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Asymmetric Power Relations on The Frontiers of The State: Resistance to a Hunting Ban in Nechisar National Park of Southern Ethiopia

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Abstract

This paper concerns the ethnographic analysis of asymmetrical power relations created between actors holding competing views about nature conservation and preservation of cultural values in one of the highly conflict-affected protected areas in Ethiopia. The rhetoric of wilderness and the policies it implies were exported to Ethiopia to create protected areas in the 1960s. Since then, though resisted, it has been strengthened through conditional funding and technical supports by conservation NGOs of the global north. Taking the case of a hunting ban introduced through the creation of Nechisar National Park in southern Ethiopia, it is found that the top-down formation of the park and imposed hunting prohibitions have resulted in altering local values, targeted attacks and elimination of protected animals such as the Swayne's hartebeest which the park was created to protect. A historical ethnographic approach was adopted from 2016 to 2018 to collect data alongside archival analysis, in-depth individual and group interviews, case appraisals, and observations.

Keywords: Imposed values, Nechisar park, power relations, resistance, hunting, dual impact.

1. Introduction

Many protected areas in Africa are facing a doomed future as a result of their widespread rejection by local communities claiming various rights to the curtailed resources (Wells, and McShane 2004; Berkes, 2002; Infield, 2001). The lion's share of the problem lies in the approach adopted during the formation and later management of these protected areas (Emerton et al, 2006; Dudley, et al 1999). First, the notion of duality of the environment and human beings as separable entities was ultimately brought to the global south where such dichotomy has never existed (Descola, 2013; Debelo, 2016). In fact, human environments are productions of human actions and interactions¹, yet that is entirely overlooked, and at that expense, this constructed or imagined rhetoric of intact wilderness dictated the formation of protected areas in Africa. Subsequent evictions were put in place to reinforce the curtailment of local interests to resource access, use or management (Brockington and Igoe, 2006; Almudi and Berkes, 2010; Adams and Hulme, 2001; Hulme and Murphree, 2001; Brockington and Scholfield 2010; Brockington and Wilkie, 2015; Baynham-Herd et al, 2018). An exclusionary fence and fine approach heralded the first instance of skewed power relations between affected locals and dominating actors.

After decolonization, colonial conservation principles remained in place through conservation NGOs that the global north established/helped to establish in Africa. Most of the new post-independence governments kept the conservation laws and principles set forth in a fence and fine fashion by former colonial conservation experts (Adams, 2013). As a way to sustaining the imposed conservation rules, mega global organisations funded the relocation of indigenous people from their land for the sake of maintaining non-local interests in African spaces (Van Vliissingen and Pearce, 2005). The power imposition has a channel (conservation actors, NGOs, and institutions) through which the “knowledge, power, money, and values of the north” flow in a well-articulated but systematic way to the Global South, which the western public conceives as “exotic wild places” (Brockington and Scholfield, 2010:552). Development aid (for example loans and support from World Bank and IMF) was partly made contingent upon recipient states' performance according to environmental treaties (Ferraro

¹ See Ingold, 2002 for the detail

and Pattanayak, 2006; Kiss, 2004). Adger et al (2005) convincingly associate the sustenance of uneven power relations in conservation to “structure of vertical and horizontal interplay between actors; the characteristic of the resource being managed; aspects agency such as the emergence of leadership and transaction of knowledge at different levels; and the social construction of crisis to overcome inertia and trigger change” (p. 5). As Khan (2013) conceptualized, asymmetrical power relations started at the point where outlawing and criminalizing local ways of treating and living with nature were instituted. He argued:

It is also undeniable that there exists a power asymmetry among the endogenous actors in the context of donor-sponsored participatory projects in developing countries. This is particularly the case for donors and environmental organizations because of their financial capacity, supremacy in knowledge/discourse production, and their global image. Along with the existing power differential, the contradictory goals of forest conservation involving mining and forest management at times compel the participating actors to compromise their autonomy (p. 472).

The gradual outcome hence was not only the reformulation and redefinition of spaces in Africa but also material dispossession and cultural erosion. By implication, local forms of life and indigenous practices easily became marginalised and criminalised (Redpath et al, 2013; Brockington, 1999; 2002).

Yet, in all the above efforts, the process of the imposition had not been smooth. From the onset, violence and conflictual power relations intertwined in the process of Protected Area formations and governance, and continued to wreck its sustainability (West, et al, 2006:251; see also Negi, et al, 2017). Bereft of local understandings and negotiations during the early imposition of conservation rules and its latter implementations, people-park conflicts are also on the rise in most protected areas of Africa (Woodroffe et al, 2005; Wittmer et al, 2006; Young et al, 2010; Wilkie, and Carpenter, 1999). Causes and natures of conflict, however, remains diverse as the socio-political and cultural settings in which these protected areas established varies. Dickman (2010) argued that differing objectives of protection appear at the foundations for most of the conflicts.

