

**The Everyday State in Africa:  
Governance Practices and the Construction of State-Idea in  
Ethiopia**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy

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November 2017

## **Abstract**

This thesis provides an empirical illustration of the state in Africa through the experiences of people living in two rural localities in different regions of Ethiopia. It investigates how the state in Africa is constructed as a discrete political actor, both separate from and elevated above the population it governs. Instead of viewing the state in Africa merely as a mimetic of the Western model or as an extension of precolonial forms of social organisation, the thesis examines the everyday and ongoing governance practices that produce it as a seemingly autonomous entity but also embed it socially. It analyses the discursive and material manifestations of the state by looking at bureaucratic routines, public development and corruption discourses, everyday interactions between state functionaries and local people as well as those of the staff of various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and variously positioned local residents. In so doing, the thesis argues that the state in Africa is re/produced by embedding itself socially while ceaselessly enacting bureaucratic and spatial hierarchy through mundane governance practices and development discourses that position it as a seemingly coherent, dominant and unified entity, separate from and suspended over and above society.

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## **Acknowledgments**

This thesis would never have been possible without the support and guidance of many extraordinary people. First and foremost, I owe special thanks to my supervisor, Graham Harrison, for his steadfast support, encouragement and patience. He believed in me from the very beginning and gave me confidence during difficult times. I have greatly benefitted from his close readings and invaluable comments on countless drafts as well as from his inspiring and engaged discussions. I am also very thankful for the encouragement I received from Matt Sleat in the initial phase of this project.

I acknowledge The University of Sheffield for sponsoring this research. I am grateful for the cooperation extended to me by everyone at the Department of Politics. I would especially like to thank Sarah Cooke for helping me steer through the bureaucratic labyrinths during the course of my study.

The people in West Gojjam and Borana have made this work possible by letting me take part in their daily lives, sharing their time, experiences and space. I cannot name or thank all of the people individually, but I am profoundly in their debt. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to kebele and woreda officials as well as NGO workers who allowed me to sit in their offices, accompany them to social spaces and travel with them on official trips. I am also immensely grateful for the kind assistance of my friends in Borana. Special thanks to my field assistant and interpreter who has become a good friend.

I am grateful to those who read and commented on drafts of chapters, Rajni Palriwala, Lynsey Robinson, Henock Taddese and Getachew Desale. I am grateful to my mother, Wolela Ayalew, late father, Mulugeta Gebrie, and siblings, Kidist and Solomon, for their support and unremitting love. My cousin Tewuld Yosef deserves special thanks for always being there for

Fruit and me when we needed her. I would also like to thank Firew Lemma who, as a good friend, was always willing to support me in many ways.

Most of all, this thesis could not have been completed without the unwavering support, love and care of my beloved wife Biruktayit (Fruit) Wasyihun. I appreciate the sacrifices she made as I wrote this thesis. I also would like to thank my wonderful son, Ethan, for his love. He has brought me so much joy. I dedicate this thesis to my dear friend Negash Deressa, who passed away much too early as I was completing work on this thesis.

# Chapter 1

## **Introduction: Studying the sub-Saharan African state**

This thesis explores everyday governance practices and the construction of the idea of the state in Africa through the case of Ethiopia. At one and the same time it offers an illustration of the ways in which the state in Africa is experienced and imagined in the everyday context of local life. The thesis makes no assumption about the conduct or final form of the state in Africa. Instead of viewing it merely as a mimetic of the Western model or as an extension of precolonial forms of social organisation, the thesis examines the everyday and ongoing governance practices that produce the state in Africa as a seemingly autonomous entity but which also embed it socially. The main focus of the thesis is on processes such as mundane bureaucratic routines, public development and corruption discourses, development project implementation and administration and everyday interactions between state functionaries and local people as well as those of the staff of various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and variously positioned local residents. I approach these processes by looking at the experiences of people living in two rural kebeles in different regions of Ethiopia and by studying their relationships within the wider social and political contexts.

The thesis problematises and places at the forefront of its investigation the idea of the state and the issue of society-society relations. The central question of the thesis is as follows: What are the processes in which the state in Ethiopia is simultaneously being embedded, enacted and re/produced at the local level against the backdrop of changes in the national economy? It specifically asks: What are the everyday governance modalities by which the state comes to be constructed as both separate from and elevated above society? How do local development practices promote the imagination of the state by differently positioned individuals, including the state and NGO employees? To what extent is the state operating and thereby imagined and



experienced differentially/in different ways across different geographic regions? Overall, what does a focus on the local level reveal about the state in sub-Saharan Africa? In addressing these questions the thesis investigates the ways in which the state comes to be constructed in everyday life through the mediation of a range of practices (governance, development, bureaucratic and discourses).

In this introductory chapter, after offering a brief overview of the existing predominant approaches to the study of the state in Africa, I outline the main arguments of the thesis. I then present the kebele institution vis-à-vis the Ethiopian state system. Finally, I introduce the fieldwork sites, discuss the issues relating to the selection of those fieldwork sites and provide an outline of the chapters of the thesis.

### **1.1. The study of the sub-Saharan African state**

In working towards an anthropology of the state, this thesis aims to highlight the potential for a contribution to the general debate on state formation in Africa. Hence, I begin my exploration with a review of the existing literature on the state in Africa. It is not my intention here, however, to provide an exhaustive review. Instead, I will provide a broad overview of the existing approaches and highlight some of the key works that have influenced this study.

