

Marginalization of Pastoralists in Ethiopia: A Case Study of the Karrayu People

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Abstract: This paper explores the life of traditional pastoral Karrayu during the imperial and Derg regime (1931-1991). The traditional Karrayu pastoral production system bases on seasonal herd mobility, changing herd compositions and traditional institutions of mutual help used to maintain the sustainability the system both ecologically and economically for centuries. Methodologically, the paper uses data from secondary sources. For this study, document analysis methodology was employed. More than ten major literature were consulted and analyzed their similarity and difference to investigate state intervention and its consequences on the life of the traditional pastoral Karrayu. As an investigation of the major sources for the study of state marginalization of the pastoralist Karrayu, this paper will help policy makers and intellectuals to embark on further studies on issues in Ethiopia and the whole of Africa in general.

The findings of this study show that the ill-conceived agricultural developmental policies persuaded by the imperial and the Derge regime that aimed at the establishment of large scale commercial farms in the Awash valley and the refusal to recognize the land rights of the Karrayu have had severe impact on the Karrayu and their production system. It disrupts of the Karrayu traditional social and resource utilization managements that evolved through centuries of adaptation to the ecosystems.

Keywords: Ethiopia, State, Karrayu, Pastoralism, Marginalization.

1. INTRODUCTION

Pastoralism is a mode of production in which people drive their subsistence directly or indirectly from the product of domesticated animals. Notwithstanding the yet unabated pressures and serious marginalization of pastoralism has encountered, it still continues to be the main stay of millions of people. In this regard the Horn of Africa is the home to the highest concentration of traditional pastoralists in the world. Ethiopia, in turn, ranks fifth in the world, in terms of pastoral population size [Markakis, 1993],[Getachew, 2000]

The Karrayu Oromo of the Awash valley are, among the many people in Ethiopia, who for centuries drew their livelihood from pastoral mode of production. The Awash valley of the Karrayu land, as well known was and still an area where the state made an intensive interventions in the name of developments and conservation.

So, this study is to examine the Karrayu pastoral life in relation to state interventions on their land. It is also intended to assess the consequent multiple marginalization that the people encountered over the last two regimes (1930-1991) of the country excluding the present government.

Besides, both available written and oral accounts also vary on several points about the origin of Karrayu homeland, the direction of their movement, the period of settlement and the way they were marginalized. Hence, the study also critically analyzes these variations which are important to clearly understand the traditional Karrayu pastoral life.

2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

For this study, document analysis methodology was employed. More than six major literature were consulted and analyzed their similarity and difference on the issue and they way they understand the severity of state marginalization in Ethiopia. The major sources, among other, that deal with Karrayu pastoralists are few in number. Ayalew Gebre, wrote the history and the origin of Karrayu anthropologically whereas Buli Edjeta wrote about the socio economic dimensions

in relation to land alienation. Assefa Tolera also wrote about the relations of the Karrayu with other Oromo and their territorial occupation as well as their life before and after displacement.

3. HISTORY: AN OVERVIEW OF THE KARRAYU PEOPLE

Pastoral Karrayu are among the Oromo, one of the numerous ethnic groups in Africa and the largest in the Horn of Africa. The Karrayu people, Asmarom asserts, are the most expansive part of the Oromo nation. The Karrayu traced their original homeland to Meda Wollabu, which is also believed to be the common home of the Oromo people [Baxter, Jan, & Alessandro, 1998], [Ayalew, 2002].

It was during the great Oromo population movement of the 16th century that most of the Karrayu left their original homeland and moved in different directions. That is why, today, we find this people in different parts of the country. On the basis of their settlement area, Ayalew, identified four branches of Karrayu named as the Fentale Karrayu (the concern of this paper), Borana karrayu, Bali Karrayu at Hulul, and the Karrayu of Southern Wollo called Jille Suba. They are also found as far as South as the Tana river in Kenya, among the Oromo [Asmarom, 2006].

