

Conflicts between Afar Pastoralists and their Neighbors: Triggers and Motivations

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Conflicts between Afar Pastoralists and their Neighbors: Triggers and Motivations

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Particularly pervasive violent conflicts in the Horn of Africa have detrimental effects on people's livelihoods there. While the intensity, causes, and repercussions of violent conflicts vary spatially and temporally, pastoral areas are currently the hotspots. This paper examines the causes and consequences of violent conflicts in Ethiopia between Afar pastoralists and two of their neighbors, the Issa and the Karrayyu. The findings are based on primary data (individual interviews, group discussions, and field observations) and secondary data (documents and publications) collected in 2005 and 2006. The results indicate that contemporary challenges such as recurrent droughts, resource appropriation, livestock raiding, proliferation of small arms, and illicit trade contribute to the perpetuation of violent conflicts. While traditional institutions manage inter-clan conflicts, their effectiveness is quite limited with regard to inter-ethnic conflicts, where the contemporary challenges in pastoral areas are too diverse and complex to be managed solely by traditional institutions. The perpetuation of violent conflicts has affected the livelihoods of pastoralists, thereby causing humanitarian crisis and limiting access to resources and opportunities.

1. Introduction

More than a century ago Vilfredo Pareto wrote that “the efforts of men are utilized in two different ways: they are directed to the production or transformation of economic goods, or else to the appropriation of goods produced by others” (Pareto 1906 [1971], 341). The production or transformation of economic goods requires involvement in exchange through peaceful institutions; interacting entities focus on building harmonious relationships through negotiation, mutual respect, and cooperation. On the other hand, the appropriation of resources or goods owned by others may entail the application of other types of institutions involving coercion arising from antagonism—here termed “institutions of violence”. Several theoretical analyses show the possibility that institutions of violence can coexist with (if not totally replace) peaceful institutions

(Garfinkel 1990; Skaperdas 1992; Hirshleifer 1988). Skaperdas's analysis indicates a narrow range for full cooperation, and implies that in the context of insecure property rights actors are most likely to prefer coercive means. Likewise, Hirshleifer develops a model to explain the situation of continuing conflict that implies that competing groups always find it advantageous to allot at least some of their resources to conflict technology. Hence, “total peace” is less likely when coercion is one possible means to control resources.

Existing evidence corroborates these theoretical studies. Despite normative arguments in favor of peace, conflicts occur everywhere in the world. Even today, more than eight hundred thousand people lose their lives every year because of armed conflicts (Ogata and Sen 2003). In some parts of the world, for example in some African countries, armed

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conflicts are becoming normal events and consequently the institutions of violence are influential in governing behavior and actions (Nhema 2004; Agyeman-Duah 1996).

Pastoral areas in the Horn of Africa are conflict hotspots. Put bluntly, these are places where states fail to properly fulfil their functions (Markakis 2004; Salih et al. 2001). One may wonder why conflicts endure despite empirical evidence and normative judgment telling us that they are destructive. Generally, conflicts occur and are sustained when actors realize that applying institutions of violence is rational in a given context (Korf 2006), but conflict-instigating factors and the mechanisms of conflict vary spatially and temporally.

This paper discusses the causes and consequences of conflicts in selected areas of Afar region, Ethiopia. The conflicts addressed involve armed attacks and counterattacks between different pastoral groups, while the institutions of violence are the informal rules and norms that shape the behavior of individual pastoralists before, during, and after the events of conflict.

Section 2 introduces the study area and the data used. Section 3 outlines theoretical discussions on conflicts and related factors. Section 4 discusses the institutions of violence of Afar pastoralists. Section 5 explains the causes of conflicts between the Afar and their neighbors, while section 6 draws conclusions and makes a number of policy recommendations.

