the lands or settled them. They paid tax to the government beside service they make when called on, especially in providing food for soldiers, and labor for construction. They had security of tenure could plant trees and breed livestock, and owned most of the irrigation land. They feel aggrieved by the land reform. Yimer Muhe stated: “The government snatched our land. They must have realized that it is our inalienable property since we developed it. Today there is no *gebbar* or tenants; all were made equal and there is no respect among the villagers”. Some of this category, however, became Derg officials.

Second, the *nech lebash /zemach* obtained access to land in return for service in war, at parades etc. However, their land depended on service and fitness and could be alienated. They also paid taxes to the government. They are seen as the second privileged group of people in resource use. However, the change of land ownership during the Derg deprived them that privilege and this group lost out. One of these stated: “Today’s farmer has no problem. He farms the land and eats its produce. He plants trees and uses the fruit. He eats white food, speaks white, and has no order to go for a war.”

Third, the tenants had only their labor. Muhe Legasso explains it as follows. “The owner of the land did not allow you to take a stone closer to the house as he says he paid tax for it. Today, we are at least equal theoretically though still the fertile land is with the party.”

In terms of communal pasture all members of the community regardless of land entitlement were able to use the commons. The difference was between rearing one’s own cattle or taking *ribbi* cattle (share-breeding). Whereas the poor took *ribbi* the rich gave cattle in *ribbi*. Mainly mules were taken for *ribbi*, apparently because of their importance for transport.

3.2.3. The Derg Period

The formation of cooperatives worked against communal resources. Two classes of people were created members and non-members, the former were viewed at the time as active and progressive and the latter as reactionary. Non-members were pushed to the margins at the cooperatives expanded with the introduction of pumps. Within the cooperatives there were two groups of people, the party members and the common people. The former were believed to have obtained fertile land when land was redistributed. In addition the drought resulted in differences as some managed to adapt and survive and other left for resettlement.

3.2.3. EPRDF period

The most important happening at this period was the dissolution of cooperatives. Indris Muhe said, "We are now released from prison." At this point the interrelationship between informal and formal institution in resource use increased. It seems that during the Derg period the formal institutions had overriding roles in the affairs of the community and resource management.

4. The site of Wadayi

Wadayi is a unique site in South Yegof area. In PA number 32 there are four *gots* hamlets using irrigation. Compared to other *got*, Wadayi has a longer history of irrigation and many of its people derive their subsistence from irrigation. A river coming from Maybar divides Wadayi into two, and called Qechin Wuha and Tiliqu Wuha. Each of these waterways crosses Wadayi towards Weraba. The river gains strength from several springs in the valley.

4.1. Irrigation

Wadayi is covered with various species of indigenous trees under the larger of which are coffee plantations. Elders suggest that the irrigation goes back to the time of their grandfathers. They remember that in the past they used irrigation to plant sorghum, barley, maize and to some extent beans and coffee.

Awel Muhe, a man from Hitabu hamlet in PA 32 considers those in his area as *gebere* [farmers], whereas he views those using irrigation, *mesno teteqami*, as rich. He stated:

What do you say when a peasant gets up to six thousand in a year. You know their houses mostly have corrugated sheet roofs even if they are covered by forest and are not visible to outsiders. Our annual production is not even enough for consumption. We are confident of our labor and they of their money.

4.1.1. The organization of irrigation

At Wadayi and villages neighboring it there is a season called Atink in which agricultural activities are brought to halt and water canals are repaired. This is from Meskerem 25 to Tiqimt 5 (E.C.) [ten days in early October]. This is done on a group basis. Users help one another for such activity and obedience is mandatory. The overall preparation for irrigation is completed within ten days of Atink. If individuals engage in other agricultural work it is believed that their harvests will be low. If conflict occurs, which is rare, it is handled by elders. Cases are rarely taken beyond the elders, since most crops do not need much water as they are perennial and there is enough water. Jemal, the KA chairman, confirms this.

Conflicts rarely come from Wadayi; they have enough water and it is not like Waraba. The users also listen to each other as they know each other's background. Disputes are common everywhere; we are forcing them to have their own *yewuha dagna* [water judge] to handle their case in a procedural way.

