

# Natural Resource Management Institutions in Post-Conflict Situations

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State and Community Forests in Yegof, South Wello,  
Ethiopia

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## 1 Introduction

*“From above there was the forest development, from below was the town, and in between Mr Drought”<sup>1</sup>.*

*Quoted in Pankhurst (1989:164; 1992:69).*

*“The forest from above and the town from below are pressing hard on us”*

*Quoted in Bahru (1998: 87)*

The case of Yegof Mountain, situated West of Kombolcha town in South Wello Zone, provides an interesting example of the key issues with which this research project has been concerned: the questions of understanding the implications of conflict, post conflict and transition for Natural Resource Management (NRM); the effects of migration, displacement and return, and the issue of community and state institutions responsible for NRM.

In this working paper I begin by considering issues relating to narratives of deforestation, moving from global perspectives to the Ethiopian case and Wello in particular. The rest of the paper focuses on Yegof. The first part considers the imperial period and growing state interest in the forest leading to peasant resistance, which reached a climax at the period of the transition from imperial to military rule. The second part considers the Derg period and in particular the context of famine and resettlement, and the dynamics of simultaneous voluntary and forced displacement. The third section focuses on the transition between the Derg and Ethiopian peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) rule, and the question of displaced returnees.

Finally, I review the question of appropriation of local institutions by the state and resistance by those institutions to this process. I conclude with remarks on the findings of the paper regarding the consequences for NRM in post-conflict situations, return from displacement, and the nature of local institutions.

## 2 Competing global narratives of deforestation

The dominant global paradigm of alarming deforestation in which local people are seen as destroying forests has been challenged by academics, notably at the Institute of Development Studies in Sussex. Through careful historical research, particularly in West Africa, Fairhead and Leach (1996, 1998) have shown evidence of appropriate management of the natural environment by farmers and of reforestation rather than deforestation.

This perspective has led to the search for local ‘traditional’ institutions managing natural resources, and a new discourse has emerged tending to suggest that traditional resource management institutions existed in harmony with nature, managed by homogenous communities. However, on the ground local organisations for resource management are often not clearly visible, although institutions in the form of rules of inclusion and exclusion are quite common (Uphoff 1996). This has led to the assumption that previously existing organisations and institutions came under pressure from, and were destroyed by, processes of incorporation by state and market forces. In practical terms some agencies and academics have therefore advocated reviving traditional resource management institutions as appropriate vehicles for NRM. As Leach *et al.* (1997:5) suggest, the emerging consensus makes simplistic assumptions that homogenous community level organisations regulate the use of undifferentiated environments and that the solution to environmental degradation is to “reconstitute community-based natural resource management institutions”. Hence a number of NGOs have sought to promote the revival of indigenous institutions (Hogg 1992).

There are two major reasons why such assumptions about Resource Management Institutions (RMIs) are problematic simplifications. Firstly, in cultural terms, resource management is not a discrete field with its own organisations separate from other social institutions; rather it is part and parcel of the rest of social organisation within which it is embedded. Hence resource management organisations often do not exist; or rather resource management is generally carried out by existing social institutions. To use Leach’s formulation about not essentialising kinship in his study of an irrigation system (1961), it may be argued that resource management does not exist ‘as a

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<sup>1</sup> The Amharic expression was: *kelay limatu, ketach fabrikaw, mehal Ato Dirq.*

thing in itself', but rather is part of social, economic and political institutions and discourses.

Secondly, this view of traditional resource management institutions rests on a somewhat romantic, naïve image of indigenous institutions as pristine, isolated, pre-existing entities in harmony with nature (Adams 1996). It may therefore be more meaningful to consider how such institutions were transformed and may even have emerged in a context of wider political and economic processes, as the need for controlled resource usage becomes more salient with greater external threats and opportunities.

The argument that RMIs are often shaped by state and market interactions and discourses, and that they have sometimes even become defined and institutionalised in interaction with external interests may seem controversial. RMIs are clearly localised in rural areas and the link between people, place and environment seems obvious. Yet the interpretation and appropriation of nature is mediated by culture, and human relations with the environment are understood through cultural and symbolic constructions. Moreover, it has long been recognised that local cultures cannot be understood in isolation from regional, national and even global interactions. Therefore, the management of natural resources can be shaped by the way in which local cultures relate to wider processes, and may even emerge through this interaction.