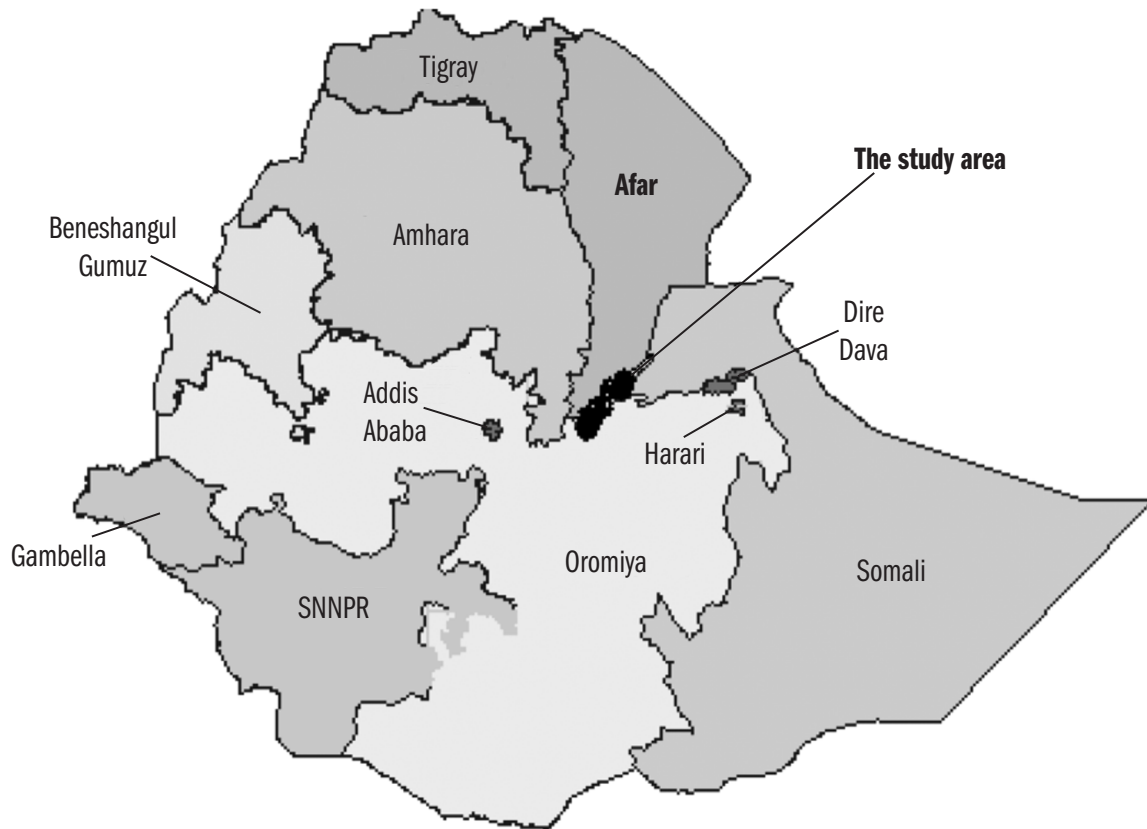
2. The Study Areas and the Data

Afar is one of the nine regional states of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Geographically, the region is

situated between 8°40' to 14°27' N and 39°51' to 41°23' E. It shares international borders with Eritrea (to the north) and Djibouti (to the northeast). Domestically, Afar borders on the Somali region (to the east), the Oromia region (to the south), the Amhara region (to the west and southwest), and the Tigray region (to the northwest) (Figure 1). The region is arid and hot, with annual rainfall usually between 225 mm and 560 mm and the daily maximum temperature between 18 and 45 degrees Celsius. Transhumant pastoralism is the main economic activity of Afar region. Afar pastoralists keep various types of livestock including camels, cattle, sheep, and goats.

The study was conducted in two districts in the southern part of the region, namely, Amibara and Awash-Fentale. The data was collected in two phases. The first fieldwork was conducted over about six months in 2005, involving extensive focused group discussions, participant observations, key informant interviews, and a household survey involving 120 randomly selected pastoral households. Discussions were also held with local administrative officials and experts working for NGOs and government offices. The second fieldwork phase was conducted over one month in 2006 to fill gaps in the data collected during the first phase. To this end several focused group discussions and key informant interviews were conducted. Altogether, a total of twelve group discussions were conducted in the two districts. The analysis in this paper is based largely on the qualitative data generated through group discussions, key informant interviews, official documents of aid organizations (e.g. United Nations Emergency Unit for Ethiopia), and previous studies conducted in the area (e.g. Getachew 2001; Gebre 2001). Quantitative data (generated through the household survey) was used to a lesser extent.

Figure 1: Location of the study area in Afar region and Ethiopia



3. The Institutions of Violence

Many scholars of the new institutionalism regard institutions as humanly designed constraints (either through spontaneous informal process or through formal procedure) governing behavior in social and economic interactions (North 1990; Knight 1992; Ostrom 2005; Schmid 2004). Indeed, institutions facilitate the occurrence of one action, say A, over another, say B, by increasing the cost of implementing action B relative to A. While many categorizations are possible, institutions can be peaceful institutions and institutions of violence. Peaceful institutions shape the behavior of actors to reach an outcome through cooperation and harmony, whereas the institutions of violence do so

through coercion and antagonism. The two types of institutions inherently have the potential to displace each other. On the one hand, peaceful institutions create an environment disabling to the institutions of violence embedded in conflicts, thereby facilitating peaceful interaction among actors.¹ On the other, institutions of violence can debilitate the capacity of existing peaceful institutions to the extent that the latter fail to govern behavior and action (Korf 2004; Korf and Fünfgeld 2006). In other words, existing regularized patterns of behavior can be altered substantially and peaceful institutions become inoperative when the institutions of violence are pre-eminent in governing behavior and actions.

¹ For example, the existence of strict property rights and effective institutions to enforce the rule of law

can mitigate conflicts by increasing the cost of intrusion into territory and other unlawful actions.

Many scholars explain the occurrence of conflicts using the greed-grievance conception of conflict analysis (Collier and Hoeffler 2002; de Soysa 2002; Korf 2005, 2006; Korf and Fünfgeld 2006). The grievance hypothesis, which follows the neo-Malthusian line of thinking, relates the sustenance of institutions of violence to increasing *challenges* of securing access to adequate resources for survival (Korf and Fünfgeld 2006; Percival and Homer-Dixon 1998). In this paradigm, fierce competition over natural resources produces inequality among resource users that, in turn, induces continuous struggle (grievance) of suppressed groups seeking to increase their share. The greed hypothesis, on the other hand, explains the sustenance of institutions of violence by focusing on *opportunities* that combatant groups can exploit by controlling spaces or resources (Collier and Hoeffler 2002; de Soysa 2002). According to Collier and Hoeffler, for example, scarcity of resources may contribute to the incidence of conflicts but the paramount factor is the existence of opportunities (e.g. resources to loot) that combatants can exploit in situations of protracted conflicts. Other scholars go beyond a separate analysis of grievance (challenges) or greed (opportunities) to show how both can sustain the institutions of violence along with other factors (such as ideology and pride sentiments) (Cramer 2002; Korf 2005, 2006).