4.1.2. Irrigation and the market

Harbu market is divided into three, the area where fruits are sold, the area where sugarcane is specifically sold and the area for the usual other commodities. Some state that it was Hassen Amana (currently living in Harbu town) who brought coffee after the Italian occupation was

over. Others argue that it was earlier. During Haile Selassie's regime oranges were introduced and during the Derg bananas. Oranges and coffee are the dominant sources of income.

4.2. Forest at Wadayi

In 1978 part of the mountain was taken as part of Yegof state forest. As a result several households were displaced and were taken to resettlement or made to join cooperatives at Waraba. Hence, the land was covered by forest but part of the land was not favorable for forestation. It was simply preserved and is currently covered by bushes and shrubs. This has limited the grazing land for their cattle, since they were forbidden to cross the forest that is guarded. At the time of the fall of the Derg, the land was used as a settlement mainly for those who came from resettlement site. However, in 1992 the preservation of the forest was reinstated. Several households were forced to evacuate the land for other places and some returned to resettlement areas. Mohammed, a farmer at Wadayi, stated:

“Erkis mountain (*gora*) was used as a grazing land for our cattle in the past. The government told us that it wanted the *gora* to plant trees and, if not, Wello would become a desert. The Derg came and gave us the land through land for the tiller but later it said land is for *limat* (development). We said the imperial regime came again. That was not the end; they sent us to resettlement, which was like a nightmare. We suffered from lack of pasture while the land became home to wild animals. At the time the Derg was overthrown, we were relieved and were able to sit with our legs stretched out. Later they came and told us to evacuate the government land. We were forced to return the so-called government land. I am sure whenever a new government comes their dream is about our land. Now we pay five *birr* per cattle or else they take them to prison like human being. Thankfully they allow camels to browse in the forest. When a tree is cut in secret we sit for two three days to identify the individuals through oaths. Where can we go from the land they themselves gave us? You know the time of the Emperor is better because this land had an owner.”

On the other hand, Jemal, the chairman of the KA, represented the official viewpoint:

The government forest is that of the government and I think the government is doing that for the sake of the country. Those who encroached into the forest were expelled and some left for their resettlement village. If they cut a tree they directly identify the person through the cultural committee. They are already tied together and there is no way to escape. We do this based on the instructions given from above. You can compare two mountains: one under them, and the other under the project. They hasten to devastate it.

At Wadayi, it is not uncommon to find a site behind each household's backyard where charcoal production is under process, to supply Harbu town. There are several wood processing workshops given licenses but they are never asked from where they get the raw materials. The process of transporting wood is facilitated by camel introduced in 1976 from Bati by a man called Worku. This is advantageous because camels can transport large sizes of wood and their legs make no noise while travelling during the night.

5. The site of Waraba

At this site, the two most important resources under use are pasture and irrigation. The land used to have acacia but the forest cover has disappeared, first due to the influence of the market, when Sudanese who came with the Italians introduced charcoal production, and later due to the introduction of irrigation, when Ibrahim Sultan employed laborers to clear trees. During drought years peasants cut indigenous trees and only one large tree survives; last year eucalyptus trees planted during the Derg period were also cut on the grounds that they interfered with irrigation, and that they harbor wild animals.

5.1. Irrigation at Waraba

As a reward for his resistance to the Italians Ibrahim Sultan was given the status of tax collector mostly in kind (*gobelale*), mainly grain. Because of his reputation he was given the title of *mislene* and even went to Addis Ababa to meet Emperor Haile Selassie. After his return he started irrigation as he obtained a huge size of land from the government. He gave some land to two investors; one was a man called *Komandotori* (a foreigner who was an Ethiopian by his mother) and the other was General Merid. The irrigation was on the pastureland of the people, which resulted in a public uprising. Ibrahim took the initiative to make those subsisting on his land clear the acacia along the Bokena and Korebo Rivers coming from the direction of Maybar. Elders remember that Ibrahim Sultan even employed daily laborers to cut the acacia trees to get more space for irrigation. He developed a waterway, which is still called by his name, *Ibrahim Sultan boy*. The introduction of irrigation was not viewed positively by the peasants or tenants working on his land. Mohammed Beyan explained that “The irrigation work involves a huge labor input which is not liked by tenants”. He also tries to explain the word for irrigation *mesno* as coming from the word *maseno* meaning “to work very hard beyond ones capacity”. Moreover, the tenants at the time did not realize the benefits of irrigation. Another informant stated the following: “The rich told us ‘learn to plant [irrigated] crops’, but planting crops is like a heavy load, and the farmers were weak, and did not know the benefits”.