Causes for people–park conflicts originate from the lack of or poorly designed community participation (Negi et al, 2017); contention over resource exploitation and poaching (Mutanga and Gandiwa, 2017); frequent arrests of ‘environmental offenders’ by park rangers (Ayivor et al, 2013; Neumann, 2001; 2002); incompatible values ascribed to protected resources (Del Campo, 2017; Bell and Topalidou, 2007); top-down decision making in the early formation of

protected areas (Benjaminsen, 1997); lack of compensation for wildlife-inflicted damage (Benjaminsen and Svarstad, 2010); and coercive and violent conservation-induced evictions (Brockington, 2002; Goldman, 2009; Weladji, and Tchamba, 2003).

Typologies of conflict surrounding biodiversity conservation are also numerous. Young and his colleagues associate conflicts in this realm to six categories and as such put:

Conflicts over beliefs and values, where differences exist over normative perceptions; Conflicts of interest, when two groups want different things from the same habitat or species; Conflicts over process, relating to the different approaches to decision-making and fairness taken by different people, groups, or agencies; Conflicts over information, relating to situations where data are lacking, misunderstood, or perceived in different ways by different actors; Structural conflicts referring to social, legal, economic and cultural arrangements; Inter-personal conflicts relating to personality differences between individuals or groups, including issues of communication and mistrust (Young et al, 2010: 3979).

Meaning attached to resources in protected areas and the manner they supposed to remain a source of conflict between conservation actors and local communities. While hunting for wildlife can be rooted in the identification and reflection of cultural identities, beliefs, and values (Baker, 1997), it is considered an illegal taking of resources from global goods (Adger, 2005). On the other hand, Tadie and Fischer (2013:447) argue that hunting is one form of forging a connection of the self with nature around. In their study of the hunting culture of three communities in the Southern Omo zone of Ethiopia, they found that hunting serves as a medium for bringing friendship ties between hunters. The social in this case is linked through the natural.

In connection to the preceding explanations, Muth and Bowe (1998:1) identified ten causes behind poaching: “commercial gain; household consumption; recreational satisfaction; trophy hunting; thrill killing; protection of self and property; poaching as rebellion; poaching as traditional right; disengagement with specific regulations; and gamesmanship”. Muth and Bowe argue further that “poaching is embedded in subcultural webs of meaning that involve tradition, ethnic heritage, individual and social identities, and other sociocultural factors” (p. 10). As argued by Beale, et al 2013; Lindsey, et al, 2013; Maisels et al, 2013; the basic causes for poaching in Africa are related to poverty at local level; colonial legacy (removal of hunting rights from Africans and its perpetuation in post-colonial Africa); lack of binding policy framework for fighting poaching; and a strong link between conflict, poaching, and trafficking.

Reliance of communities on local means of healing to their ailments seems another way to explain frequent killings of wildlife from parts of the park (Gibson and Marks, 1995). In other instances, bans in traditional hunting cultures were met with resistance such as political activism, sit-ins, violent threats and boycotts of game management duties (Von Essen et al, 2015). In extreme cases, as documented by Von Essen, et al (2015), illegal killing of protected wolves took place in Sweden and Finland as a form of challenging the hunting ban. As put by Essen, “As a form of everyday resistance, illegal hunting provides continuity of livelihood practices as well as means of challenging the legitimacy of the regulatory agencies in the struggle for recognition.” (Von Essen et al, 2015:201). Von Essen further argues that:

non-hunting ‘urban outsiders’ or ‘townsfolk’ have increasingly been construed by hunters as being in alliance with scientists, politicians and natural resource managers in a hegemonic formation that is seen to systematically exclude hunting points of view on a fundamental level in the public debate on the rural landscape (2015:208).

Holmes also put the trigger behind non-consumptive hunting as “an implicit challenge to the ban on these same activities” (2007:194). Material and symbolic acts remain a form of rejection, taking different modalities: strong and observable when the dominant actor show sign of weakness and a hidden form whenever the state and imposing actors got strong (Scott, 1985). As argued by Scott, resistance is “... any act by members of a subordinate class that is or are intended either to mitigate or deny claims... or to advance its own claims vis-à-vis those superordinate classes” (1985:290). It is an oppositional act with the involvement of different actors bound by time, space and condition (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013:1). Resistance is individual, collective, symbolic, and material in nature (Holmes, 2007:186). Stella and Anna characterised resistance with four core themes as it is “a practice; historically entangled with power; intersectional—as it engages with multiple powers; and heterogenic and contingent due to changing conditions” (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013:1). Power relations therefore remains a vital core out of which all other discussions about people-park relations, conflicts and its outcomes would logically flow.

Parallel to this, it has also been witnessed in the number of declarations and resolutions passed that the global north proposed mechanisms of getting rural people affected by conservation on board to at least mitigate people-park conflicts. Particularly, there has also been a rising recognition of the importance of engaging rural communities that neighbor or live with wildlife as key partners in tackling illegal hunting and trade with wildlife resources

(Biggs et al, 2017)². As this empirical study attests, sustainability of protected areas and the declared objectives of biodiversity conservation have shown a declining record in recent years (Sanderson and Redford, 2003; Ghimire and Pimbert, 1997; Adams, 2008; Berkes 2004).

Building on the definition forwarded by Redpath et al (2013:100)³, this article intends to demonstrate how top-down formation of Nechisar National Park (hereafter NNP) in 1974 gradually affected conservation goals and local forms of life (Debelo, 2012). In doing so, I will demonstrate how the imposed hunting ban affected the cultural values associated to hunting wildlife by the local Kore and Guji for various social, economic and medicinal purposes on the one hand, and how resistance to the hunting ban went against the very purpose of the establishment of the park through time. Two cases will be displayed: the attack to the emblematic animals protected by the park (which led to the extinction of the Swayne's Hartebeest), and killed lion and escalation of the conflict.