Several empirical studies show that increasing resource scarcity is the main cause of conflicts in different parts of the world (Homer-Dixon 2001; Tir and Diehl 1998; Hauge and Ellingsen 1998). Homer-Dixon argues that environmental scarcities represent great challenges to human life, contributing to insurrections, ethnic clashes, urban unrest, and other forms of civil violence, especially in developing countries. Similarly, Bardhan argues that, while passions evoked by ethnocentric attitudes (i.e. pride) should not be overlooked, a great number of conflicts around the world occur as a result of increasing competition over scarce resources (2005). Other scholars argue the role of opportunities arising from resource abundance in sustaining conflicts (Olsson 2006; De Boeck 2001). De Boeck discusses how the diamond trade across the Angolan/Congolese border sustains institutions of violence among actors who struggle to maximize their share from trade opportunities. These studies show that both challenges and opportunities can

result in conflicts, but the two factors operate in different ways. When challenges appear, actors mainly target expected losses and conflicts arise when they try to minimize the loss unilaterally at the expense of each other. On the contrary, when opportunities are identified, actors mainly target expected benefits and conflicts arise when they try to maximize benefits from the opportunities by blocking one another.

These resource-centered orthodoxies have recently been challenged. Hagmann criticizes resource-centered arguments for relying on preconceived causalities, for amalgamating eco-centric and anthropocentric philosophies, and for neglecting the motivations and subjective perceptions of local actors (2005). Recent studies conducted within the context of East African pastoral areas also relativize—if not utterly dismiss—the link between resource scarcity (or abundance) and violent conflicts by focusing on newly introduced opportunities (e.g. access to illicit trade and the demand for better state benefits) and the historical process of modern state-building to explain conflicts (Hagmann and Mulugeta 2008; Yasin 2008; Markakis 2003). Hagmann and Mulugeta argue that current pastoral conflicts are complex in their causes and, unlike in the past, are highly connected with modern state politics and the capitalist mode of production. Hence, contemporary conflicts among East African pastoralists are driven not only by scarcity of pastoral resources (which was prominent in the past) but also by competition over new sources of revenue (e.g. government budget) and control of market centers and strategic places. Others associate pastoral conflicts with crippled conflict management institutions caused by widespread corruption in the work of NGOs operating in these areas (Eaton 2008) and politically motivated actions (Mulugeta and Hagmann 2008). Taken together, these studies suggest that the causes of conflicts among East African pastoralists go beyond the pastoralists' domain, and resource-centered solutions are therefore unlikely to bring sustained peace in these areas.

4. The “Institutions of Violence” in Afar

The institutions of violence in Afar constitute local social capital, which can be deployed when coercion is needed. Clan is the highest level where meaningful operation of the institutions of violence is observed since clan members

share common ancestors, territorial ownership, and political leadership. The descriptive analysis in Table 1 shows how much Afar pastoralists rely on their clan in connection with security.

Table 1: If you are attacked by outsiders, who will come to assist you?

	Number of respondents	Percent
Relatives, friends, and neighbors	5	4.5
Every clan member	106	94.6
No assistance	1	0.9

Source: Survey data

However, the level of cooperation (i.e. the level of operation of the institutions of violence) sometimes rises to inter-clan level when conflicts erupt between any Afar clan and the neighboring ethnic groups, as the following quote indicates:

We [Afar] fight together against outsiders [Karrayyu, Issa]. Our immediate neighbors belong to another tribe of Afar [the Weima tribe] but help us if they see us fighting with Oromo [Karrayyu] or Issa. We also do the same favor for them whenever they are attacked by others.
(Group interview in Doho kebele, Awash Fentale district, February 2005)

The institutions of violence are manifested in the form of cooperative norms before and during fighting with an enemy. In this regard, Afars have developed a special institution known as *dero* to mobilize fighters for collective action: when an intrusion occurs or clan members are attacked by outsiders those aware of the incident utter a special sound (“eee...”), ensuring that many people can hear it. Others echo and repeat the signal until enough clan members are gathered for collective action. All able-bodied adult male members of the clan are expected to participate when the signal is heard. On the other hand, when an intrusion is planned the clan sends scouts to the target area to evaluate the enemy’s resources and “military” strength. This helps them to decide whether to carry through the intrusion and to determine the number of fighters to be mobilized for collective action.

Solidarity is not only expressed during collective fighting and information sharing. It may take also the form of sharing punishments when a conflict is peacefully resolved through the mediation of a third party: if a subset of the clan is found guilty, clan members will share the penalties (which usually take the form of livestock). Even in a private case when a clan member commits a crime against a non-member for personal reasons, the corresponding sanction passes collectively to the culprit’s whole clan. Likewise, any incoming compensation will be shared among clan members. Indeed, the principle of collective (as opposed to individual) guilt and responsibility for infractions against outsiders forms the basis for solidarity within Afar clans and hence contributes to the effectiveness of the institutions of violence.