Since the early 1960s scholars have articulated a number of approaches to understanding the nature and character of the postcolonial African state, focusing mainly on those questions that address the ‘crisis of authority’ (Lonsdale 1981: 168), the ‘crisis of state capacity’ (Englebert 2002: 55), the ‘crisis of governance’ (Mamdani 2005: 3), the ‘African crisis’ (Ferguson 2006) and so on. Much of the writing on African state formation, drawing from a Weberian understanding of the state as an organisation, deals with the nature and role of the postcolonial state. Here, African states are portrayed as being ‘weak’ and ‘soft’ that ‘fall short of the requirements of statehood’ (Englebert 2002: 74). The state is seen as a colonial invention

and as an ‘exogenous’ structure grafted onto African societies (Englebert 2002). As a result, it is argued, African states have been distant from the populations they govern. For example, Goran Hyden (1983: 7) conceptualised African states as being ‘suspended in “mid-air” over society’ and ‘not an integral mechanism of the day-to-day productive activities of society’. Jackson and Rosberg (1982) similarly argued that Africa’s ‘quasi-states’ (Jackson 1990) lack ‘empirical statehood’. They go on to argue that the survival and persistence of sub-Saharan African states is ensured by international diplomacy and international institutions that give them juridical recognition. This view has been supported by scholars like Englebert (2013: 150), who argued that the state in Africa is ‘socially-neutral’ in that it derives its legitimacy from ‘outside the state and its population’.

One of the arguments that emerges from this literature is that African states are neo-patrimonial (see Médard 1982; Clapham 1982; Bratton and van de Walle 1994). Neo-patrimonialism is often used to describe a diverse collection of phenomena and modes of exercise of state power in Africa. These include the concentration of power in one individual who acts as the patron or ‘big man’ (Bratton and van de Walle 1994), practices of ‘despotism, clannish behaviour’, so-called ‘tribalism’, regionalism, patronage and ‘cronyism, corruption, predation, factionalism’ (Bach 2012: 221). Useful as it has been in illuminating our understanding of why and how African states suffer political instability, this approach tends to generalise the nature of the African state as fragile (Cheeseman, Death and Whitfield 2017: 20).

Despite its diversity, the failed state and neo-patrimonial literature generally assumes the state to be an autonomous and centralised apparatus. More specifically, as a number of authors have pointed out (see Roitman 2004; Ferguson 2006; Hagmann and Péclard 2011; Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2006), these studies are constrained by the Weberian ideal characterisation of the state as a system of administration with legitimate and effective control over its territory

and population. Yet such framings are not without truth with regard to Africa's past and present multifaceted problems and therefore cannot be dismissed merely as Eurocentric or Afro-pessimistic views. However, while it is important to acknowledge the empirical realities of African lack and failure, I concur with the critique that we need to be suspicious of accounts that tell us 'nearly everything that African states ... are not' (Mbembe 2001: 9) without telling us 'what they actually are' (Ferguson 2006: 10).

This view of the state fits into another approach by Mamdani (1996). Although not necessarily taking state failure as their analytical departure point, these scholars have conceptualised the postcolonial state and modes of governance as a product of colonialism. Mahmood Mamdani (1996) views the crises of the postcolonial state in Africa as a direct result of the continued legacy of colonial modes of governance. He argues that the institutional framework forged by colonial rule, that is, the direct rule of citizens by civil law and the indirect rule of natives/subjects by customary law, has produced a dichotomised society and a 'regime of compulsions' in postcolonial Africa. Although Mamdani provides valuable insights, this study distances itself from approaches that place too much stress on 'how modern state structures have been imposed and implanted in the African countryside' (Bonne 2003: 2). Instead, in the view of this study, we should look at the way in which contemporary regimes of power operate in their own logic and give emphasis to dynamics of local politics in postcolonial Africa.

Overall, in most of the above observations, the relationship between state and society is understood in terms of modes of governance associated with 'authoritarianism', whereby the postcolonial state is conceptualised as being presided over, in the same way as the colonial state, by an elite that is elevated above the society over which it rules. Such a view of the state in Africa fails to recognise that the appearance of the state-society distinction is socially constructed through governance and development practices by various actors.

Conversely, others call for a rejection of the ‘paradigm of the yoke’ (Bayart 2009) which depicts the state in Africa as a colonial product, an external structure, elevated above African societies. Within a point of departure in the historicity of African societies, scholars such as Bayart (2009) and Chabal and Daloz (1999) have focused on cultural patterns that stretch back to precolonial traditions but which, they argue, have also played a role in shaping the character of postcolonial African states. These authors suggest that contemporary African states are deeply entangled in social relations, in which state power is captured by particularistic interest groups. The consequence is argued to be that the state is unable to maintain institutional autonomy vis-à-vis society. On the contrary, social groups have been able to profoundly penetrate the state through primordial networks of kinship and patronage politics. Bayart (2009) developed the metaphor of ‘the politics of the belly’, referring to the idea that African states are characterised by modes of governance associated with the elite’s predatory pursuit of spoils, wealth and power. He argues that predatory politics is not simply about a corruption of the state but rather ‘it is the state’s fabric’ (2009: 89). The state in Africa, he argues, is built on a network of personal loyalties that spreads in every direction like a ‘rhizome’ to link various patrons and their clients to the informal distributive network.

Bayart’s *longue durée* and Foucauldian analysis of the state in Africa breaks away from the institutionalist and Weberian approaches in which the state is viewed as imported and transplanted. Instead, he concentrates on lines of ‘historical concatenation’ of political rationalities of governance (the politics of the belly) that persist across precolonial, colonial and postcolonial periods. Yet, in the view of this thesis, a focus on continuity conceals the historically contingent regimes of practices and overlooks events that precipitate radical change such as war, failing states and refugee crises (Clapham 1994).