This study was the outcome of six-month fieldwork among the Guji and Kore communities living inside and around Nechisar National park. After a brief two week visit to the villages in August 2015, the second fieldwork period was conducted from April to September 2016. An ethnographic approach is followed alongside other qualitative data collection techniques. After a brief period of rapport building, discussion about the objectives of my study and securing host families and interlocutors, informal exploratory interviews were conducted so as to know their relations with the park, hunting in the past, present, and their cultural values in relation to hunting. Age, knowledgeability of their respective culture and length of their stay over the places were all taken in to account as selection criteria for inclusion at an earlier phase. Through a referral system by first contacts (elders mostly), a total of 68 individuals took part in explaining the cultural meaning of hunting, methods, and tools they used to kill and related phenomenon. Focused group interview involving a total of 36 participants and composed of youth from all the mentioned villages also conducted, mainly to know their role in hunting practices. A total of seven rangers (from Kore and Guji origin), a park warden, and four local officials from Galana, Arba Minch Zuria and Amaro districts were interviewed to

² As a showcase, The Global Tiger Recovery Plan, African Elephant Summit, London Declaration, Kasane Statement, Brazzaville Declaration, UN General Assembly Resolution 69/314 (2015), and UN Sustainable Development Goals (target 15.c) on curbing illegal hunting and trade in wildlife resources could be mentioned.

³ which conceive environmental conflicts as “situations that occur when two or more parties with strongly held opinions clash over conservation objectives and when one party is perceived to assert its interests at the expense of another”

learn the nature of park people interactions, the reaction of the local communities to hunting ban, and access reports of killing of wildlife from within the park territory. An interview guide prepared to cover such issues as the cultural meaning of hunting, the wildlife hunters target, tools they have been using, the purpose of hunting and the way hunters reacted to hunting ban introduced after the creation of the park in 1974. In almost all cases, anonymity, confidentiality, and all ethics of Anthropological fieldwork were observed, except when informants themselves declare their full oral consent to use their names to appear on my research.

2. The park and the people

Nechisar National Park (NNP) is located in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS), 500 kilometers south to Addis Ababa-the capital city of Ethiopia. The park got its name from the white savanna grass that covers the undulating Nechisar plains. The total area of the park (though contested, and not yet gazetted) is 514 km². Of the total park size, 78 km² is covered by parts of Lake Chamo (48 km²) and Lake Abaya (30 km²). The park is characterized by a wet climate, and includes different vegetation types, endemic Swayne's⁴ hartebeest, and housing 40% of the total bird species of the country (Biressu, 2009:1; Tsegaye et al, 2017). It is bordered by Gelana district of West Guji zone from the east, Amaro district of SNNPRS from the east and northeast direction, and Arba Minch Zuria district and Arba Minch town from the western direction (Kelboro, and Stellmacher, 2013). The forty springs, for which Arba Minch town is named, is also part of the park territory. By drawing multiple stakeholders, the park produced competing actors from near and far places promoting diverse, and opposing interests. The Kore farmers and Guji agro-pastoralists adjoin the park from the north and northeastern directions. The Guji are living on a contested land forming the administration (Irgansa *kebele*) known to their regional government (Oromia). The total population, according to information secured from local officials is estimated to be seven thousand (in 2015). Dominantly, they keep animals as their livelihood. They also supplement pastoral livelihoods with small scale farming across the eastern corridor of the park. The Guji have a strong clan-based social structure, locally led by elders called *abbaa Ollaa* (village elders). There is only one school (up to eighth grade and constructed by the community but supported by the local district). The communities know no access to modern

⁴ This species is reported by the park biologist to have collapsed since 2017 (Bayisa Busa at park office: July, 2016).

health care systems in their *kebele*⁵. There is no access to potable water. The Kore, on the other hand, are farming communities using parts of the park for agriculture, and harvest forest products from what the park calls its territory. Four local *kebeles* share a boundary with the park: Derba Manana, Yero, Tifate, and Gumure. Before the formation of the park, both communities claim to have been using the place for hunting ground and dwelling.