5. Explaining Conflict in Afar

The pattern of conflict in the study areas is complex, with several factors contributing to the perpetuation of conflicts. In order to elucidate the driving forces of conflicts in the study areas, two cases are examined separately. This section also discusses peaceful institutions (informal and formal) that exist to manage conflicts in the area.

5.1. Conflicts with Issa-Somali

Two major factors are making resources scarcer in Afar and putting many places which were previously accessible to Afars out of their reach. First, a wide-scale westward expansion of Issa-Somalis (hereinafter Issa) in the past seven to eight decades has displaced a number of Afar clans (particularly those who belong to the Weima tribe) from their traditional rangelands in West Hararghe (Getachew 2001; Gebre 2001).²

Issas are in our territory. They get military training in Djibouti to displace us from our fathers’ land. They were around Dire Dawa in the past but control most of our resources now.³ (Interview with Seko Mohammed Seid, Afar elder at Ambash, Amibara district, November 2006)

Similar ideas were reflected in many of the group discussions. A closer look at the qualitative data reveals that Afars

² A tribe in this paper refers to a cluster of clans. Most of the Afar clans inhabit-

ing the southern part of Afar region are members of the Weima or Debne tribe.

³ Dire Dawa is 250–300 km east of Aleideghi plain (the current key point of conflict).

have lost control of places such as Mulu, Erer, Afdem, and part of the Alaydeghi plain.

Second, state development programs have increased the pressure on the Afars. A total of 375,219 hectares of prime Afar rangeland has been confiscated by the Ethiopian state for various purposes (Table 2). The Yangudirassa National Park, Alaydeghi Wildlife Reserve, West Awash Wildlife Reserve, Gewane Wildlife Reserve, Mille Serdo Wildlife Reserve, West Awash Controlled Hunting Area, and several large-scale farms in the Middle Awash Valley constrict the Afars' access to rangeland resources.

Table 2: Land confiscated from Afar pastoralists

Purpose	Area (ha)
National parks	54,870
Wildlife reserves	148,180
Controlled hunting areas	150,680
Commercial farms	16,318
Other	2,160
Total	372,208

Source: Computed from Yemane (2003, 5), Getachew (2001, 91), and own data

Squeezed from different directions, the Afars became aggressively resistant against the Issas, which led to recurrent bloodshed between the two ethnic groups. More importantly, the rapid and coercive westward expansion of the Issa into territories historically controlled by Afars has reduced the possibility of peaceful resource sharing among the two groups. Alaydeghi, Blen, Buri and Andido are the major places of conflict with Issa pastoralists because of their better endowment of pastoral resources. The conflict is exacerbated by the prolonged and recurrent droughts the area has experienced, particularly, since the mid-1990s. For instance, a series of clashes occurred between the two groups in 2002 following the failure of the *sugum* rain that normally occurs in March and April (UN-EUE 2002a, 2002b; Markakis 2004). The conflict during that time was quite serious and reached to the extent of blocking transportation between Ethiopia and Djibouti for some time.

While the shrinking pastoral resource base is an important factor in explaining the Afar-Issa conflict, it is not the only one. Smuggling has also contributed much to the perpetu-

ation of the conflict. Apart from its grazing resources, the eastern part of Afar is a smuggling route for caravans taking large quantities of manufactured goods (clothing, footwear, electronics, pharmaceuticals) and food from the eastern borderlands of Ethiopia to Addis Ababa. For a long time the Afar have benefited from their strategic location on this trade route by acting as middlemen between the coastal and hinterland traders as well as by direct involvement in the smuggling business (Getachew 2001). However, the Afars' gains from smuggling have attracted Issas who are also active in this field. Issas control two key smuggling centers (Gedamaitu and Adaitu) in the Afars' contested territory whereas Afars frequently inflict attacks on Issa to regain these strategic places. For instance, a series of clashes between the two groups over control of the trading centers were recorded in 2001 and 2002 (UN-EUE 2001; 2002a). For Issas, controlling the trading centers ensures free movement to transport smuggled goods between Ethiopia's two main import-export lines, the railway and the highway. For Afars, maintaining control over such strategic places not only ensures their income from the "underground economy" but also relaxes their access to grazing resources especially during drought years. Therefore, for both groups, fighting is in this case mainly a matter of expanding their own "free zone" to maximize benefits from cross-border trade opportunities.

Another source of conflict between the two groups is the recurring livestock raiding. Issas not only fight for the rich pastoral resources and of smuggling centers in Afar territory, but also for the livestock that they can raid from Afars to sell immediately in domestic markets or export through illegal routes. Nor are Afars immune from the raiding "business." Notable examples of livestock raids and counter-raids occurred in 2002: In June 2002, Issas raided more than 3,500 head of livestock from Afar and killed seven Afar herders. Organizing in response, the Afars went to Mulu market to save their animals from being sold, but were unsuccessful as the animals were taken to Djibouti by a different route. Four months later, young Afar men took retaliation against the Issa and sold a number of raided animals (the number not reported) at Bati market in Amhara region. This implies that livestock raiding between the two groups is a reciprocal "business" that sustains conflicts between them.