5.1.1 Development of irrigation

The land prepared for irrigation by Ibrahim was used in two ways. Some individuals rented a quarter of a hectare (*qidema*) for 25 *birr*. This was started as the benefit of irrigation obtained more acceptance on the part of the people. On the other hand tenants working on the land who were made to produce crops and vegetables shared the money obtained from the sale of the produce mostly at Kombolcha. During the early days of irrigation at the peasant level and those who rented from Ibrahim planted mainly cereals like maize, *tef*, and beans. Later on, chilies, tomatoes, and lettuce, and to some extent perennial crops, notably coffee, were introduced. However coffee was uprooted because of frequent diseases and limited benefits. Ibrahim also introduced sugarcane to the area though it did not become predominant until recently. Elders remember that Ibrahim used to sell sugarcane and tomatoes by taking it to Assab.

Gradually, the value of irrigation as a means of earning cash was understood. The number of users increased. This resulted in disputes among users. This time Ibrahim called his tenants to devise ways of using the water. This was also the case for those using irrigation by taking contract land from him. Hence, institutional management and use of water was started. This

necessitated two individuals or positions. One is the *gan-gef*, whose duties were 1) to distribute water to groups of users every ten days. He would control the time the water travels to reach the group's plots; 2) to check the proper usage of water for the purpose of irrigation only; and 3) to control and take individuals who violate such rules to the *chiqa* for punishment. The *gan-gef* was elected once, and was not replaced unless he wanted to be. This is because since he distributes water to the group as a whole his position rarely exposes him to disagreement with individual users. The second person is the *yewuha shum*, who had the duties: 1) to receive water from the *gan-gef* and distribute to his group according to the place of their land and the state of their crop. If the user's crop urgently need water he tries to resolve the problem; 2) to check the appropriate use of the water at the individual level. The user has to use water first for chilies, tomatoes, and later for cereals and lastly to make new land. The water is used to make new land if and only it is not in great demand by other users; and 3) to control conflict among the users. If simple disputes occur he resolves them among the group. If the conflict is beyond his control he takes the parties to the *gan-gef* then to the *chiqa* for punishment. The users elect the *yewuha shum* every year and even twice in a year at the beginning of the *Meher* and *Belg* seasons. This is for two reasons. First, compared to the *gan-gef*, the job is very time consuming and makes the individuals less productive. Second, since the individuals interact with users he or she may clash with the users.

5.1.2. Nature of Conflicts over irrigation

What led to the formation of the *yewuha shum* was the disagreement over water use. The nature of the conflict revolves around the order of getting water. Sometimes individuals miss their turn. Taking another's water and changing the direction of channels were also reported. Most of these disagreements were resolved at the *yewuha shum* level. Individuals who committed the above mistakes were fined at most one *birr*. The money is given to the *yewuha shum* and the group consumes alcoholic drinks among themselves. To the question "Do you employ *bele* if the criminal is unknown?" Ayalew reacted as follows.

"In the past the numbers of users was limited unlike today. If an individual committed a mistake the group members were asked to expose themselves. Such individuals were easily identified. Users did not take others' water deliberately like today. You know *bele* was not used for such trivial things like Mr 'X' cut my sugarcane. If a person persistently disobeyed the rule, the *yewuha shum* would take his case to the *gan-gef* and hand over him to the *chiqa*. The *chiqa* would directly uproot him from the land."

To the question "Do you ostracize or exclude him from the *qire*?" Mohammed answered as follows:

There was no point to exclude him; once he is uprooted from the land his fate is migration or wage labor. It is today that all became equal and you do not snatch him from the land. You try to punish him through *qire*, which itself is weak. All we do today is to take oaths day in, day out.