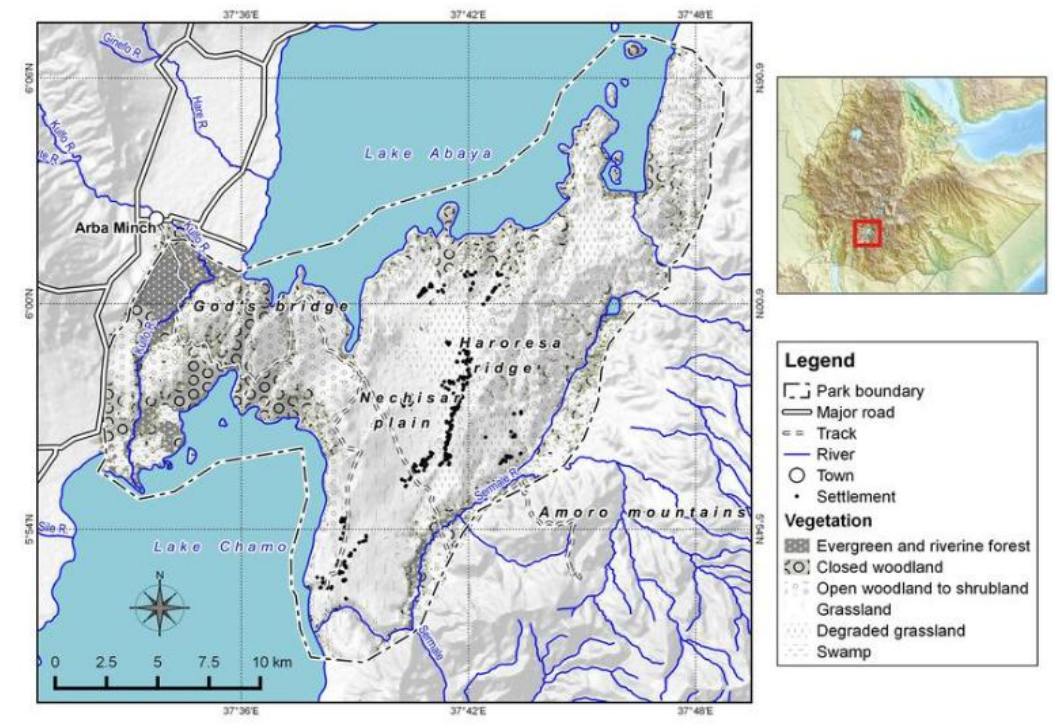


Fig 1. Map showing the location of NNP in Southern Ethiopia. Adapted from Tsegaye, et al (2017:293).

3. Protected areas and hunting regulations in Ethiopia

Wildlife products were an item of trade and gift since the old days in Ethiopia. Hundesa reported that there was a documented history that the contemporary Ethiopian kings used to “presenting live animals including elephant, giraffe, lion, and zebra to the Egyptian sultans in order to obtain patriarchs for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church” (1996:3). As elsewhere in Africa, the first game reserves were all established by the support and funding of the western donors in Ethiopia too. Learning through the resident foreign advisors at his palace that the Europeans were striving to introduce a game regulation to colonial territories, king Menelik II

⁵ *Kebele* is the lowest administrative structure in the current Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

introduced the first version of hunting prohibition in 1901, followed by a well-elaborated form of same regulation in 1944 during the period of Emperor Haileseilase (Hundessa, 1996).

Later in 1963, UNESCO assisted the Ethiopian government to study and establish wildlife conservation areas, assigning wardens to extend support and establish protected areas in an exclusionary form. The UNESCO-Ethiopian collaboration was consummated in the formation of the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Organisation (EWCO) in 1965; formation of the first national parks in the late 1960s and early 1970s; and assignment of trained wardens to promulgating conservation laws taking the experiences of Kenya, Tanzania and elsewhere in the eastern Africa (Hundessa, 1996; Biressu, 2009). Hunting regulations from these mentioned eastern African countries were adopted as a way to comply with the standards set in the west. Various rules of wildlife utilisations were introduced, including a strict ban to killing for household consumptive reasons, but not for a tourist who could pay the stated amount and followed the regulation and classification put forth by IUCN (Hundessa, 1996:4).

Since trophy hunting requires huge payment in cash, preferably in foreign currency, it remained a domain of foreign tourists, which, before the ban, was the domain of stronger men who aspire to earn a good name and pride. In his extensive survey of Ethiopian wildlife-rich regions, Blower observed that “until comparatively recently the slaying of an elephant was accounted equivalent to killing forty men; a buffalo, rhinoceros or lion to five men, and so on. Successful hunters were entitled to wear gold earrings and other marks of distinction and were accorded considerable respect and prestige in the community, while the financial returns from ivory, rhinoceros horn, and other trophies were an added incentive” (Blower, 1968:277-278). However, the introduction of hunting regulations since 1901 and the formation of protected areas in the 1970s turned the former hunters into illegal poachers-denying them of the right to even subsist on wild meat during drought periods. More importantly, the once chief executive of EWCO quoted to have stated the level of his organization’s commitment to the London Convention on Wildlife Conservation as: “EWCO's approach to the management of its Wildlife Conservation Areas has always been deep-rooted in the 1933 London Convention, aimed primarily at curbing illegal killing of Wildlife in African countries. We accepted the Convention with sincerity and attempted to develop and perpetuate our wildlife areas...” (Hundessa, 1996:8).

4. Hunting as embedded in social reasons

Hunting is a culturally motivated practice among some Africans in both the colonial and post-colonial periods. In pre-colonial Africa, everyone hunted using such traditional weapons as bow, arrow, spear, snares, and swords. Kideghesho witnessed that hunting among the Maasai for proving full manhood had been practiced before and even after the coming of Serengeti national park to their places (2008:1862). Nevertheless, it is not solely for consumptive reasons. As put by Steinart, eating wild meat among some in Kenya (whom he studied), is believed that it will bring devastation to domestic stock (Steinart, 1989:248). Economic, social, and cultural meanings were attached to hunting, specifically among Digo and Duruma pastoralists living in Kwale district of Northern Kenya (Steinart, 1989:285).