William Reno (2000) characterised the state in Africa as ineffectual and as an empty façade of the more powerful informal networks of patronage and corrupt ‘shadow states’ that divert

state resources for personal enrichment and support for their protégés. Likewise, Chabal and Daloz (1999: 14) argue that states in Africa, in the sense defined by Weber, are vacuous and ineffectual, ‘so poorly institutionalised, and so weakly emancipated from society’. Overall, in these studies, the relationship between state and society is understood as a problem of institutionalisation. The state in Africa is viewed as being completely captured by informal, personalised and traditionalist politics (Chabal and Daloz 1999). These works provide interesting analysis and innovative approaches to the study of the state in Africa, but their limitation for this study is that they fail to ask whether the everyday social realm may also be shaped by the bureaucracy and contemporary development practices, and through the operations, of state officials.

However, my argument above that the social realm can be shaped by the bureaucracy and those practices associated with development activities as well as through the operations of state officials may well raise the question of the existence of state infrastructure. Jeffrey Herbst (2000), for instance, has demonstrated forcefully that African states have a slim presence outside capital cities. He argues that a lack of external threats and the ability to survive through foreign aid and taxes on primary commodities discourages African leaders from investing in bureaucracies in ways similar to those undertaken by European state-builders. However, as becomes clear in this study, the state in Africa has recently come to establish a wide geographical reach and numerous local ties. This is not idiosyncratic to Ethiopia. More works have recently emerged which stress the importance of the bureaucracy in other parts of Africa (Branch and Cheeseman 2009; Erdmann and Engel 2007; Olivier de Sardan 2014). My thesis works with this understanding of the bureaucracy in Africa in mind. In addition to this, as discussed in the next chapter, I recognise the literature that seeks to study the African state by looking at the multiplicity of (state and non-state) institutions at the local level (Lund 2006; Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2014; Blundo and Le Meur 2009).

In most of the different approaches discussed thus far we find a tendency to view the postcolonial state as being characterised by two contradictory attributes: on the one hand, it is characterised as an exogenous structure detached from and elevated above society, while on the other it is an empty shell and vacuous institution absorbed by social forces and particularistic interests. In the first view, the state is reduced to a mere exogenous institution. In the second, it is interpreted as a structural outcome of precolonial African political culture. In the view of this study, both approaches result in a reductionist and essentialised conceptualisation of the state in Africa.

## **1.2. Theoretical positioning and departures**

The most important question, then, is how can we avoid reducing the state to a mere exogenous institution or treating it as a structural outcome of African political culture? This section outlines an alternative theoretical approach that the thesis adopts with regard to understanding the state in Africa. The theoretical approach taken in this thesis and which is elaborated upon in the next chapter is an anthropological scholarship on state formation that seeks to redress the top-down and reified understanding of the sub-Saharan African state as either an extension of the colonial state or as an extension of precolonial patrimonial forms of social organisation. This approach has been variously referred to as ‘ethnography of the state’ (Gupta 1995), ‘anthropology of the state’ (Das and Poole 2004; Sharma and Gupta 2006; Hansen and Stepputat 2001), ‘state-in-society’ (Migdal 2001) and ‘the state as cultural practice’ (Bevir and Rhodes 2010). Rather than taking the state to be a predefined organisation (by external actors or pre-existing traditions), it recognises that the state is an effect of ongoing processes and governance practices. Such an approach aims to disaggregate the purported coherence of the state by looking at the local interactions and heterogeneous (bureaucratic and non-bureaucratic) practices of governance and discourses, rather than static structures, that produce it.

This study is an attempt to expand upon, and contribute to, a number of the issues that arise from these approaches to the study of the state. It argues that the state in Africa, as elsewhere, is not a coherent structure or a subject that is separate from society but rather that it is a structural ‘effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist’ (Mitchell 1999: 89). An ethnographic analysis of the state as the structural effect of practices is an analysis of the practices and power relations that characterise social life at the level of both the institutional mechanics of government and of the social actors who are positioned in a multidimensional social space (Migdal 2001; Mitchell 1999). This means paying attention to the ways in which the state is re/defined and becomes a material reality within the everyday context of local life. This thesis particularly identifies and investigates four sets of everyday practices (governance, bureaucratic, development and discursive practices) that make the state structure appear to exist. In the next chapter, I discuss each of these concepts in much more detail. However, to make my argument plain from the outset, the concept of governance as it is applied in this thesis is drawn from Bevir and Rhodes’s (2010) ‘decentred approach’ to governance which views the state as a ‘cultural practice’ and acknowledges the existence of diverse actions and the fragmentation and diffusion of power relations.

The ways in which I understand development activities are drawn from Norman Long’s ‘actor-oriented’ and ‘interface’ approach, which recognises that instead of operating in a top-down fashion, development functions through multiple social realities, dispersed power relations and the diverse practices of various actors. This approach helps us to grasp the diverse ways in which the state is constructed, contested and appropriated differently by differently positioned actors, and how ‘interface situations’ (Long 1992) encourage the production of the state-society boundary. I will also draw on Ferguson’s (1994: 256) concept of ‘instrument-effects’ to highlight the unintended consequences of development practices in producing the state-society boundary. The ways in which I use the concept of bureaucratic practices are drawn