### **3 The Ethiopian context and the case of Wello**

In the Ethiopian context too, the dominant paradigm, which is still prevalent in policy discourses, assumes that the highlands were forested and have become increasingly deforested. The idea that forest cover in the country was reduced from 40 percent to just 3 percent became quoted so often that it came to be considered as fact. This dogma has been challenged by a number of researchers, notably by McCann (1995).

In the case of Wello an environmental history research team has challenged these views (Crummey 1998, Bahru 1998 and Dessalegn 1998). Although the team does not speak with one voice and there are differences among them, the results of their studies suggest that the Northern highlands may never have been as forested as has been claimed and that

deforestation may not be all that recent. Comparing photographs taken in 1937 under the Italian Occupation with recent ones in selected sites, Crummey shows that there was more forest cover in 1997 than there was 60 years earlier. However, as Crummey recognises, the photographer was seeking to impress the Italian colonial administration about the potential for colonial settlement and may therefore have taken pictures that show areas suitable for settlement. In addition it is important to note that Wello has had a history of considerable migration and warfare, which is likely to have taken its toll on forest resources.<sup>2</sup>

Dessalegn (1998) documents an indigenous tradition of environmental concern and conservation notably in the 1960s on the part of intellectuals, governors who promoted afforestation schemes, and individuals requesting state permission to act as wardens of forests in the environs in which they live. He also emphasises the importance of what he terms "religious forestry": the role of Orthodox Christian and Muslim religion in protecting sites of plantations around churches (*Atsed*), holy springs (*tsebel*), burial grounds (*wijib* in the Muslim tradition), and sacred mountain summits.

Bahru documents the growth of state interest in forestry in imperial times from the 1950s when the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) forestry department began taking control of forests, especially after the proclamation of 1965. He notes that there were conflicts between the MoA and individuals who had been allocated land by the government (*balewileta*) and the nobility and royalty who also laid claims to land (*madbet* or *ristegult*).

Although not all the team members share this view, the findings of the Wello environmental history team have been presented as challenging the earlier paradigm of increasing deforestation, and clearly show that there has been reforestation notably near settlements, both through peasant and state initiatives.

However, interpretations of these findings require caution, notably about traditional forest management. The reforestation is generally of eucalyptus by farmers on their own plots near settlements during the past half century, and by the massive government hillside reforestation programmes using food-for work under

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<sup>2</sup> This point was made by Dessalegn when this paper was presented at the workshop organised by the Forum for Social Studies in Addis Ababa in February 2001.

the Derg. The failures of the latter approach which emphasised quantity over consideration of ownership and use rights have been amply documented (Yeraswork 2000). These so-called 'community forests' were in fact viewed by peasants as state forests. As Bahru concluded (1998:116): "The community forest is a good example of an idea that was probably brilliant in conception but flawed in implementation. Characteristically it stopped short of trusting the peasants themselves".

The majority of these 'community forests' were destroyed during the conflict and transition after the downfall of the Derg. Interestingly, the few cases where such forests were preserved by local communities seem to have been where they had been able to derive benefits for them, often with backing of Christian or Muslim religious leaders and institutions<sup>3</sup>. In the case of individual peasants, we are not dealing with traditional communal resource conservation, but rather with innovation in the past two or three generations by peasants becoming aware of the benefits of planting trees.

The "religious forestry" discussed by Dessalegn is an important aspect of preserving sacred groves. However, on the whole these are fairly limited and seem to rely on denying access to small sacred sites - except for ecclesiastical purposes - rather than managing forests for use by the community. Are we then faced with a situation where traditional management of forests existed and has been destroyed by state and/or market penetration, or did such management simply not exist in Wello?

The evidence from the Wello environmental history team would suggest that many areas of South Wello did not have forests by the time of the Italian occupation. However, to this day a few pockets of Juniper and Podocarpus forest exist. For instance, Anabe forest in South Wello has a venerated Podocarpus, called *Awliyaw*, reputed to be the largest and oldest tree in Ethiopia. But forest pockets such as Anabe seem to have survived more because they are isolated by rivers, cliffs and ravines, than because of traditional management, or because of the stationing of guards by the state.<sup>4</sup> As Bahru's informants pointed out, guards do not have torches, and tend to patrol

only nearby areas by day - whereas those cutting trees tend to operate by night.