4.1 Hunting for celebrated mourning and good names

Hunting is not a mere dietary supplement, rather has been a source of prestige, wealth and honor. This resonates with the first possible reason for the commencement of hunting among the Guji. According to oral tradition, the Guji attribute the beginning of hunting tradition to a boy insulted by a Guji girl, whose strength, according to her evaluation, was weak:

A Guji girl in a remote past had said to have insulted a boy as '*battii*' [weak and rubbish] as a way of provoking him to show her his strength to be a proper husband when he was about to ask her for love affair. The boy, not to let her go, went to a field and killed a Greater kudu, and shown her the horn and its skin. Seeing everything, she accepted his proposal and told him that he is free from '*battumaa*'⁶.

Since then, the Guji man⁷ made his tradition of killing wildlife, as opposed to the old and established Guji norm. The Guji and Kore communities hunt wildlife to achieve a better social status and name, as a way of marking their 'brave' deeds. Furthermore, hunting for big game was considered as a route to winning higher respect among their people. Such social respect and resulting elevation in status translated itself in enjoying an upper hand at mate selection. Strong wild animals are the target for 'good' name. These include lion, leopard, elephant, rhino, and an enemy. From all the targets discouraged for hunting, tortoise stood first, followed by a crested porcupine (locally called xade), and a hyena because these animals, according to them, doesn't need to be on a horseback to chase and kill. Those animals, which the Guji hunt using a horse and a spear are considered as strong and hence help the killer to

⁶ *Battumaa* refers to the undermined status of a man –being weak and spoiled being.

⁷ Hunting is solely a masculine profile

win better social respect. The social significance of the hunter and his pray would express itself upon the death of the ‘brave’ hunter.

The public stays around glorifying his deeds, openly recalling and uttering the valour of the man that he killed strong wildlife, and who is capable of avenging back the killer. Seven days of mourning devoted to marking that the deceased deserves such a long remembrance for his bravery deeds. In the same vein, Steinart put similar issue from his observation to the Kamba of Northern Kenya as: “The pride of achievement men took in their hunting accomplishments, the universal esteem expressed for hunting experts, the reputation for generosity attained by hunters whose meat would be shared among family members and the hunting group (and conversely, the contempt expressed indirectly for those who did not go to bush clearly indicated that hunting defined a place of prestige and honor for men” (1989:250). To win prestige and elevated social status, the Guji hunt what they call ‘the big five’: rhino, elephant, lion, leopard and a nyapha[enemy] (Moroma Morke at Gode: June 2016). For a Guji man who never killed either wildlife or an imagined enemy only deserve a day of mourning even without much griefs. Elders announce to the mourners to stop crying much for a person who doesn’t walk out to show his arms to the strongest beings around. For the brave man, however, the mourners devote many bullets firing to the sky, waving a shield and spear, anointing their face with sorsa (white-washed soil) and stay with the deceased family celebrating his daring deeds for seven days.



Fig. 2. *Kombose*: Celebrating the bravery of Kore man on his mourning. A Picture taken by my field assistant (Amare Aklilu) at Derba Manana in Amaro district. July 2016.

Furthermore, a man among the Guji would not be addressed by a given name after forming his own family (*abidda*-literary ‘fire’), and bear a child/children. For example, if a man got a male child, called Akona, his father shall be called *abba Akona*-father of *Akona*. Addressing a person by their given name after marriage in the social arena is not appreciated and is a mark of disrespect among the Guji. If a person could not get a male offspring, he has to kill an enemy (*nyapha*) or wildlife valued among the Guji to be named after. Even in some cases, the Guji kill wildlife or an enemy as a way to secure a name at times a male child dies. The following are names generated out of the killed trophy.

A person who killed *iddii* (Grant’s Gazelle) and Abyssinian Hare would be named as *abba Morkee*. *Morkee*-literary means competence-signaling the effort and energy involved in chasing on a horseback, pursuing, and killing these animals by a spear. Energy invested and persistence is what counts a lot in such practice. A person who killed *warsesa* (Rhino) would win a name called *abba Shane*⁸. *Abba Namee* would be reserved for a person who killed an elephant. The fact that an elephant ‘curiously cares for its offspring -like a man’ [*nama*]-help to derive meaning to the name attributed to the killed animal. Killer of *Difarssa* (waterbuck) also deserves a name called “*abba Guracha*” (father of the black) seemingly emanating from the common black color of a waterbuck the Guji know. Killer of a lion takes *abba Daalachaa* (father of the grey). However, from all the strongest animals known by the Guji, lately Leopard is excluded from the brave man’s naming for the reason the Guji informants explained:

Upon a time in the past, a tiger was found full and turgid after killing and praying on a big goat around the village. A woman carrying back fuelwood from the forest saw it and suddenly beat the tiger on the head and killed. People then said, it became ‘*battii*’ [spoiled in this context] and taken out from the list of brave man’s pray⁹.