from Ferguson and Gupta's (2000) concepts of 'verticality' and 'encompassment', Kapferer and Bertelsen's (2009) concept of 'society of the state' and Sharma and Gupta's (2006) concept of representations. I argue that the construction of the idea of the state is partly possible in its bureaucratic presence, that is, in the way the institutions that make up the state operate on the ground and interact with local people both in informal ways and through activities such as sedentarisation and territorialisation. The concept of discourse I utilise in this thesis is situated in the terrain between scholars like Foucault (1972: 49), who developed the concept of discursive practices, and Bevir and Rhodes (2015), who chose to employ the concept of tradition to balance their concept of situated agency. Overall, my conceptual approach elicits a number of methodological strategies. The thesis therefore applies two varieties of interpretive methods and the situational analysis method to the study of governance. These methods are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Throughout the thesis, as I outline in the next chapter, I overlay the different sets of practices with Foucault's idea of 'dispersed' power and analyse the complex, diverse and contingent actions of the situated actors and the production of the idea of the state. In so doing, I argue that these sets of practices produce the effect of the state as an autonomous entity, separate from and suspended over and above society, with the appearance of clear functional differentiation, an inherent agency of state and institutional coherence. State power arises through the mediation of various practices associated with development administration and bureaucratic routines that mobilise, coordinate and articulate diffuse and local sites of power relations (family, public spaces, schools, etc.) into 'general mechanisms and forms ... of domination' (Jessop 2007: 36). Following Mitchell (1999: 84), I also argue that the appearance of state-society distinction creates the 'effect of agency, with concrete consequences' and such agency, as I will show empirically in Chapter 6, is 'contingent upon the production of difference' through boundary-making processes.



This representation of the state as a unitary actor gives the impression that ‘it’ exists as a concrete entity, whereas in reality there is only a dispersed ensemble of institutions, practices and social relations. I will demonstrate that the image of an autonomous state that stands separate from society is challenged by the existence of diverse sites of power relations such as non-state forms of authority (Lund 2006). In this sense, non-state authorities take the form of locally notable social, economic and political elites, who collapse the distinction between formal and informal, state and non-state domains in their multiple positions as politicians, religious leaders, community elders, traders, etc. and whose networks of patronage traverse hierarchies.

The thesis seeks at once to examine the local context of more general processes – specifically, the production of the state as an idea – but also to disaggregate and demystify (Abrams 1988) popular imaginations of a unitary, homogeneous and autonomous state in order to demonstrate its social embeddedness. The core argument of the thesis is that the state in Ethiopia is re/produced by embedding itself<sup>1</sup> socially while ceaselessly enacting bureaucratic and spatial hierarchy through mundane governance practices and development discourses that position it as a seemingly coherent, dominant and unified entity, separate from and suspended over and above society.

It must be noted that in studying the state as a structural effect of practices (Mitchell 1991; Jessop 2007) and through the specific contexts of local social processes, I do not deny the organisational existence and immense importance of central state institutions, policies and regulations in shaping local lives. On the contrary, I argue that state formation is shaped by central state institutional and policy interventions. This is in keeping with Foucault, who argues

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<sup>1</sup> I am aware that my use of the state as a subject/political actor reifies the very concept I wish to interrogate. I choose to retain it here only for the sake of clarity of my argument.

that ‘I do not want to say that the state isn’t important; what I want to say is that relations of power, and hence the analysis that must be made of them, necessarily extend beyond the limits of the State . . . because the State, for all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations’ (Foucault 1980: 122).

However, it must be reiterated that approaching state formation as such is not to concur with the ‘top-down approach’ that depicts state formation as a process of ‘violent penetration of the territory by the army, bureaucracy and capital’ (Stepputat 2001: 285). I argue that the top-down approach leads only to a reified conceptualisation of the state as separate from the dynamics of the local. In other words, it fails to capture the intersection between the national and the local and mediations by non-state authorities such as NGOs. The thesis (in Chapter 9) demonstrates that central state projects (such as sedentarisation and territorialisation) are mediated by NGOs and shaped by entrenched local social interests and interactions with the local population.

This thesis does not assume the prior existence of either a particular ‘African political culture’ (Chabal and Daloz 1999) or a persistent and distinctive form of ‘African way of doing things’. Instead, inspired by interpretative approaches to the study of culture and governance (see Chapter 3), it seeks to unpack the diverse and contingent discourses and practices of the situated actors through which power is coordinated and articulated. Here my aim is not to discount the importance of the continuity of traditions but rather to direct attention to and unearth the complex specificity, multiplicity and heterogeneity of practices and meaning in context. At a broader level, avoiding the reified notion of African political culture enables us to locate the question of state formation within the broader changing context of African political economy. Here I approach the current infatuation with developmentalism as a prism through which to understand everyday forms of state formation. In so doing, I argue that the logic of garnering legitimacy in Africa is no longer solely predicated upon the ability of its leaders to forge patrimonial networks. New ideas of legitimacy, such as development rhetoric,

are redefining the terrain in which African politics operates. A number of African states<sup>2</sup> are making efforts to institutionalise development as the main *raison d'être* of the state, by way of introducing ambitious national development plans, projects and programmes whose primary orientations are towards legitimising state authority. In other words, discourses and practices of development, in many contemporary African states, provide a dominant 'ideological formation' (Hansen and Stepputat 2001: 15) that define the character of the state and how politics is supposed to be conducted and how state institutions should function.

### **1.3. Why Ethiopia?**

In chapter four I discuss at length the major reason that influenced me to choose Ethiopia as a case. My specific reason for choosing Ethiopia lies in the fact that it provides an excellent case of an African state which has positioned itself at the front and centre of the economic transformation (see Chapter 2) agenda and that has tied its legitimacy to rapid economic growth and poverty reduction efforts. The Ethiopian government, through its two five-year Growth and Transformation Plans (GTPs),<sup>3</sup> has adopted for itself a utopian and ambitious project of creating a middle-income country by the period 2020–23, with a target of 11 per cent annual economic growth (Assefa 2014). The strategic pillars for attaining these goals include increasing agricultural output and productivity, promoting industrialisation and public investment in infrastructure. This emphasis on structural transformation is accompanied by a desire to improve the livelihood of the country's predominantly rural population (80% of the total population) through the provision of basic development services. To achieve this, the government, along with its international development partners, has launched an extraordinary range of development programmes, including the promotion of basic services (school, health

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<sup>2</sup> Developmental states in Africa include Tanzania, Botswana, Rwanda, South Africa and Ethiopia (Routley 2014).