5.2. The Derg redistributions and cooperatives

The land redistribution was done as follows based on family size. First the land was divided into two *walka* and *boda*. *Walka* is the type of land, which is used only for the production of cereals using rain. *Boda* is land that can be used for irrigation, and was distributed equally

regardless of family size. Hence a family of 7-8 obtained 3 *temaji* (a *temaji* is a quarter of a hectare) of *walka* and one *temaji* of *boda*; a family of 5-6 obtained 2 *temaji* of *walka*, a family of 2 obtained 1 *temaji* and a family of 1 obtained 1/2 a *temaji*. Hence, the irrigation land was equally shared among members of the community.

The establishment of cooperatives brought another chapter in the ownership of land. As one informant recalled:

The government snatched land from the landlords and gave it to us. In fact we expected more than we were allocated. While this was the case they introduced cooperatives and they became landlords themselves. We went back to the time of the Emperor, or even more severe than that. Those who produced were few but those who lined up to take the grain were many. We produce and we were given grain like salt. The *Esepa* [Workers Party] enjoyed the fruit of our labor.”

The establishment of cooperatives created two groups of farmers: *gilegna* (those working privately), and those who joined cooperatives. Gradually, the government started giving land owned by *gilegna* to the cooperatives, forcing the former to join the cooperatives. Initially there were less than 100 members but by 1989 one year before the cooperative’s collapse there were about 224 members. Those who refused to join the cooperative were sent to resettlement.

Within the cooperative the division was made into three categories: those engaged in cereal production and looking after cattle, those working on irrigation, and those carrying out administrative activities. In relation to the irrigation the group produce the vegetables and the money is shared among the members. But members of the cooperative claim that the money was used for those working in the administration as per diems.

At Waraba, individual irrigation was not disrupted. Individuals were given 25 x 50 m. backyard plots for *eshet* (fresh produce) and 50 x 50 m. for *derashote* (the main crop). The land was used mainly for irrigation though they sometimes faced shortages of water as the cooperative was given priority. Since cooperative members were not allowed to work their private business vegetables were sold in two ways. Merchants from Dessie, Kombolcha, Dubti and even Asseb came to the village to buy both from private farmers and from cooperatives members. Some of the latter sold their produce to the former who took them to these markets.

5.3. The EPRDF period

The collapse of the cooperative opened a new chapter in the use of irrigation. During the first land redistribution 1 *temaji* had been given to all members of the cooperative. Irrigation became an individual business. The main institutional change was that users with contiguous land formed groups (*buden*) and they organized their own meetings to elect *yewuha shum*. He then registers all of them according to the position of their land. They have formed their own by-laws (*Ye-wiste denb*), which are not written. Two of the most important bylaws were: 1) One should not take another’s turn and if done deliberately he or she would pay 50 *birr*; 2) If one’s crop is in dire need of water the *Yewuha shum* should consider the case and give the water to that member. The form of punishment seemed fixed, but was largely symbolic as individuals who broke the rule were usually given warnings.

The growing number of irrigation users and the shift towards mono-cropping of sugarcane has brought with it some changes. Sugarcane is transported from Waraba to Harbu and sometimes to Kombolcha. This required camels, which can easily transport a larger size of the crop to the towns than donkeys. Individuals earn incomes by renting out camel. A bundle of sugarcane (usually a hundred sticks) is transported for five *birr*, which increases or decreases depending on the season. Nowadays a camel, which was not worth five hundred birr a few years ago, is sold for 800-1200 *birr*.

With the fall of the cooperatives, banana and papaya became the main perennials and coffee was totally removed because of diseases and its time consuming nature. Crops that are harvested twice were mainly chillies and tomatoes. Sugarcane is harvested once a year, but has the advantages of not requiring too much water, being disease-resistant, resistant to too much water in the rainy season, and most importantly having a higher market price, with an immediate market at Harbu. Informant note that the maximum cereal harvest from a plot of 50 m x 50 m (*andirub*) is between 10-15 quintals, and the market price is around 100 *birr* per quintal, providing a maximum income of 1,500 *birr*, without taking into consideration fertilizer costs. Sugarcane from a similar plot fetches at least five to six thousand *birr*.