4.2 Hunting for aesthetic and medicinal values

The other purpose the Guji hunt is to use some part of the trophy hunted for commercial, medicinal, or aesthetic values. Wildlife under the latter category is rhino, leopard, elephant, and lion. They put an ornament made from the skin of an elephant on their ear, neck, and arms (*marxa* –a common name for earrings and bracelet). A man found displaying *marxa* on the mentioned body parts win higher social respect among his peers. Satawa (giraffe) skin is replacing the elephant skin these days upon the scarcity of the latter from most part of the

⁸ Shane refers literary to the state of being in a full concentration in Oromiffa language the Irgansa Guji speaks.

⁹ Informant: Jarso Guye, at Arda Gudina. June 2016

places the Guji know. The tooth of an elephant is also sold on the market (although not legally acknowledged) and serve as a source of income since older times.

Using wildlife meat for medicinal purposes is the other reason for hunting between the Guji and Kore living in and adjacent to NNP. The Guji and Kore also hunt wildlife for using them as a cure for different diseases. Such animals as tarri (Dikdik) are considered as strong medicine for cough in children and old men. It has also its own mode of preparation, which only a traditional healer knows. The meat of Dikdik is dried, ground softly, boiled, and takes as a soup. The second animal in this category is Awaldigessa (Aardvark). The fat on the tail of this animal is used for curing an internal disease such as kidney and liver problems (as diagnosed by traditional healers around). The third is Golja (warthog). The skull of this animal is used to cure skeletal diseases like stiffness joints or muscles. The skull is crushed and fried without water and grinded into a powder form. People who have complaints of bone disease are advised to drink the soup of the powders made from the ground skull.

While the Guji and Kore value hunting for the above reasons, killing wildlife from within or surrounding the parkland is criminalised by law since 1901 (Biressu, 2009). The frequent killings of wildlife, however, brought a prolonged conflict between the local communities and the park management. In the following sections, I will bring in how imposed non local values of conservation gradually met resistance/rejection.

5. Imposed hunting ban and resistance

Beyond killing for the above-mentioned reasons, there were incidents recorded where individuals kill and leave wildlife without extracting anything of the prey. This form of resisting conservation has been documented in some parts of Eastern Africa (Holmes, 2007). However, driven partly by cultural motives (aesthetic, medicinal, naming and social status discussed above), a mix of bitter reactions to conservation is in place. With clear conformity with what Holmes (2007) put as: “someone hunting inside a national park is automatically and implicitly making a statement that hunting should be allowed in a national park”, this political statement is also under taken by local actors against the imposed hunting ban. Similarly, selected killing of wildlife from the NNP were documented, showing a drastic decline of wildlife stock in the park from time to time. The unique exception is zebra, whose numbers are increasing, despite attacks from lions and humans at different times.

In this regard, most of informants approached did not overtly expound over reasons for recurrent killings of wildlife, especially in the post-1991 period. Exceptionally, however, two of my informants put the motive behind killing as a form of revenge to their treatment by the park in the past. Part of their argument rests in agonies they heard from their fathers and later faced themselves living in the park and their current village at Golbo. They put it in these terms:

Do you think all humans keep silent under continuous attack and oppression from enemies? The reason all the Guji you see suffer here with their livestock, the reason we graze in the night, as you saw us last time, is all because the value the park put to donkeys, lions and wild beasts in the park. We are dying from diseases and lack of everything because of this park. They forbid us from establishing schools, borehole water sources, health posts, in what they say is the land of the park. Aren't we dying because of these Swayne's hartebeest and donkeys? They [the park] burn all our houses, take away many Guji guns, and are still forcing us to give them bribes after arresting our cattle and then their owners. Would that all happen if we [the Guji] all vanished before the park was established, had we known that? Would then the ferenji [a common name for the white man] come and pay for the donkey, and tell the park to push the Guji to create heaven for the donkey and wild lion? Who else is seeing Guji? Do they bring a coin to Guji, except problems? (Edo Waqo and Miju Bakalo, at Golbo, July 2016)

From their claims, it is apparent that past bad memories about the park's treatment of the Guji and the persistence of continuous curtailment of use and access rights to resources in the park prompted hunting, in addition to the reasons mentioned above. Hippo and warthog hunting from near and inside Lake Chamo (part of the park) is the best case in point, where there are multiple reports of the frequent arrest of perpetrators (Park letter to Arba Minch Zuria police, dated October 2015). There were places and houses in Golbo market¹⁰, who provided "medicinal" wild meat undercover, and only through local networks. Though difficult to prove, one of my local interlocutors showed me the house where wild meat is sold to customers behind closed doors. From the gate, goat meat is hung on the wall and all that is visible to the public, but in the back yard of the house one could find "meat of Golja" [warthog] cut into small pieces, with bunches displayed on a small plate. Price-wise, it is expensive (4 to 5 smaller pieces from different parts warthog meat for 15 Eth. Birr) when compared with a kilo of goat meat for 60 birr.

¹⁰ A small market to the eastern side of the park territory and place where the local communities exchange their produces.



Meat of warthog and a bread ready to be consumed as a medicine at Golbo market. Picture taken by the researcher in July, 2016.

Local people, according to my local interlocutor, knows days on which such meat is available in the butcher's house, and some even hand in the price to be sure that they would get. The above scenario at least explains two different but interrelated things. The first is killing for medicinal values, a tradition which is handed-down from generation to generation. This aspect of their practices shows some level of continuation in the face of challenged local values due to the introduction of Christianity to their land. Curtailment to cultural practices and beliefs init may trigger dissent. But, continuity is not guaranteed against the expansion of modern education though not accessible to their villages.