<sup>3</sup> The first Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP I) was implemented from 2010/11 to 2014/15 and the second (2015/16-2019/20) was launched in October 2015 (MoFED 2010, 215).

centres, roads, agricultural services, etc.), resettlement and sedentarisation programmes, irrigation projects, group-based participatory programmes (such as the Productive Safety Net) and cooperative schemes. While Ethiopia remains one of the poorest countries in Africa, the expansion of such development projects has brought about the momentous spread of state bureaucracy. For example, between 2005 and 2009, 264,000 school teachers and 34,000 health extension workers were hired (Lefort 2015: 370). There are now 63,000 agricultural extension workers spread across all kebeles. Each woreda has more than one farmer training centre.<sup>4</sup> Since 2002, the number of farmer training centres in the country has increased to 8,500 (Nigatu 2013). The number of primary cooperatives<sup>5</sup> rose from 19,147 in 2005 to 53,982 at the end of 2014, while the total number of members increased from 3.9 million to 8.3 million (9.8% of the population) during the same period (Bezabih 2009; Kifle 2015).

The significance of the expansion of basic development projects and the concomitant growth and spread of state bureaucracy and development discourses, I argue, lay in that it helped to represent the state to its population and provided multiple avenues and possibilities for state-society encounters. As will be discussed in greater detail throughout the thesis, local people are now expected to mobilise and participate both within and outside the state structure as stakeholders in local and national development initiatives. Significantly, development discourses entered the everyday life of rural subjects. Such specific contemporary modes of governance and the ways in which they are popularly experienced in Ethiopia, I argue, are

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<sup>4</sup> The farmer training centres provide a wide range services including ‘farmer training and extension services on improved farming techniques (through training courses, exhibits, demonstration farms, field days and farmer-to-farmer extension); market-oriented information and advisory services; meeting and communication facilities; and seed and seedlings of new crops, vegetables, fruit and forage varieties’ (Nigatu 2013: 77).

<sup>5</sup> The primary cooperatives are organised around 36 different types of economic activities, including grain marketing, coffee marketing, saving and credit services, fruit and vegetable production and marketing, dairy production and marketing and livestock marketing, etc. (Bezabih 2009).

crucial in shaping both local encounters between state officials and local people and the ways in which the state is understood, imagined and reproduced.

The remainder of this chapter describes the fieldwork sites and issues relating to the selection of fieldwork sites, and provides an outline of the chapters of the thesis. But before I do so, however, it will briefly describe the position of the kebele institution vis-à-vis the Ethiopian state system.

#### **1.4. The administrative layers of the Ethiopian state**

The Ethiopian state bureaucracy is organised into multiple hierarchical administrative levels. At the top of this structure is the federal government, below which lie regional state governments. The constitution establishes nine federated regional states and two city administrations along the lines of language groups. The nine states are Oromia, Amhara, Tigray, Afar, Somalia and Harari (organised along dominant languages) and Gambella, Benishangul-Gumuz and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) (organised through the amalgamation of smaller language groups). The two municipalities are Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa (Vaughan 2015).

Each regional state is divided into several zones which comprise a number of woredas (districts), with each woreda in turn composed of several kebeles (roughly meaning neighbourhood). The woreda is the most important administrative unit of each region and has 'its own administrative apparatus, police and security force, judges and prosecutors and increasingly, power and resources to prepare and determine economic and social plans in the area under its authority' (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003: 42). There are 550 woredas and several special woredas spread across the country, each with an average population of more than 150,000. The kebele is the lowest administrative unit and typically has a population of between 5,000 and 10,000 people. Each kebele has its own council which, in theory at least, makes

decisions on locally relevant matters. Moreover, each kebele is represented on the woreda council by three individuals (Poluha and Elehu 2016).

I initiated my fieldwork at the kebele level since, as the lowest tier of governance, the kebele allowed me to observe the everyday interactions of the state (through its functionaries) and the ordinary people who come to the kebele for a variety of reasons. The kebele is also the local level at which state policies are implemented, and, as a result, it constitutes a crucial part of the trans-local network of power (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 2002). Therefore, the kebele is not taken as an administratively bounded place of politics but rather as an important nodal point within a national network of power where development policies (see Chapter 9) and large-scale development projects (see Chapter 6) take place and are enacted by different state agents (woreda-, zone-, regional- and federal-level officials). On the other hand, as the lowest point of contact between the people and the state, the kebele offered me a unique position from which to consider how ordinary people construct a particular image of the Ethiopian state.

### **1.5. Field sites: Zonal and Kebele setting**

The first fieldwork site is the Degga kebele<sup>6</sup> in the highland agrarian community of the West Gojjam zone in Amhara regional state, which was part of Ethiopia's historic core, or the Abyssinian<sup>7</sup> kingdom. At the time of the fieldwork, the kebele contained about 1,400

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<sup>6</sup> The name Degga is a pseudonym to provide anonymity to the residents. In order to protect my interlocutors' anonymity, the names of the woreda and the woreda town have been withheld.

<sup>7</sup> Abyssinia was an area to the north-west of Addis Ababa in modern-day Ethiopia that comprised two politically powerful ethnic groups – the Amhara and Tigray. It was the precursor to the modern Ethiopian state. Abyssinia provided the basic institutional underpinnings – the land tenure system, Amharic language and Orthodox Christianity – of the contemporary Ethiopian state. Because the Abyssinians historically occupied a position of cultural and political hegemony within the Ethiopian state system, they came to be seen as 'state builders' (See Ullendorff 1955; Crummey 1980; Donham 1986; Gebru 1996; Markakis 2011).

households and had a total population of almost 10,000. Most of its residents live in houses made of mud and straw or corrugated tin.