On the origin of the Karrayu people scholars do not have the same idea. Ayalew, for instance, who otherwise did an excellent work on Karrayu's land alienation and transformation but wrongly associated their genealogy with the Borana confederacy. This however, is aptly refused by other scholars who stated the fact that, the Karrayu belong to the Barentuma confederacy. There is also another notion, which is slightly different from the above idea. That is, the Karrayu are grouped geologically among the Barentu whereas culturally and territorially among the Borana [Ayalew, 2002], [Buli, 2001], [Assefa, 2000].

Similarly, the Barentuma confederacy moved northeast and settled in what are today the Bali, Arsi, Hararge and Wollo administrative regions. Therefore, the place names that we find in the north and in the northeastern Shewa region and their living place today is might be one witness which indicates that Karrayu are grouped into Barentum [Tesema, 1976], [Wondwossen, 1987]. Such difference might be arising because of the sources the writers used. So that, using only oral sources may not be enough to write the history of the people just what Ayalew did, rather it is important to consult both primary and secondary sources.

Here, neither the scope nor the theme of this study permits me to go deep into such historical debate on the origin of the Karrayu. But this much is suffice for the background. At this juncture, it should be noted that the focus of this paper is not the entire Karrayu people; instead it deals with the pastoral Karrayu who settled in the Awash valley of north eastern Ethiopia. So far no one could guess the exact time of the Karrayu settlement in the Awash valley area. Based on oral traditions Ayalew estimated that the Karrayu inhabited the stated area before 200 years ago. So that, currently Karrayu land is known as Fentale Woreda in eastern Showa zone of the Oromia regional state. They are bounded by the Afar Debine in the north, Arsi Oromo in the south, Awash National Park and Ittu Oromo in the east, Arogoba in the west and Amhara in the district of Bereket in the southwest [Ayalew, 2002], [Buli, 2001].

4. SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

It is very important to look at the social organization of the Karrayu people so as to understand their economic, traditional political system and their dispute resolution mechanisms as well as their resource utilization and management. One can easily understand that, since they are part of the larger Oromo society no doubt they follow similar pattern of social and political structure of their ancestors. Kinship in the form clan is based on social organization among the Karrayu pastoralists which means their social relation is based on genealogical through the male descent. Besides, the Karrayu have two major "tribal" divisions namely Dulecha and Basso. This helps them to cope with the natural as well as manmade problems of pastoral livelihoods [Ayalew, 2002], [Germu, 2007].

The Gada system which was relatively the first democratic institution in Ethiopia and one of the unique achievements of the Oromo people also had an active role in cultural, social, ideological and religious aspects of the Karrayu society. In the Gada grade system there were five *tutta* (parties) who take political and ritual responsibilities within eight years interval. Based on wisdom and merit, for instance, an Abba Bokku (the leader) was chosen in fixed terms of every eight years interval like now a day's democratic governments use fixed time intervals for political power transitions. Those elected officials of the Gada government had great responsibilities to organize and give order to their respective people [Buli, 2001], [Tesema, 1976]. In general Ayalew describes, "The traditional socio-political institution of the pastoral Karrayu has

been egalitarian in nature and the members strongly believed in group discussions to settle any dispute, or otherwise, over the use of common resources” [Ayalew, 2002).

However, now a day's except its periodic ritualistic ceremony, Gada is becoming insignificant among the Karrayu pastoralists because of manmade factors like state interventions and the influx of other people into the area of Karrayu. On the other hand, Quallu is a religious institution and it has very important role for their social organization. Religious leaders have also a great role in political spheres at the time of political transitions to bless the officials [Wondwossen, 1987],[Buli, 2001]

5. ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Pastoralism is the dominant base of life for the Karrayu and they mainly rear cattle, camels, goats and sheep. Cattle and camels have great value among the Karrayu pastoralists for both social status and sources of income. Seasonal mobility with their animals in search of grazing land, water and markets including across regional boarder and changing herd compositions in their grazing land Ona Birra, Ona Bona, Ona Ganna was common among the Karrayu. Therefore, their movement helped to maintain both ecological and economical aspect of the region [Assefa, 2000], [Germu, 2007].

In addition to livestock rearing, in the current years, particularly up to 1980s on wards the Karrayu have also begun to practice small scale faming and charcoal production as the response to the scarcity of their former vast grazing land and for the declining of their pastoral means of livelihood[Ayalew, 2002], [Assefa, 2000].