The second, however, renders multiple explanations, and independent investigation too. The absence of health education, lack of access to modern medical centres complicated by the absence of any type of road linking to distant towns made them reliant on local healing techniques for illness. Places claimed by the park are still considered as a contested area and, as a result, any development intervention is illegal. A sense of alienation and deprivation due to imposed conservation was also uttered openly by some Guji informants as:

They[the park management] assigned scouts and vehicle to protect donkey[Zebra] and *iddii* [Swayne's hartebeest], while no single health assistant is sent to our kebele (Argada Guyo, at Golbo: July 2016).

Consolidation of asymmetrical power between the weak and the powerful in NNP took a stronghold through impositions of heavy fine and criminalization to persons killed wildlife in parts of the park as a response to a loss to lions and carnivores protected in the park. The following case clearly depicts how a lion preyed on local livestock was defended and the victims continuously criminalized. The cattle of Guji sometimes graze further into the territories of the park from their settlement at Gode village. According to herders interviewed, a lion attacked their cattle several times. Since the place was renamed/redefined as a national park, the Guji have abstained from claiming compensation. Despite such local claims, exclusion, uncompensated losses, and fine and fence approach remain a preferred method of enforcing conservation values by the park management.

5.1 A Killed lion and conflict

“The lion killed my cattle, and I avenged it. What else special crime have I done?”—A Guji man suspected of killing a lion and wandering between places (*Abadoyyo Jaatanii*¹¹, at *Shaaqarsha Roobi* market near the park: July 2016).

After losing two of his cows from the killing of a lion, in March 2016, a man ‘killed’ a lion after five months as an act of revenge for his loss. A person suspected also left his home and, according to scouts, hid elsewhere in Amaro district. The park is accusing the Guji community at Gode for deliberately hiding the whereabouts of the killer and starting to strictly enforce park rules. A failed negotiation between the park management and Irgansa *kebele* of Guji on the handing over of the culprit was frequently on the agenda at meetings for several months. As a result, a tense situation was created between park management and the community. A strategy was devised by the park chief scout (according to interviewed scouts) to implement tougher treatment of the villagers of Gode. The park management started to enact strict conservationist rules to curtail the entrance of any cattle from Gode village to any parts of the park by deploying scouts day and night across the boundary. Following such excuse, the plan immediately ended at two disengagements: an order to demolish the newly constructed house of a culprits' father at Gode; and the mass arrest of the village in May 2016. As put by Gibson and Marks, mounting arrests in response to offences against wildlife doesn't reduce the rate of killings from protected areas, since the approach followed was unaccompanied by other support mechanisms to local communities (Gibson and Marks, 1995:942). It further exacerbated the resistance tactics and conflicts

¹¹ A pseudonym is used in cases to keep the anonymity of my informant.

which all run against the very values the park was established in 1974, as the following case testifies.

6. Revealing the asymmetry of power relations

It is worthwhile mentioning the power relations that exist between conservation actors—the park management as an institution enforcing conservation laws, and local communities upon which such powers and curtailments imposed. At least, the uncompensated loss of agro-pastoralist cattle to a lion attack on the one hand, and the heavy fine imposed on the killer of a lion as revenge to multiple losses of livestock, on the other hand, shows what Garland (2008) put as ‘post-colonial’ power imposition. The lions in this case, as charismatic animals, have a protector, a more empowered actor, often backed by institutional authority, while the Guji cattle only have a loving and caring owner, whose power rests only in his personal capacity. At times, blame is assigned to herders for grazing within the reach of lions and as if the former provoked the attack—similar with the story of attacked and killed child by a Chimpanzee in Gombe National Park of Tanzania reported by Gerland (2008:56). Both the Chimp and the lion have a powerful protector (Government-through institutionalised legislation and enforcement of the law, and international actors-through their money and dominance over the promulgation of protection laws).

To the opposite end is the powerless child and livestock of local communities who only receive condolence and, at worst, blame for being attacked. The mother of the child in Gombe attack by a chimp was blamed for walking to a forest to collect a firewood in a place where chimps are free to attack and kill (Garland, 2008). The local herders who wander to look for fresh pasture necessary for the survival of their cattle during dry seasons encounter similar reactions. As argued by Igoe (2010), capitalism and biodiversity conservation enterprises are increasingly working hand in hand—one supporting the other—while also legitimising each other’s interests. The growth of multi-million dollar conservation NGOs across the world is a single showcase in this regard. These dominant conservation actors propose that conservation should only be based on ‘scientific’ analysis—ignoring local values, politics and cultural components, making the practice mostly resistible.

7. The dual impact of imposition and resistance

Imposed conservation values in the form of banning hunting practice since 1974 impacted both the success of conservation, the wildlife, and local values. Killing a charismatic/emblematic wildlife from the park is frequently reported by the park authorities since the establishment of the park in 1974. The following were the bold impacts that resulted because of the imposed conservation rules on both the wildlife and local cultural values.