5.4. Irrigation and conflict

Conflicts tend to break out in September when the new season begins, since the new water management committee members are not elected yet and everyone uses water the way he or she wants. Some informants say that the powerful (*gulbetegna*) have an advantage during this period. Around mid-October when all need water, the institution starts its usual activity and the frequency of conflict decreases. During the time of the small rains (*belg*), if there is not enough rain the volume of water decreases markedly, and conflicts can become common both within and between villages. Inter-village conflicts are between those using the same water canal or under the same *gan-gef*. During the night some youngsters travel towards Wadayi to change the direction of the water. Those sharing the same source of water complain on the day given to them. One case of an inter-village conflict happened between Waraba and Tulu-Ketaro last year.

In October 2001, Waraba and Tulu irrigation users discussed the diminishing water size coming from the Borkena River. This was because the irrigation canal built by the Derg government was silted and improving the flow of water demanded the cooperation of many people. In response members of the two villages cooperated and developed the water canal. They chose one *gan-gef* who allocates water to each village: three days for Waraba, and two days for Tulu. During May last year the level of water became very low and neither village was happy with the water allocation. Frequently youngsters at Waraba changed waterways. This grew to a village wide conflict in which the intervention of the KA chairman was required. Members of the Tulu village live to the north of Waraba and the water starts from their land and they wanted to get the lion's share. Those at Waraba argued that the water is used for non-irrigation purposes and the members of the Tulu irrigation are also expanding the size of their irrigated land, which diminished the volume of the water. This led to a fierce dispute and consecutive meetings were arranged to reconcile the two interest groups. Finally, it was decided that the water should be used five days at Tulu and four days at Waraba. This was seen a victory on the part of Tulu because the number of users at Waraba is greater than that of Tulu.

Within villages all kinds of conflicts exist and only some relate to irrigation, notably concerning taking someone's turn or changing the direction of the water without producing a sufficient reason. This is mostly done deliberately. A young person explained the point.

During March and May the level of water diminishes. You find everyone accusing each other if you visit the area during the season. The problem is that someone is using water for sugarcane which is less affected by the lack of water while someone is pleading to get water for his chillies which cannot recover from running out of water. You decide by yourself that it is far better to be punished 50 *birr* than lose 300-400 *birr*. The punishment may not even happen to you as the elders intervene to reconcile the conflicting parties.

Last year a conflict occurred between Hassen Ahmed's son, Indris, and Tadesse. The three parties explain the case differently. Ahmed claims that his son diverted the direction of the water. He saw his sugarcane being invaded by pests called *felefel*. In order to destroy these pests he diverted the direction of the water not to irrigate his land. But his action was seen as a theft. The punishment taken by the *yewuha shum* was to deny him one round of water ration. He thinks that the measure taken was unfair. Tadesse on his part claims that the direction of the water was changed to use it for chillies. He argues that even if what Ahmed is saying is correct, taking someone's turn is a criminal act. Those having the power take your water during the night and his son is used to such criminal acts. The decision of the elderly to use the water or the turn of Ahmed for his crops is not enough. For him such individuals should be taken to prison, which restrains them.

The *Yewuha shum* stresses the frequency of such actions rather than the specific happening.

Since people have enough money they can pay if financial punishment are passed. In order to restrain such action such individuals should be taken to legal bodies and be imprisoned.

6. Transformation of Informal Institutions

6.1. Qire at South Yegof: from dengoro dagna to qire

At these sites changes and continuity in the system of *Qire* activities can be clearly seen. This can be observed within one area and between Waraba and Wadayi. At the two sites the process of relating its origin to forefathers (*menjilat*) is common but elderly informants emphasize that the institution became an *iddir* or formalized in late imperial times. At this juncture the influence of the urban or diffusion from the urban to the rural is indisputable or is established.

Informants at Wadayi are still familiar with *dengoro dagna* rather than *qire*. There is no regular meeting of members and they contribute grain, *injera* bread and fuelwood to the bereaved family. There is only one individual leading the institution the *dengoro dagna*. The participation of the institution is limited and conflicts are resolved by organizing elders, not necessary through the *dengoro dagna*. After the coming of the EPRDF government there has been an attempt to form *qire*, as in other places. The *qire* has been made to participate in the cultural committee organized to identify criminal cases including for the preservation of the government forest.