West Gojjam is a predominantly agrarian zone, with a high proportion of its population, over 91 per cent, living in rural areas and engaged mainly in agriculture (CSA 2008). The population of the zone is predominantly Orthodox Christian. Prior to the 1974 land reform, the area was part of what was known as the *rist* system. Under this system, each individual was assured of distinct claims to land which were inheritable and inalienable (Hoben 1973). Superimposed over the *rist* tenure was an institution of tax and labour extraction known as *gult*. *Gult* was usually granted by the crown to the aristocracy and local gentry as a reward for their political loyalty, and to churches and monasteries as endowments (Hoben 1973).

Since the 1970s two developments in national politics have been significant in the transformation of Gojjam. The first involved the establishment of peasant associations. As in other rural parts of Ethiopia, following the 1974 revolution, in Gojjam farmers were organised into peasant associations on an 800-hectare area (Dessalegn 1984). The kebeles in Gojjam, as elsewhere in the country, were charged with implementing land reform, administering public property such as land, establishing service co-operatives, building schools and health centres and carrying out villagisation programmes. Additional roles were later introduced, including judicial tribunals and necessary security and defence activities (Dessalegn 1984). This had the effect of transforming kebeles into permanent territorial and administrative entities. Significantly, this created different hierarchies between the kebele bureaucracy and the local population. Today, the kebele is a central figure in the daily life of rural people.

The second development involved the introduction in 1995 of agricultural extension programmes. These programmes were aimed at transforming the livelihoods of rural people through the dissemination of agricultural technologies such as chemical fertilisers and hybrid

varieties of seeds and pesticides, in addition to through the provision of training and credit services (Teferi 2004). It resulted in the generation of some dynamism in agricultural productivity and gave rise to new classes (Abeje and Ezana 2011). However, farming techniques and cultivation methods have changed little in the years since the introduction of the agricultural extension programmes. Farmers in Degga, for example, continue to rely on ox power for cultivation.

Land scarcity is yet another issue affecting productivity. At the time of the fieldwork, Degga kebele inhabitants possess only small plots of land. Some of them are sharecroppers with wealthy farmers. Land scarcity is due partly, as Svein Ege (2017) suggests in the case of Shewa, to increasing land rentals, latent rights and partible land inheritance. Households in the kebele are primarily engaged in the growth of cereal crops, which are used mainly for subsistence. Rich farmers also grow onions and wheat varieties for the government. Onion and wheat production takes place on irrigation land. This has led to increasing reliance on and demand for chemical fertilisers, irrigated water and pesticides, etc. In addition, people engage in a diverse range of income-generating activities, including working in local sawmills, the production and sale of alcohol and providing casual labour. These processes involve the local people in complex power relations within their day-to-day lives. This thesis attempts to situate state formation within this context.

My second fieldwork site is Odda<sup>8</sup> kebele, which is located in a semi-pastoral lowland community in the Borana zone of Oromia regional state. The Borana people live both in Ethiopia and the northern part of Kenya, straddling the border between the two countries. In Ethiopia, the Borana number almost 1 million people (CSA 2008). The Borana are organised

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<sup>8</sup> The name Odda is a pseudonym to provide anonymity to the residents. The names of the woreda and the woreda town have been withheld to protect the anonymity of the state employees and NGO workers.



around two exogamous and patrilineal moieties called the *Sabbo* and *Gona*. Each moiety is subdivided into several clans, with the *Sabbo* comprising three clans and the *Gona* containing fifteen clans. These eighteen clans are geographically dispersed and intersect in every aspect of everyday life. The social and political life of the Borana is organised around *gadaa* and *qaalluu* institutions (Bassi 2010). The *gadaa* is an age grade and generational class system in which five generational classes (*gogeessa*; also called *luba*) alternate in assuming power every eight years (a *gadaa* period) (Asmerom 1973). Once in every *gadaa* period, a pan-Borana assembly known as the *Gumi Gayo* convenes to evaluate the performance of the *gadaa*-set in power, to revise existing *aadaa seera* Borana (customary laws) and proclaim new ones.

In contrast to the *gadaa*, the *qaalluu* is a hereditary office (Bassi 2010). The two Borana moieties have their own *qaalluus*. Together, the two institutions constitute ‘a differentiated institutional leadership, assuring the governance and participation of the entire group by exercising their political and juridical influence in different types of meetings, assemblies and councils’ (Bassi 2010: 222).

The Borana’s pattern of settlement and movement is dictated by *seera marraa bisanii* – ‘the law of grass and water’ (Samuel et al. 2016: 47), which governs the community’s seasonal need to be based near to water wells as well as their maintenance and regulations for dry-and wet-season pasture-use patterns. This way the Borana are able to survive in a semi-arid environment that is characterised by a high level of rainfall variability and frequent droughts.

In the aftermath of their incorporation into Ethiopia during the last quarter of the 19th century (Markakis 2011; Oba 2013), the Borana were affected by the central state in many different ways. However, they were seldom participants in governance process and the state remained marginal in the everyday lives of the local people. During the imperial period, the focus was on periodical tax extraction, and the customary institutions were tolerated. The Derg

was aloof towards pastoralists. When Marco Bassi conducted his PhD fieldwork in 1994, he found a ‘division of competences between the administrative and the customary structures’ (2010: 222).