6. MARGINALIZATION: A BRIEF CONCEPTUAL ISSUE

In Ethiopian history based on either their occupation or their geographical location some parts of societies were culturally as well as politically marginalized. For instance, crafts men in the past were culturally as well as politically alienated because of the low attitude of a sector of the society towards their occupation and the states also did not encourage their work. Similarly, those pastoralists who have mostly live in the periphery; politically, ecologically, economically and culturally were marginalized since they are far from the center[Yacob, 2000]

First, it is very important to look at the concept of political and ecological marginalization in relation to the pastoral communities in general and in the Karrayu context in particular, so as to have clear understanding about economic and cultural marginalization.

According to Blaikie cited in Ayalew the concept of marginalization implies the process by which pastoralists lose the capacity to control their own lives. Similarly Doornbos explained political marginalization as, "... ethnic minorities or occupation strata, gradually excluded from the making of decision about their own affairs and see their scope of autonomous action increasingly circumscribed by externally imposed restrictions" [Droornbos, 1993]. On the other hand, ecological marginalization implies the shrinking of land because of expansion of state farms and the influx of new settlers to the areas like the case in the Awash valley where mainly the highlanders came to the region. This political as well as ecological marginalization consequently brought the eviction of pastoralists from their land which is important both for economic and cultural activities[Ayalew, 2002].

In the context of the Karrayu, the state interferences in their internal affairs as the rest of Ethiopian pastoralists had its own root in the period of colonization and in the period of emperor Menilek [Wondwossen, 1987].

Here, I am really afraid that these scholars clearly analyzed the political history of Ethiopia that the root of interest of the Ethiopian kings or the rulers towards the resource of the lowland regions goes back several years before Emperor Menilek II. The expansion of Christian highland kingdoms in the medieval period in need of resources which brought war with the Muslim powers might be one testimony.

In this regard, Pankhurst and Piguet described that the interest of state interferences in the lowland regions goes back to the medieval period, partly promoted by trade since the lowland regions were reach in ivory and other trade commodities[Pankhurst & Francois, 2004]. But one could not deny the fact that it was during emperor Menilek that the Karrayu came under the yoke of *balabats* who came from the highland area of Ethiopia. Consequently the Karrayu land was given to the *balabats* and they forced them to pay about heads of hundreds of cattle and certain amount of ivory each year as a tribute to the *balbats*[Wondwossen, 1987], [Buli, 2001].

7. DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS VERSUS THE KARRAYU(1930-1991)

As stated earlier in this paper, before the 1950s the pastoralists in the Awash valley had relatively free movement in their vast land with their animals to overcome drought. Moreover, they practiced their social and cultural affairs without the direct interference of the states. However, during the Imperial regime the government decided to exploit the land of the Awash valley and planned different development projects like state farms, National Park, building of dams, urban expansion in the form of settlements. The major objectives were, to increase the level of pastoral productivity and to improve the livelihood of the people through commercial agriculture and to make the regions more suitable for tourist attraction and sources of hydroelectric power so as to increase the income of national economy at large [Ayalew, 2002].

However, different scholars suggested different notions about the objectives of the government and its policy of pastoral land confiscation. The first point is the government perceived the land of pastoralists as a free land with no man [Assefa, 2000], [Yacob, 2000]. This idea may lack critical analysis about the aim of the government that is why Buli argued that there is a testimony that at the implementation of the development projects, government faced great challenges from the Karrayu pastoralists who protected their ancestral land [Buli, 2001]. This makes sure that the government to know very well the land was not free from people. Besides, as I understood, the pastoralists were never free from tax payment during the two regimes and even now.

For instance, the Karrayu pastoralists paid cattle and ivory to *balabats* under the period of Menilek and this has continued in the imperial period which compelled them to pay tax per head of their animals. Under the Derg regime they paid tax in cash directly to the government [Buli, 2001].

On the other hand, Ayalew argued that because of the pastoralists' movement in and across the borders, the government lacked effective political control and suspected them as warriors, danger for state politics and environmental degradation. Moreover, the governments believed that collection of tax is effective only when pastoralists become sedentary agriculturalists [Ayalew, 2002].