At Waraba the *qire* has clearly transformed itself. During the imperial period, people allegedly resisted external forces from taking their land by organizing through *qire*, and at one time succeeded in preserving part of the *beni* as a grazing land. Many changes came with the

cooperatives. Those who joined the cooperative came from different areas, including Harbu and other towns. While the formation or the introduction of cooperative was under way members of the cooperatives proposed the ideas of establishing a *qire* or *iddir*. Informants are mostly inclined to use the term *iddir* or *iddir dagna* rather than *qire* at this site. However, following the introduction of cooperatives *qire* started to take the shape and style of urban *iddir*. After the cooperative was formed a meeting was held and changes in the leadership were introduced. In addition to the *qire dagna*, “the *qire* judge or leader, there was a *tsehafi* secretary, a *gemja-bet*, storekeeper, and three committee members. It is also decided that contributions should be made on a monthly basis. This issue resulted in serious dispute. Some said that if money were contributed it would result in conflict when the one elected might embezzle money or members might try to get back the money they contributed when they leave the area. In response to these concerns, the following rules were developed:

1. An individual who is a member of the institution cannot ask for the money he (or she) contributed if he (or she) wants to be outside the *qire* or changes his (or her) residential area.
2. If a person wants to join the institution, he (or she) should contribute the total amount of money members contributed from the day contribution started. On the other hand, a newly formed household is made to contribute such an amount if and only if his father (or mother) is not a member of the institution.
3. The money shall not be used for private purposes, and may not be given to individuals on a credit basis.

With the above points, contribution stated with ten cents, then 25 cents. Gradually the amount was increased to 50 cents and it is currently one *birr*. A meeting is arranged monthly to contribute money and discuss issues related to the *qire*. The money contributed by members is used for different purposes. Household utensils like drinking containers, chairs, tables, cooking materials, etc. had been bought for the exclusive use of members. When a member wants these utensils for the purpose of organizing a *debo* “work party”, or *sedeqa* “religious ceremony” or some other event he can take the materials. Using the money a prayer house (*Zawiya*) was constructed. Whenever prayers are carried out the expenses are covered from the *qire* money.

This case is far removed from the situation at Wadayi where the term *dengoro* is employed. It is noteworthy that elderly men at both sites commonly employ the term *dengoro* rather than *qire*.

6.2. Abegar : From kinship line to election

The institution of *Abegar* is seen as the “highest court” in which only very serious issues are addressed. According to Mussa (an elected *Abegar*) the institution came into being in the following way:

In the past people used to live peacefully, and rarely fought. Everyone knew his place as rich and poor, old and young, land owner and landless. But such respect and love dwindled with the passage of time. Allah realized this and sent seven individuals to Wello. They stayed in Mar-Zeneb cave for seven years. After that two of them stayed in Ethiopia. Abadir Wale after learning *Umma* left for Hararge and Musa Wari remained in Wello. Musa then elected those who should work in

reconciling conflict, Kuli Basi and Shisha Biri. These are people who are believed to be the first *Abegar*. Adem Muje who was the *Abegar* of Alada Mesqela, Ruga and Segrat is believed to be a descendant of Kuli Basi.

The most important thing is learning *Umma*. It refers to the procedure or way of solving conflicts between husband and wife, over the share or inheritance of land, homicide, etc. All these things were managed by the *Abegar* as learnt from the *Waliy*. Cases were even taken to *Abegar* when a person is dissatisfied by the decision of the formal judge. Individuals who became outlaws (*shifita*) after conflict over land were called and were forced to abide by the ruling of *Abegar*.

During the Derg period, the *Abegar* institution was marginalized and was not allowed officially to become involved in dispute settlement. With the change of the government the institution of *Abegar* revived. Rather than making references to a single *Abegar*, several *Abegar* were elected at every Peasant Association level. However, *Abegar* at Waraba and Wadayi works at two levels: Village levels *Abegar* and the *Abegar* at the Shekoch level. Hence what the people call *Ye-bahil committee* “the cultural committee” or *Ye-elet Abegar* “the daily *abegar*” was formed by the initiative of the government.