In general peasant priorities in terms of NRM seem to be geared towards guaranteeing access to pasture for livestock, which are such a crucial part of the household economy. In many parts of Wello the interest in forest resources and their management does not seem to be prominent, and state interventionism which has been concerned with 'clothing the hillsides with green', has often been seen as a threat to pasture resources. Peasants have resisted plantations and impositions of state forests largely on the grounds that this restricts grazing areas. Although limited management of forest areas may exist, it would seem that these are the exceptions rather than the rule.

#### **4 The case of Yegof**

##### **Historical origins**

The historical origins of the forest, as Bahru<sup>5</sup> 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. Italian reports mentioned fines of up to fifty Maria Theresa thalers for unauthorised 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*),<sup>6</sup> on the slopes. The summit was apparently considered sacred. Bahru

<sup>3</sup> See Thematic Briefing *Conservation and participation in community forests*

<sup>4</sup> The Wello environmental history team was unable to visit the forest owing to its inaccessibility and a road has only recently reached the forest (Pankhurst 2000)

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> Referred to as *Hujub* by our informants, who mentioned in particular those of *Sheh* Yassin Durih and *Sheh* Mejele at Atirshign.

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 informants<sup>7</sup> on the summit there is a large clay incense burner (*gach'a*) allegedly one metre high by which the sacrifices were performed.

## The Italian period

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 of the environs of the Kombolcha plain seem 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.

## The imperial period and the imposition of the state forest

Discussions with informants in Bekimos Kebele Administration (KA)<sup>9</sup> 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,<sup>10</sup> notably the local esquires (*Chiqa shum*), and some landlords paying tribute in kind and later tax in cash (*Gebbar*).<sup>11</sup> The state also assigned functionaries such as the *Abba bidra* who collected payments in kind and labour from peasants and the *Atbiya dagna* responsible for local judicial matters. However, though the later was supposed to have nominal jurisdiction over the forest area, in fact no rules for forest use or sanction 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 trying 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 39 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 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 programmes, and the delimitation of the forest area. As the MoA files discussed by Bahru show, this involved establishing which areas were considered *bani*, or common land, which areas were considered *gebbar*, land on which taxes had been paid and what should be considered *mengist*, or state land. Local elders were involved in the process, which resulted in much conflict with local people.

From the perspective of understanding the implications of transition situations it is probably no coincidence that the 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

<sup>7</sup> Mekonen Aklog of the Dessie Zuria Forestry Department.

<sup>8</sup> I should like to thank Marc Wilks and the staff of the Istituto Agronomico d'Oltermare who e-mailed me scanned images of the photographs from Maugini's collection identified by Crummey.

<sup>9</sup> This discussion was held with a group of elders who were requested to come and meet us on 1-02-2000.

<sup>10</sup> For details see Yeraswork (2000:101-2).

<sup>11</sup> Informants mentioned the names of *Chiqa shum* Reta Hussein, *Gebbar* Ali Adera, *Atbiya dagna* Said Ali, and *Aba Bidra* Asfaw.

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 labourers. Interestingly Bahru notes that 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 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 villagised in the lowlands were the most salient.

The similar statements quoted at the beginning of this paper which informants mentioned to me in 1987 and to Bahru in 1997 express the sense of being “hemmed in” (Bahru 1998:111). The case of Yegof shows some of the complexities of community-state relations, when it came to the villagisation and resettlement. The villagisation 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 villagisation sites.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Derg period and the dynamics of resettlement differentiation**

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 victimisation, and their families were allowed to join them only two years later. For instance informants from Bekimos Kebele Administration claimed that 42 households were taken, 40 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”.<sup>13</sup> 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 1992: 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

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<sup>12</sup> Information kindly provided by Elizabeth Watson from her fieldnotes 20/05/99.

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<sup>13</sup> *Lij awet'alehu biye, dagna alnekagnim.*

the plain. It seems likely that the middle category were those who were more prone to victimisation 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 which 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 victimisation. One informant made this point very evocatively: "they had [already] distributed the land among themselves in their heads"<sup>14</sup> There were also allegations that land was given to those able to bribe officials. Although officially the resettlement was used to remove people from the state forest area, not all of those who were resettled lived or had land in the forest area, and many compounds and fields from which settlers were taken were then reoccupied or redistributed, which confirms this interpretation.