Unlike the above idea, Richard Hogg argued that because of inadequate information about the importance of livestock for the national income, governments focused on crop productions and neglect livestock. In this regard, policy makers, as well as governmental officials including highlanders have a perception that agriculture is better than pastoralism in terms of economy and land preservation. That is why, all land proclamations under the imperial and the Derg regimes didn't bring land right security to pastoralists [Hogg, 1997]. Besides, they perceived arid regions do have not the potential for agriculture and they considered the land as vacant. But it is not true for instance, Karrayu practice the livestock based, crop based and mixed livelihood system. Whatever the case, state development projects like the creation of National Park, building of dams, urban expansion had brought multifaceted problems to the pastoralists' life in the Awash valley particularly on the Karrayu. For instance, in the early 1950s Emperor Haile Selassie gave a total of 12,000 hectares of the Karrayu land to the two aristocrats namely *Ras Mesfin* and *Bazabih Selassi* who initiated in developing the Upper Awash Valley land for commercial agriculture (Mathara sugar Estate plantation). In the same manner in the 1960s particularly in 1969 the government gave land of the Karrayu to Koka Dam and to the Awash National Park respectively [Germu, 2007], [Regassa, 1997]. From the total land claimed by the Park about 52,000 hectares was important dry season grazing land of pastoralists which refers to the area between "Ona Bona and Ona Birra". Though Emperor Haile Selassie promised to the Karrayu to give land as compensation, they didn't get any compensation for their land. Here it should be noted that, Buli Edjta has slightly different idea from the above. According to him, though the land had no water government bought land around the area commonly known as Borchate for resettlement of Karrayu pastoralists [Buli, 2001], [Assefa, 2000].

Likewise, in the Derg regime there has been also considerable expansion of state irrigation schemes in the Middle Awash with that of the Afar and Karrayu territory. For instance, the third livestock development project intervention in 1975 intended to develop three ranges in the country also took lands from Karrayu. On the other hand, under the two successive regimes settlement programs were considered as a way of transforming Karrayu pastoralists to agriculturalists. Accordingly, settlement farms were established in both middle and lower Awash Valley [Hogg, 1997]. Nevertheless, Ayalew described the program and the attitudes of the Karrayu pastoralists towards the program as follows:

The attempts to settle, resettle and compensate the pastoralists demonstrate, then, proved unsuccessful and even counterproductive. The local population grew suspicious of motives on the part of the governments, and come to believe

that every move of the state was intended to take away more land from them rather than benefit the community[] (Ayalew, 2002).

However, some scholars said that, the development projects had some value for the life of the pastoralist. For instance, according to Getachew, the restricted mobility or settlements of the pastoralist which was designed since the imperial regime had advantages. As to him, it made easy access for the government or the NGOs to reach to the pastoralists at the time of food relief. Besides, the cash income from milk and butter selling increased for pastoralist and it minimizes land degradation. Above all it also facilitates the participation of pastoralists in political and economic process of the country. But it is difficult to say that the development projects brought significant change among the pastoralists rather it made beneficial to those agricultural laborer mainly who came from the highland area both in producing cash crop and living in town [Regassa, 1997],[Pankhurst & Francois, 2004].

8. CONCLUSION

In general, state interventions in the name of development projects during the past two successive regimes brought tremendous consequences on the economic, social, and cultural life of the Karrayu people. The first direct impact of the development projects on the Karrayu life was clearly observed when they lost their dry season grazing land and this compelled some of the Karrayu to sell their cattle and change their way of life from producer of their own subsistence in to wage laborers and some of them were involved in charcoal production and agriculture. The restrictions of seasonal mobility of Karrayu further led to the devastation of ecological environment of the region and destruction of livestock. Likewise, the development projects denied access to water to use it for their cattle as well as for themselves. Consequently, it increased conflicts among the Karrayu and the neighboring people; and culturally the state interventions displaced the Karrayu from their scared ritual and funeral sites. The loss of scared places further facilitated the massive social and cultural changes, for instance most of the Karrayu adopt Islamic religion and the overall social organization declined.

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