7.1 An extinct Swayne's Hartebeest

The conservation of Swayne's hartebeest was the main objective of the park from the outset. Evictions of local communities in 1982, 1995 and recently in 2005/6 produced animosity between the local communities of Kore, Guji, and the park management (Biressu, 2009; Tsegaye et al, 2017; Debelo, 2016). As a subtle form of revenge, the local communities had reported having been targeting emblematic animals of the NNP, of which Swayne's hartebeest remain a selected target. In 1974, different reports by the park show that there were more than 270 counts of Swayne's hartebeest, out of which the last male species was spotted in 2016 in the park. Other wildlife such as plains zebra, Grant's gazelle, *dik-dik*, and the greater kudu thrive well while the emblem of the park is vanishing. The Guji and Kore claim plainly to respect the taboo of consuming wild meat while blaming the youth for killing and consuming the meat of Swayne's hartebeest and greater Kudu. A court and archival records of the park, on the other hand, show a number of individuals accused of the killing of these two and other animals from the park space. Though killing for honor reported having declined recently, however, killing for consumptive and resistance registers were still documented.

In my fieldwork period (from April to mid-September 2016), I saw no horses either in a kraal of the Irgansa Guji or in the fields. On the other hand, the hunting ban not only affected the social or cultural purpose of hunting. It turned all the tools involved in the practice of hunting to a simple treasure valuable to be kept at home, and as a simple tool of history. These days, spear and shield are all symbolic tools only found in the house of elderly people. They are only brought to ritual places like Gada and *Jila* (feasts meant for various rituals and cultural performances). Shields have almost become an artifact that the Guji keep only on the wall of their houses. It became an outdated combat tool. Such kind of distortion to culture amounts to a gradual decline of values and material culture that a specific people used to identify itself (Guji and Kore marker of identity in this case). Moreover, banning the local poor from hunting either for cultural values or consumptive reasons, while allowing the rich non-local

hunter for 'leisure', elucidate over the established and sustained asymmetrical power relations between the indigenous poor and the western rich tourists. Since the net benefit of curtailment of hunting practice goes to the established dominating structure, the disadvantaged communities see less in observing such imposed bans. The spear, however, is held by most Guji herders attending cattle in the fields. However, it is no longer a highly valued combat tool. In this relation, replacement of a spear and shield by an automatic gun is evident as long as material valuation and killing wildlife is considered. The replacement of the hunting tools by automatic modern guns hastened the eradication of wildlife from the park. Information secured from park scouts also confirm this assumption: "most of the recent killings (at least since 1991, as one of them emphasized) were made by the use of bullets. Only a few instances were registered through the use of spear and that is even by child herders, with limited cases to Lesser Kudu" (Group interview with scouts at *Dhakabule* camp, July 2016).

The Kore and Guji indigenous knowledge at treating own ailments is also impacted due to the imposition of the hunting ban. Their life in what is contested as 'parkland' put them under a cycle of deprivation because of their 'illegal settler' label by the powerful conservation actor—the park management. Their settlement status made it nearly impossible to provide basic social services including access to health, clean water, and road as these are banned by the law to be seen in a protected areas in Ethiopia. This made it again impossible for the dwellers to access either modern health institutions or travel to places it is found in distance urban centers like Arba Minch or Kelle towns (far away approximately 50 kilometers to reach these centers). On the other hand, their access to some traditional medicinal plants and animals has been entirely curtailed because of the imposed conservation-induced ban. In all cases, it is counter-productive for both the communities affected and conservation practice in the park as seen above. The second point is also the gradual decline of old Guji names taking a prefix *Abbaa*, as a marker of brevity and that he killed wildlife. In my investigation into the matter, I only found 23 individual Guji men in 25 smaller sub-villages (called *Ketena*), bearing such names in Irgansa *kebele*. Age wise, none of them were below 24 years, while the oldest is 98 years.

8. Summary

This article discussed how asymmetric power relations anchored on indigenous lands in the form of biodiversity conservation, impacted local cultures, who ultimately resisted. Conflict over the hunting ban introduced by conservationists met with rejection motivated by livelihood needs, medicinal values of the game and cultural values attached to the killing of such wildlife. Local communities persistently reject the curtailment of vital resources meaningful to their collective and individual existence. It showed also that trespassing hunting ban possesses a symbolism—signifying resistance/disobedience to both the rules imposed and the immediate enforcing agencies. Thus, it became a hard choice to negotiate hunting practices which runs against the very core values of biodiversity conservation anchored, and on the other hand, and renouncing cultural pride intertwined in the killing of selected games for local communities on the other. The costs the local communities bear (attack from a lion, heavy fines, and expropriation of property) was left unresolved—further exacerbating their interactions. Cultural forms of life among the local communities gradually altered and, in some aspects, changed due to the imposed conservation values. The banned hunting for cultural reasons impacted social values associated with hunting among the Guji and Kore. Illicit killing for various reasons therefore persisted and led to the extinction of emblematic animals like Swayne’s Hartebeest from the park. Arrest, curtailment, and disregard to local social and cultural needs by conservation agency finally led to a sustained asymmetrical power relation but consistently resisted by the dominated Guji and Kore. As fence and fine approach alongside, arrest, expropriation of gun, and curtailment to local communities continued, the possibility of at least minimizing subtle or overt rejection seems minimal. A cycle of conflict would likely to continue, as it has been the case, since the formation of the park in 1974.

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