Meanwhile the conflict between Afar and Issa has become highly politicized, particularly since the 1970s. The military-led regime that overthrew a civilian government in 1969 showed a strong demand for territorial expansion to form “the Great Somalia,” which was the main cause of war between Ethiopia and Somalia in 1977/78. This pan-Somali passion of the former Somali regime and its military support led the Issas—as ethnic Somalis—to claim several places in Afar including the flood-fed rangelands in the Middle Awash Valley (Getachew 2001; Markakis 2004; Galaty and Bonte 1991). Although the pan-Somali passion is not formally promoted nowadays, the legacy of the past regime still influences the attitudes of Afars towards the Issas. Indeed, there is a strong belief among ordinary Afars that any attack they launch on Issa is legitimate as long as Issas are in their traditional territory. Moreover, the conflict between the two is compounded by current political situations and complexities in the Horn. The ethnic-based federalism adopted in Ethiopia in 1991 which increased ethnic groups’ awareness of traditional territories, the unstable geopolitical conditions of the Horn countries which facilitated illegal trafficking of firearms, and the high dependence of Ethiopia on the port of Djibouti where the Issas have political dominance over Afars are all contributing to the perpetuation of conflicts between the two ethnic groups.

5.2. Conflicts with Karrayyu-Oromo

The Karrayyu are longtime neighbors of the Afar. Their relationship began two centuries ago when Karrayyus occupied the Upper and Middle Awash Valley (Getachew 2001; Gebre 2001). Traditionally, Afars control areas north of Mount Fentale whereas Karrayyus control the lands to the south. The two groups had strong economic and social relationships in the past, which were also manifested in solidarity and shared values. As Getachew notes: “They shared pastures and even lived in shared settlements” (2001, 48). While such positive relationships still exist to some extent, their conflictive interactions are more pronounced nowadays.

Two main reasons can be given for gradual deterioration of peaceful interaction between Afars and Karrayyus. The first is the gradual decline of the pastoral resource base for

various reasons. Confiscation of land by the state is among the serious challenges that Afars in Awash-Fentale have been facing since the 1960s. Near Mount Fentale, the Awara Melka state farm now occupies a significant tract of the rangeland previously accessible to Afars, while several state farms (such as Melka-Sedi, Melka-Werer, and Yalo) and settlement farms occupy large tracts of the dry season grazing retreat in Amibara. Most of the remaining rangelands have also been proclaimed as game reserves, national parks, and controlled hunting areas (Table 2). In addition to state land confiscation schemes, the westward expansion of the Issa displaced several Afar clans from their homelands in West Hararghe (Gebre 2001; Getachew 2001). The declining resource base within their territory pushed Afars southwards and increased their competition with Karrayyus. However, resource scarcity is not unique to Afars. Karrayyus are also victims of the extensive land confiscation programs of the Ethiopian state. The Nura Era Orchard, the Metehara Sugar Estate, and part of the Awash National Park have already displaced Karrayyus from their rangelands (Gebre 2001; Tolera 2000). Moreover, Karrayyus face continuous pressure in the east from Arsi Oromos (Getachew 2001; Tolera 2000). The severity of resource scarcity has been worsened by a series of droughts since mid-1990s, and the deterioration of rangeland quality over time due to expansions of unwanted plants (such as *Acacia nubica* and *Acacia senegal*) (Abule et al. 2005, 26).

The deterioration in the pastoral resource base has negatively influenced peaceful relations between the two groups. On the one hand, Karrayyus become less willing to permit Afar herders onto rangelands in their domain and less tolerant to any intrusion (Gebre 2001). On the other hand, such resource scarcity also leads Karrayyus to cross into Afar territory, resulting in frequent confrontations between the two groups. The Karrayyus’ conflict is more serious with the Weima tribe of Afar because the latter settled near contested areas following their eviction from West Hararghe by Issa. Frequent clashes occur between the Weima Afar and Karrayyu, particularly near the Awash National Park (in places such as Beleadi, Aroretti, and Dinkuku Pond) and around Mount Gumbi. Conflicts occasionally also erupt between Karrayyus and the Debne tribe of Afar (longtime neighbors of the Karrayyu) over the wet-season rangeland

known as the Gababa plain (between the two peaks of Mount Fentale). Clashes are more intense during droughts. For instance, a series of attacks and counter-attacks between Afar and Karrayyu occurred in June 2002 following the failure of the short rainy season (UN-EUE 2002a). The conflict became exacerbated later in October as the drought continued (UN-EUE 2002b).

Another cause of the Afar-Karrayyu conflict is the intensification of livestock raiding (*gadde*) between the two groups. Indeed, raiding is the traditional phenomenon between the two groups, and is tacitly approved by traditional leaders (Getachew 2001). In its traditional sense, raiding is a means of restocking after drought seasons, establishing initial stock for young men in order to assert manhood in the pastoral environment, and increasing prestige. Nowadays, however, livestock are mainly raided for commercial purposes and sold in open markets or exported through illegal routes. Since contemporary raids are usually wide in scale of operation, the level of conflict sometimes reaches an extent where government security forces have to intervene. For instance, in 2004, Karrayyus raided some five hundred head of livestock from Afar in Awash-Fentale, killing five Afar herders and injuring one. On a revenge attack, the Afars killed one Karrayyu and raided an unknown number of animals. The spiraling escalation of conflict was stopped by the intervention of the government.