The major factor for the revival of *Abegar* is related to political factors. With the collapse of the *Derg* members of the community bought guns from the desperate *Derg* soldiers. Attempts by the government to collect guns produced little result. At this juncture they resorted to traditional techniques to confiscate guns. Informants were surprised that the new government was aware of traditional institutions; as one man exclaimed: “Who told them that such a system exists? From where did Meles obtain the parchment *birana*?” The introduction of the Cultural Committees enabled the transitional forces to collect firearms. According to one young person parents exposed them even when they denied and were ready to cross the *bele* stick swearing that they did not possess arms. He went on explaining:

They organized a meeting to expose those who owned arms. Everybody was silent. We were told to cross the *bele* and were ready to do so. We bought the guns with our money and I do not think Allah would punish us for the money he gave us; we did no rob from others. But our parents who are the ardent believers of the curse exposed us. Still when something is missing or a waterway is broken due to a flood they hasten to identify it through *bele*.

The authorities realizing the power of the institution added another role to the *ye-bahil committee*. Following its establishment in 1993 the *Abegar* was given the right to reconcile people in cases of boundary disputes even including cases of bloodshed. Mussa recalled:

We were given the right to administer the community. Later on the role of the *Abegar* was restricted according to directives issued in 1995. The *Abegar* should not involve itself in issues related to land as well as problems of husbands and wives.

The activities of the *Abegar* have changed over the three regimes. During the imperial period the *Abegar* was invited to solve any problem, which was beyond the capacity of the community or the *qire* for that matter. He then would order the people together at a place usually through *qire* leader. A drum was used to call the people. Then about 15 elders (called *sheni*) were nominated. Then, the accuser would present his case and the suspected individual

is asked to expose himself or the people help in exposing the accused. After the individual is identified the case is seen by the *Sheni* and a decision is passed which was binding. Until the decision is passed the man was made to wear a skirt or was made to take refuge with the *Abegar* to escape retaliation.

With the coming of the EPRDF the *Abegar* started to work with other institutions including the *Kebele* Administration, the *Qire Shum* and *Yewuha dagna* when the case involves irrigation. The procedure is as follows as supported by observations at Weraba.

A person reports his case in writing to the PA chairman. The latter then passes the issue to the *Abegar* to be seen. The *Abegar* on his part orders the *Qire-Shum* to call people to a place. At the meeting, members of the *Bahl* Committee take their seat in a far-removed place. The accuser buys *chat* for the committee. The accuser presents about five individuals on his side (*Sheni*), mostly his relatives. The *Mengistawi Buden* start calling the names of the people who were supposed to come to the meeting. A person is supposed to bring to the meeting his son, wife and daughters. Failure to do so makes him liable to five *birr* punishment per individual. After the registration of those who came the accuser identifies the suspect. If there is no suspect, those attending the meeting are asked to identify possible suspects before crossing the *Bele*. Usually cases are resolved by this stage. When the accused is known he also nominate *sheni* elders who observe the fairness of the decision. *Sheni* from both sides pass the decision, which the *Bahl Committee* considers and approves. The *Bahl Committee* is seen as the police of the community and is much feared. If a man is missing or is suspected of committing a crime they instruct the KA to search for him.⁴⁰ The complaint of the people is paramount. Though some of the cultural committee try to give the punishment to the *sheni* others argue that the *sheni* are symbolic. Mussa, the elected *Abegar* mentions that,

When a tree is cut I never go there and see or try to know who did it. We receive the case from the KA chairman. We join the meeting to direct the process of identification. We tell them that the forest of the government and associations is like AIDS. The police gave them instruction about the preservation of the forest and how one tree is equal with the soul of one man. Punishment is passed on the basis of their wrongdoing. They say ‘What do you mean trees are life and should flourish’. We derive our meals from trees’. Anyway for the responsibility the government and the people entrusted me I am not to be blamed.

However, the *bahl* committee is not popular among the people. Especially youngsters see it as less powerful and they no longer accept its ruling and deny guilt. A Grade Twelve student, Seid, argued as follows:

Last year I cut a tree from a *Mehaberat* [associations] forest to buy stationary materials for the new academic year. They organized a meeting to identify those who cut the tree and completed it after three days of consecutive meetings. I paid one *mugera* (bread), which cost me ten *Birr*. If it were now I would not expose myself. They are simply frightening us. The committee members enjoy eating meat and drinking beer (*tella*) and simply take cases to *Bele*.

⁴⁰ It was mentioned that a person suspected of setting fire to his neighbor’s house was brought from Illubabor by writing a letter to the Peasant Association where the man took residence.

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