### **The transition period 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 utilise 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.<sup>15</sup>

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 reestablish forests and forest guarding was recognised 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 metre in the year 2,000 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-labourers returning from work on state farms and in Asseb, and refugees from the Eritrean conflict. The exact numbers and proportions are unknown.<sup>16</sup> However, the following data obtained from officials of three Kebele Administrations (KAs)<sup>17</sup> 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.

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<sup>14</sup> *Meretun bechingilatachew tekefallewit neber*

<sup>15</sup> see Thematic Briefing *Conservation and participation in community forests*.

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<sup>16</sup> Nationwide the figures for displaced returnees exceed 2 million (see MARENA Briefing ET04 *Returnees and Natural Resource Management*).

<sup>17</sup> Two or three of the former Peasant Associations (PAs) under the Derg were regrouped into one *Kebele* Administration (KA).



PA	Bekimos	Metene	Atari Mesk	Total	%
Total households (tax paying land holding)	1,418	1,306	953	3677	
Returnees	250	102	88	440	12
Ex-soldiers	20	34	25	79	0.2

**Table 1: Numbers of total households, returnees and ex-soldiers**

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'da*). Returnees were generally able to join a relative and obtain land to build a house. One settler referred to this as "A seat for my bottom"<sup>18</sup> 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 x 30 to grow a little maize (*ishef*). Some were provided *yemote kedda* "land of the deceased".<sup>19</sup> 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 (*te'egiten*).

Returnees have therefore been among those arguing for land redistribution. In Dessie Zurya *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.<sup>20</sup> 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 part of the 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 therefore in a better position than in neighbouring KAs where distribution was not carried out. Data for Atari Mesk suggests that 88 out of 200 people (44 percent) who gained land in the redistribution were former settlers, and apparently all settler households gained some land.<sup>21</sup> 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.

No cattle	Now	Previously
Two oxen or more	3	8
1 ox	7	6
Other cattle	4	10
No cattle	16	6
Total	30	30

**Table 2: Returnees current and earlier livestock holdings**

<sup>18</sup> *Yegit'e meqemeh'a*.

<sup>19</sup> See MARENA Briefing ET05 *Struggles over the land of the deceased*.

<sup>20</sup> Data obtained by Ato Mekonnen Aklog from the *Wereda* Council.

<sup>21</sup> 25 of the 200 who gained land were former soldiers.

Given survival difficulties returnees resort to selling and charcoal of survival. Some of the women collect dung for sale as fuel and grass to sell as fodder. Other options include wage-labour notably in peak agricultural seasons (weeding at a rate of 3 *birr* a day), wage labour in Kombolcha town, and sharecropping and livestock share-rearing on unfavourable 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.

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 and in February 2000 and March 2001 suggest that there may be more 'illegal' settlement there.

## **5 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 the 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.

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 themselves were accused of involvement in tree cutting. With the reassertion of control by the Ministry of Agriculture guards began their work once again. Culprits could be taken to court by the MoA and could be imprisoned for 3 months plus 300 *birr* convertible into time in prison for tree cutting and could be fined 5 to 10 *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 just after the transition in July 1991. In connection with a 'international tree day' Ministry of Agriculture 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 were made and prayers for rain and forest conservation. A video of the whole outing was produced.<sup>22</sup> 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 an attempt to coopt the authority of local religious leaders.

## **6 Concluding comments**

The Yegof case provides us with some insights pertinent to the main concerns of the MARENA/

<sup>22</sup> However, a similar event took place in 2000.

Inform-Ethiopia research project with regard to our understanding of post conflict situations, the consequences of displacement, the nature of resource management institutions, the notions of community and relations between communities and external agents.

### **Post-conflict situations**

The study has suggested that periods of transition are characterised by a power vacuum resulting in a loss of state authority and challenges to State interventionism and control of Renewable Natural Resources. Both the transition period between the imperial and Derg governments and the transition between the Derg and EPRDF rule were moments when peasant resistance against the state forest became pronounced. Claims which had been suppressed came to the fore.