5.3. Comparative Discussion

At least two important factors can be extracted from the above discussions. First, state land confiscation programs since the 1960s have increased resource scarcity in the study areas and aggravated conflict. Since large state-owned establishments—nature reserves and large-scale farms—have occupied most of the dry-season rangelands (*kalo*), pastoralists have been forced to keep their livestock in wet-season rangelands (*alta*) almost year-round. This has increased the scope for confrontation with neighboring ethnic groups (such as Issa and Karrayyu) since most of the wet-season rangelands (e.g. the Alaydeghi plain and the Fentale) are

found in contested zones. This policy-induced scarcity is exacerbated by the recurrence of drought in the study areas. Given that pastoral resources are subtractable in nature, scarcity implies the existence of highly negative appropriation externalities.⁴ In such situations, each pastoral group seeks to minimize and if possible avoid the negative externalities created by others. This is outlined by an Afar elder:

We fight with others during droughts because water and grasses are not adequate to feed our animals. When we migrate elsewhere beyond our territory we usually negotiate with the owners [except with Issa] to feed our animals; most likely, the owners refuse to allow more animals onto their rangeland during droughts. However, refusal by the owners does not block us from entering the desired rangeland because we have to save our animals from possible death.

(Interview with Hummed Musa, Afar elder in Amibara, February 2005)

This means that resource scarcity (induced by policy and nature) has transformed a cooperative game of using pastoral resources into a zero-sum game in which the gains of the gainers are equal to the losses of the losers and hence has facilitated the application of the institutions of violence.

The second conflict-instigating factor is livestock raiding. Livestock are resources that can be accumulated through production (by applying peaceful institutions) or through raiding (by applying the institutions of violence) by Afars and their neighbors. As a “forced contract,” livestock raiding has traditionally occurred between pastoral groups of East Africa since time immemorial (Galaty and Bonte 1991; Otim 2002). While raiding, as a cultural phenomenon, contributes to conflicts in the study areas, culture provides a partial explanation for the existence of raiding. Nowadays, raiding occurs not only for cultural reasons but also to earn income by selling the animals in open markets. This is due to the integration of the pastoral economy into the commercial economy, which is associated with increasing access to external and domestic livestock markets. The change in the incentive for livestock raiding from “culture” to “commerce” arising from the opportunity to sell the raided animals could influence the frequency and extent of conflicts. First,

⁴ The negative externalities are manifested in the costs incurred to fulfill the biological needs of livestock (i.e. resource appropriation costs).

commercial raiding is extensive in nature, which means that it is less tolerable and hence the victims are more likely to take retaliatory action. Second, by its nature, commercial raiding involves larger numbers of actors. Livestock traders, traffickers of illegal arms, and others are usually behind the raids, fueling up the conflicts. Since these actors share few common norms and values, traditional institutions are less effective in managing conflicts associated with commercial raiding. Third, commercial raiding increases the likelihood that raided animals will quickly be beyond the reach of the raided groups, which reduces the effectiveness of negotiations to return the animals. As local opinions indicate, there are several cases in which negotiations were unable to bring any change simply because the animals had crossed the border to Djibouti or Somalia or been marketed elsewhere within Ethiopia. The usual response of a victim group is retaliation using its institutions of violence.

An implicit factor behind the conflicts is access to conflict technologies, which is mainly associated with the instability in the Horn of Africa since the 1970s.⁵ In the “old” days, conflict technologies constituted traditional fighting tools. Local accounts indicate that Afars (and their neighbors) used to fight with spears, bows, swords, and, in rare cases, non-automatic rifles. Nowadays, if these old conflict technologies exist at all, it is only for their symbolic value. Instead, modern firearms are used to attack and defend. It is not surprising to encounter armed youths around homesteads, in bush areas, and in some towns in Afar. This is not without reason. Better access to conflict technologies increases win probabilities and hence increase the likelihood of controlling strategic places or benefiting from looted resources (livestock). Indeed, it is an imperative for every Afar to acquire modern weapons to sustain their livelihood, given that the neighboring groups own and use the same technologies. This implies that, as power resources, modern conflict technologies are essential instruments that sustain the institutions of violence among Afars and their neighbors.

⁵ Countries in the Horn of Africa have been shaken by war and civil unrest particularly since the 1970s. The Ethio-Somalia war of the 1970s, the civil war in Somalia since the 1980s, the instability in Djibouti in 1990s, the intensified civil war in Ethiopia in the 1980s and early 1990s, and

the Ethio-Eritrea war in the late 1990s are apt examples. These instabilities and wars facilitated the availability of light weapons in “underground” markets of all countries in the Horn.

5.4. Institutional Aspects

The likelihood of violent conflicts will be zero—at least theoretically—if peaceful institutions exist to counterbalance the institutions of violence. This subsection discusses the capacity and effectiveness of the existing institutions to counteract the institutions of violence. Since such institutions can be formal or informal, the two categories are discussed separately.