At the time of my fieldwork, however, this ‘division of competences’ was dissipating and the Borana were rapidly sedentarising (see Chapter 9). As I will describe in greater detail in Chapter 9, the majority of the people in Odda kebele have resided in permanent settlements since the early 2000s. At the time of the fieldwork, the kebele contained about 1,300 households and had a total population of nearly 9,000. The kebele is subdivided into three sub-kebeles. The kebele has an elementary school and three satellite schools in the sub-kebeles (for primary-age children in the faraway villages). The habitations of the Odda kebele people are mostly mud and straw huts. Households in the kebele are engaged in small-scale agricultural production and cattle, sheep and goat herding. Compared to Dagga, the people are vulnerable to recurrent droughts and suffer from shortages of water and food. The majority of families are unable to make ends meet without some form of NGO/government support. This is partly because the changes of the state have disrupted the regulatory system of the Borana.

### **1.6. Selection of field sites**

The selection of my two fieldwork sites was ‘strategic’ (Marcus 1995). First, my choice of two fieldwork sites in different regions of Ethiopia was theoretically informed. My choice was specifically influenced by the centre-periphery/frontier approach to the study of the Ethiopian state and society. Over the past several decades, as I will describe in greater detail in Chapter 4, several scholars have pointed out that the Ethiopian state is bifurcated along a centre-periphery axis. The objective in selecting two fieldwork sites was, in part, to investigate the usefulness of the centre/periphery dichotomy. As we shall see, this dichotomy did not fit my ethnographic observations.

Second, my particular choice of the zones of Borana and West Gojjam was intended to have an exploratory advantage because they are 'atypical' (Marcus 1995) to one another and are located in two of the largest regional states in Ethiopia. As outlined in the previous section, the two sites are set apart by their distinctive cultural, geographic and political characteristics. Although their overt diversity provided different vantage points for exploring how ideas about the state are variably manifest in different geographic, cultural and economic contexts, my cases are representative of neither the centre-periphery distinction nor the cultural diversity of Ethiopia as a whole. An ethnographic study based on two locations cannot be seen to assume a representative character. However, anthropologists are rarely concerned with the representativeness of their cases. The primary objective of an ethnographic study is to capture the meanings of banal and ordinary activities, social processes and dynamics (Marcus 1995; Geertz 1973). 'One might ask; why are we here, in a village of no particular significance .... The justification for such an enterprise must lie precisely in its banality - in the fact that these circumstances are the normal context in which class conflict has *historically* occurred' (Scott 1985: 27). Following Scott, I argue that a micro-level enquiry based on one or two localities offers insights into the multiple and complex ways through which local social and political relations constitute and are interconnected with the dynamics of the macro-level, wider national political life.

Third, my choice of rural settings, as opposed to urban centres, is influenced by the spread of development practices and discourses which, through the state policy of all-encompassing rural development, are leading people at the local level to become increasingly involved in development activities as part of their day-to-day lives. This process is more evident in rural areas, where a wide range of development programmes, including the provision of schools, health centres, roads, agricultural services and sedentarisation programmes, irrigation projects and cooperative schemes, are being implemented through the kebeles. This, as Teferi (2004:

613) notes in the case of decentralisation, ‘has increased the significance of local government as a site for struggle over the meanings of ‘state’ and ‘people’’. The selection of rural areas was therefore intended to situate the study of the state in the context of the social, economic and political transformations. It must be acknowledged here, however, that in focusing on rural settings, where people are homogeneous in terms of their ethnicity and religion, I was not able to take advantage of the diversity of urban Ethiopia’s population. My research questions could have provoked a different response in urban areas, where people may approach the state with a diverse and contrasting set of experiences and values.

Finally, my particular choice of the areas of Degga in Gojjam and Odda in Borana was influenced by both their location in relation to their respective woreda towns, where the administrative offices are located and where I conducted a multi-sited ethnography (see Chapter 3), and by my personal contacts.

The selection of two research sites raises the question of comparison. An uncritical application of the comparative method to the study of culture and society has long been well criticised by several anthropologists (see, among others, Gluckman 1964; Clifford 1986; Marcus 1995). Bruce Kapferer (2011: 26), for example, summarising Gluckman’s view, cautioned that one should not compare cultures without paying close attention to the ‘principles engaged in structures of meaning’. This becomes even more important in the Ethiopian context where there is a long-standing propensity among scholars to engage in a comparison of cultures, very often with little attention paid to defining those principles that inform cultural practices. Cultures compared in this way, as Kapferer notes, are ‘drained of their particular import and are reduced to each other [and] become subordinated to theory’ (26). There are, however, a few notable exceptions. One such exception is Donald Levine’s seminal work *Greater Ethiopia* in which he, rather than engaging in direct comparisons, juxtaposed Amhara/Tigray and Oromo

traditions focusing, in Kapferer's (2011: ix) words, on their 'positive singularities' to highlight their contributions to the making of Greater Ethiopia. However, his method seemed to reduce the concept of culture to a series of traits, while at the same time implicitly constructing similarities and differences between cultures in an objectivist sense (Messay 1999).

Therefore, in this thesis, the two sites are not used in the conventional comparative model but instead are set to elucidate one another with the intention of shedding light on the larger national cultural, economic and political issues that feed into state formation. Bruce Kapferer, in his book *Legends of People, Myths of State* (1988 [2011]), follows a similar strategy in his account of nationalism in Australia and Sri Lanka. In his juxtaposition of two forms of nationalist spheres – Australian egalitarian Christian ontology and Sri Lankan encompassing hierarchical ontology, Kapferer investigated nationalist cosmologies 'on their own terms and in the contexts of their ideas' (1988: xii). In so doing he demonstrated convincingly the complexity of different styles of nationalist imaginations in the contemporary world. Here, in juxtaposing the two sites, I do not view them as self-contained and discreet cultural units. Instead, using interpretative and situational analysis methods,<sup>9</sup> I draw on field materials to examine the ways in which the idea of the state is re/produced in relation to the different sets of practices that individuals are exposed to in the everyday context of local life. In this way, I will attempt to generate dialogues across specific contexts on the common processes of state formation for the purpose of understanding the heterogeneous process of state formation.