In the Ethiopian context it is also important to understand the linkage between the context of famine and state interventionism in NRM.<sup>23</sup> It was immediately after the 1972-3 famine and after the 1984-5 famine that state intervention reached its climax, because of government concern to be purposive. In 1973 the large-scale plantation raised the dormant issue of where the state forest boundary was, where the boundary between taxed and common land was, and what rights local people had. In 1984 the RMI intervention was used to dislocate and resettle peasants living on the mountain to and relocated them in villagisation and resettlement schemes and in producers cooperatives.

In terms of the state forest the two transitions were marked in 1973 by peasants showing their opposition by uprooting seedlings and attempting to stop plantation work, and in late 1990s by large-scale deforestation and renewed 'encroachment' of settlement and even farming in the forest area, partly by settler returnees and ex-soldiers. This has demonstrated that no real sense of local responsibility for managing the state forest had been generated and that the forest was only 'protected' through the forceful but generally ineffective guarding by the government.

The study also suggests that the end of the conflict does not necessarily mean that issues become resolved. There is often 'fall-out' from the end of the conflict which may even generate new tensions and

conflicts. Thus the fall of the Derg coincided with and precipitated the return of large numbers of settlers and of former soldiers. The issues of moving from relief to sustainable livelihoods for the settlers and ex-soldiers became salient issues in the post conflict period in the early 1990s. Similar problems were faced with the Eritrean war as a result of refugees and demobilisation of soldiers. Settlers and ex-soldiers were in some senses 'uprooted' and disconnected from existing institutions, to whom they did not have allegiances. In the face of lack of access to land and livestock many resorted to cutting trees and selling fuelwood and charcoal with serious environmental consequences.

### **Consequences of return from displacement**

The Yegof study shows that returnees from resettlement were among the most dispossessed and marginalised groups. On return they found that their former land holdings had been redistributed and they most did not have the capital to purchase livestock. Many received minimal assistance from relatives, and most only a plot for a house and sometimes a small plot of land of 20 x 30 metres. Survival options for them once food aid stopped included selling wood and charcoal, wage-labour and sharecropping on unfavourable terms.

Those returned earlier fared somewhat better than those who returned later, in part because they have had more time to find ways of establishing themselves. In areas where redistribution of land took place returnees who came before the redistributions fared best. Some even obtained positions of authority in Kebele Administrations since they were not considered tainted by involvement in the Derg bureaucracy.

Nonetheless almost a decade after they have returned especially in areas where redistributions did not take place large numbers of returnees are landless or have holdings that are too small to enable them to achieve self-reliance. Though former settlers have been among those arguing for land redistribution, their voice does not seem to have counted, since whether redistribution occurred seems to have been related to average land-holding sizes and the politics of perceived differentiation resulting from the policies of the previous regimes.

Returnees remain a marginalised category with limited integration in local institutions. Their landlessness and

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<sup>23</sup> See MARENA Briefing ET 02 *An overview of natural resource management under the Derg*

powerlessness have forced them to become some of the poorest who rely on cutting wood for sale, and encroaching on the state forest. However, it should be stressed that they are not the only ones, that other farmers and forest guards have also been accused, and that they are simply agents for the main pressure on forest resources which comes from urban interests for fuel, construction and furniture.

### **Understanding institutions**

The study suggests that local indigenous institutions have had very limited roles in NRM, particularly in forestry. Peasant concerns are more focused on grazing areas and forests, especially those established through state intervention are often seen as a threat to pasture resources. Moreover, the role of local institutions has been mainly one of conflict resolution and mediation of community and State interests. The history of forest management has been characterised by state imposition and resistance by local communities to limitations on their use of forest land, particularly for grazing. At times when the state is not able to impose its will as during transition periods local people have been able to assert their rights, but the state eventually reimposes its will.

The State has at times attempted to coopt local institutions to locate and hand over culprits of tree cutting for deeds which occur without witnesses, and to make use of spiritual leaders to promote conservation but with limited success. This is arguably since their involvement with intrusive state measures tarnishes their legitimacy, and they seek minimal involvement with state structures.

State conservation measures at a local level have been used by leaders in positions of authority to victimise their rivals and enemies and benefit their relatives and allies making it clear that interventions have heightened divisions within differentiated communities, especially over the questions of resettlement, villagisation, land reallocation and returnees.

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