5.4.1. Informal Conflict Management Institutions

Conflicts between Afar clans are managed by the *madaa* based on Afar customary law. Members of the traditional jury are elders selected from different clans, excluding the clans involved in dispute. The process is called *billi arri*, which literally means peace-making. In the mediation process, the mediators focus on cooling off the parties by extending the length of the procedure until they settle their affairs by themselves. According to the elders in Ambash, traditional deliberations may take up to two weeks. Sanctions are not designed to punish the wrongdoer. Instead, to use Rugege’s expressions, the traditional mediators impose sanctions based more on the “give-little-and-take-little” principle than the “winner-takes-all” principle (1995). The *madaa* has the authority and legitimacy to effectively enforce sanctions imposed by the traditional jury. Central to its effectiveness is the tradition of forgiveness among Afar clans, respect for elders, and the transfer of resources as compensation. As a result, there are few cases in which conflicts between Afar clans escalate until they need the mediation of outsiders.

The *madaa* was able to effectively manage conflicts between Afars and some of their neighbors in the past (Getachew 2001). For example, Afar and Karrayyu used to share institutions that enable them to exchange fugitives, pay compensation, and reduce tensions; i.e. if an Afar murdered a Karrayyu (or vice versa), a traditional jury composed of both ethnic groups would handle the

case.⁶ However, though they still exist to some extent, these shared institutions are no longer influential. For Afar and Issa, the traditional framework for managing conflicts (as well enforcing agreements) is either latent or non-existent. In general, the *madaa* is now less effective at managing inter-ethnic conflicts.

The household survey also indicates that inter-clan conflicts are within the capacity of traditional institutions while inter-ethnic conflicts often exceed it. Thirty-eight out of forty-eight interviewed pastoralists who reported inter-ethnic conflicts indicated that the conflicts were either resolved with the involvement of formal mediators or were not resolved at all. This contrasts with inter-clan conflicts, which required little external facilitation within the period considered.

5.4.2. Formal Conflict Management Institutions

The existence of well-functioning formal institutions (in addition to informal ones) may have two related benefits for societies (Knight 1992). First, the existence of formal institutions facilitates the introduction of third-party enforcers (mainly the state) and can help to stabilize informal institutions. Second, the introduction of formal institutions makes the institutional setup more complete and robust for handling diverse challenges and opportunities. In this respect, state-backed property rights and conflict management institutions can augment informal institutions in managing conflicts in pastoral areas (Swallow and Bromley 1995).

As a third-party rule enforcer, the state is expected to facilitate peaceful interaction between right-holders and duty-bearers. However, this is not the case in the study areas: the right-holders and the duty-bearers are often unknown, particularly in border areas. Meanwhile, high territorial demand is observed particularly for locations that have either better pastoral resources (such as the Alaydeghi plain and the vicinity of Mount Fentale) or strategic importance for exploiting trade opportunities (such as Gedamaitu and

Adaitu). Afars move into contested areas without the consent of their neighbors because they believe that these areas are within their territorial domain. Their neighbors also do not hesitate to take countervailing actions that usually lead to bloody confrontations. The actions of the local administrations are limited to precautionary tactics such as establishing offices in contested areas to safeguard future claims of their people.⁷ At higher levels, conflicts are understated and are usually considered as temporary conflicts over pasture and water rather than a struggle between groups for permanent territorial control.

In several policy documents the Ethiopian government has acknowledged the complexity of pastoral challenges and called for certain critical interventions to improve the livelihoods of pastoral communities. However, conflict and its management have received marginal attention, if mentioned at all, in many of the contemporary policy documents. For instance, while eight articles (out of 104) in the food security strategy of 1996 discuss pastoral areas, none of them mentions the importance of conflict management in these areas (FDRE 1996). Even the most recent policy document, the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program, envisages no systematic way of managing conflicts in pastoral areas (FDRE 2002).

Despite this fact, government and development agencies intervene in conflict mediations on an *ad hoc* basis. Actually, most of the inter-ethnic conflicts within three years preceding this study were mediated in the presence of the government and the NGOs operating in the area (such as CARE Ethiopia). The mediation forums were held in urban centers in the presence of traditional leaders and government officials, where the latter took leadership on the stage. The meetings lasted two to three days depending upon the complexity of the cases and the damages involved. The government and the NGOs provided logistics to bring the conflicting parties together.

⁶ Based on the rule that the culprit and his clan pay 101 head of cattle as compensation or blood money to the victim's family and clan.

⁷ In order to stop the expansion of the Issa, new district offices have been built close to the eastern border of Afar region. Since October 2006, the Amibara district administration has transferred all district-

level government offices to an open rangeland known as Andido, which is a critical penetration point of the Issa because of its proximity to water points at Blen.

Unfortunately, these mediation efforts were unable to mitigate the recurrent conflicts between Afars and their neighbors. Rather, formal mediations are usually wound up with pseudo-commitments by participants to share resources in a peaceful manner. For instance, at the formal mediation forums in the towns of Awash 7 Kilo and Dire Dawa in December 1998, Afar and Issa elders agreed to forgive each other for earlier conflicts and vowed to work together for peace and stability of the area (Unruh 2005). However, the conflicts between the two groups showed no sign of abating after these promising agreements, with instances of conflict between the two groups occurring in June 2002 (UN-EUE 2002a), October 2002 (UN-EUE 2002b), and April 2007 (“MoWR Alaydege Conflict Delay,” *Addis Fortune*, April 20, 2007) offering typical justifications for the violations of prior agreements. Similarly, more than five instances of conflict between Afar and Karrayyu occurred in 2004 despite the efforts of the government and NGOs to mediate between the two groups. The recurrent failures of formal mediations to bring harmony among conflicting groups have reduced confidence among Afars. As a result, Afars have termed formal mediations *dir wegry*, which literally means false mediations.

A number of limitations are embedded in formal mediations. The first is that local mediators may lack knowledge and experience on how to apply the informal and the formal approaches in an integrated manner. This may create disparities between the local elders and government officials in their ways of handling the mediation. In the traditional system, mediators rarely act as a dictating party but use “soft” techniques to resolve conflicts. By contrast, formal mediators usually downplay the “soft” techniques of traditional mediators and are tempted to provide fast solutions.

Second, formal mediation forums are organized with budget support from the government and the NGOs operating in the area and conducted in high-profile hotels in local towns (such as Awash 7 Kilo) with traditional elders compensated for their participation entirely in monetary terms (in the form of per diems and transport allowances). The facilitators (affiliated with government offices and NGOs) also take their share of benefits by claiming for per

diems and allowances. Since the budget rules for conflict mediation do not follow the standard procedures of public finance, it is highly likely that the compensation paid to the mediating actors is inflated and the budget is corrupted. This implies, as also observed elsewhere in East Africa (Eaton 2008), that conflicts between Afar pastoralists and their neighbors could serve as a “business opportunity” for mediating actors thereby reducing the incentive of these actors to work for total avoidance of violence.

The third problem of formal mediation emanates from the domination of local officials in the mediation process. Some local opinion holds that government officials monopolize the mediation forum and elders are given little chance to express their views or else their interests are overlooked. Moreover, since participation of the elders in the mediation forums provide them with the opportunity to access state and NGO budgets and participants are often selected by local politicians, elders tend to “stay on the safe side” in the mediation process. The involvement of local elders in this way can have detrimental effects on traditional institutions and sustainability of peaceful interactions among the neighboring groups. That is to say, the elders, who could provide an alternative forum for justice, may be associated with the formal authority by the local people and lose their legitimacy, as also observed elsewhere in East Africa (Hoehne 2006; Mulugeta and Hagmann 2008). For instance, Mulugeta and Hagmann note that traditional Karrayyu elders have earned the nickname *luke*, meaning informer, because of their loyalty to politicians.

6. Conclusion and Policy Suggestions

The institutions of violence are frequently on the front line when it comes to influencing behavior and action among the interacting groups in Afar. In line with contemporary arguments (Homer-Dixon 1998; 2001; Tir and Diehl 1998; Hauge and Ellingsen 1998), the findings show that resource scarcity is an important challenge leading to recurrent clashes among neighboring groups. Extensive land confiscations by the state and recurrent droughts are the major factors contributing to resource scarcity. However, resource scarcity is not the only factor that led to conflicts in the study areas. Livelihood opportunities have also played some

role. In this regard, market opportunities for livestock (both domestic and abroad), opportunities for smuggling, and access to modern conflict technologies are important.

Conflict management should be recognized as part and parcel of pastoral development policies, because development efforts cannot produce the anticipated impacts on the livelihood of pastoralists in the presence of recurrent conflicts in pastoral areas. While managing conflicts in pastoral areas should be a crucial policy agenda, it is worthwhile, however, to recognize that conflicts in the study areas are complex and diverse in origin. Therefore, a detailed understanding of the natural, social, economic, political, and historical contexts of pastoral areas is crucial to providing long-lasting solutions.

The current situation indicates that traditional institutions alone are not effective in managing conflicts and hence external intervention is indispensable. This is attributable to the gradual weakening of the ability of traditional institutions to manage resource use patterns and to the fact that some of the contemporary causes of conflicts are beyond the capacity of traditional authorities. It is worthwhile to note, however, that external intervention does not mean introducing entirely new forms of governance and crafting “modern” rules to extinguish the traditional ones. Rather, it is essential to provide a locally motivated institutional

framework whereby traditional and formal conflict management institutions cross-fertilize each other. In this regard, the government should strengthen out-of-court conflict management procedures by building the capacities of local and traditional authorities, for example through regular training events where innovative new procedures and successful experiences from other areas are introduced. In the meantime, it is important to strengthen legal institutions at district level so that the conflicting parties can present their cases for judgment when mediations fail. In the long run this latter point implies strengthening state security institutions step by step to realize fully functioning rule of law in pastoral areas.

Finally, managing inter-ethnic conflicts requires strong cooperation between neighboring regions (Afar, Somali, and Oromia), including designing institutions to sanction cross-regional livestock raiding and facilitating inter-ethnic resource-sharing. However, mitigating conflicts in these areas entails also cooperation beyond the neighboring regions. In this regard, creating strong alliances among neighboring countries (e.g. Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Somaliland) to control illicit cross-border trade and small arms trafficking, to license and facilitate cross-border livestock trade, and to exchange cross-border livestock raiders and criminals is an essential, albeit challenging, element of conflict management.

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