That being said, my lack of knowledge of *Afaan Oromo* meant that I was not able to collect comparable data, especially data concerning the cultural norms (idioms, metaphors, etc.) that inform everyday life and 'structures of meaning' (Kapferer 2011) between my fieldwork sites. I was also not able to observe and participate in local official and informal public meetings in

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<sup>9</sup> The methods employed in conducting the fieldwork are discussed in Chapter 3.

a comparable way (see Chapter 3). My analyses of state formation in Odda (Chapters 9 and 10) are predominantly based on the interviews and conversations that I conducted with a wide range of actors. The difference between the types and depths of field material has therefore led to different levels of analysis for the two cases, which is focused more on West Gojjam. This does not mean, however, that the two cases explain different processes or phenomena. Instead, they explain the multiplicity of ways through which the state is re/produced and comes to be imagined in Ethiopia.

In other words, I juxtapose the two field sites to demonstrate the numerous ‘referents’ of the state (the social practices and local institutions through which the discreteness of the state is established vis-à-vis society) across context, space and time (Jessop 2007: 3). Each chapter in this thesis therefore takes a different angle to explore and demonstrate the various aspects of the governance process and state formation in comprehensive pieces across context, time and space, etc. The thesis therefore situates the field material from the two sites on a continuum along Burawoy’s (2009: 45; see also de Vries 2012) four ‘extensions’ of the extended case method. That is, five chapters (Chapters 5 to 8 and Chapter 9) discuss the first extension, namely the extension into the life and world of the participants. The other extensions that Burawoy describes are over time (discussed at various points, including in Chapters 4 and 9) and space (Chapters 5 and 9), from micro processes to macro forces to explore connections between geographical sites (discussed in Chapter 9) and, finally, the extension of the theory (used at various points, including in Chapters 2 and 11). As such, at the same time as Burawoy’s (2009: 45) four ‘extensions’ allow us to account for the heterogeneity of governance practices and the complexity of the everyday aspects of state formation, they also provide the unity of the thesis.

## **1.7. Outline of chapters**

**Chapter Two** establishes the main theoretical and conceptual grounds upon which this thesis stands. It also provides further context to the thesis by describing issues relating to the vernacular conception of the state in Ethiopia and the relationship between the ruling party and the state. **Chapter Three** outlines the methodology adopted in the research, describing the situational analysis and interpretive methods. It also presents the processes and techniques of data collection and analysis.

**Chapter Four** provides a broad overview of the existing literature on the state and society in Ethiopia. In so doing, it first questions the widely held assumption that Ethiopia is an anomaly within Africa. Second, it examines how the Ethiopian state has been analysed and understood.

**Chapter Five** discusses the modalities by which state power and authority circulate and how hierarchy is reproduced through the regularising of specific sets of activities and bureaucratic rituals. Here, I examine the nature and pattern of interactions among state functionaries and also encounters between kebele officials and local people. I argued that banal local bureaucratic practices perform the function of reproducing and representing a reified image of the state as a distinctive, vertical and detached (from society) actor.

**Chapter Six**, instead of taking the state-society boundary to be self-evident, examines how it is constructed through development and governance practices. It does this using the lens of an important local development scheme: the Koga irrigation and watershed management project. The chapter will ask how local- and high-level state functionaries engage in activities that differentiate the state from society by articulating what community is and ought to do and also where the state begins and ends (in terms of its development responsibilities) as opposed to other forms of authority such as community associations. The exploration in this chapter seeks to answer the following questions: How have institutional arrangements during different

stages promoted division between the state and local people? How has this impacted on the self-perception of the people? The overall objective is to tease out the processes and instruments by which state discreteness is produced.

From a rather bureaucratic-centric analysis of state formation, I next turn attention to public discourses in **Chapter Seven**, which deals with how the state comes to be imagined as an authoritative centre of power by focusing on local public discourses of corruption. It will also look at the role of religious metaphors in helping people constitute a particular image of the state.

The above three fieldwork chapters contribute to an overall picture of how the state as a political centre of authority, elevated above and set off from society, is produced as a result of governance practices. In **Chapter Eight**, the argument takes a different turn. It explores the everyday patterns of interaction between state and non-state actors and argues that the state and society, instead of being separate domains, are in fact part of the same sociocultural and political complex. This chapter will take us a step further to understanding state formation as embedded and grounded in the everyday realities of social relations.

**Chapters Nine and Ten** concentrate on case studies from my second fieldwork site. These chapters add a further layer to the thesis by looking at the multifaceted interplay between the central government and local interests as well as the role played by NGOs in the everyday processes of state formation. Focusing on local sedentarisation and territorialisation activities, **Chapter Nine** points to the constitutive effect of a wide range of actors (state officials, NGOs, local elites and the people) for every state formation. **Chapter Ten** explores how changes induced by the interaction of state and non-state actors – the creation of a new spatial and bureaucratic order – promote a variegated understanding of the state. By drawing on the experiences of state employees, NGO staff and local people, the chapter sketches a broad



spectrum of discourses and understandings of the state. In so doing, it argues that because the state appears in people's lives in different and multiple ways, it is experienced and imagined differently.

**Chapter Eleven** concludes the thesis by weaving together the main findings of the study and by discussing their implications for the study of the sub-Saharan African s

## Chapter 2

### **Rethinking the state: theoretical and conceptual frameworks**

This chapter discusses the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that will enable an ethnographic analysis of the state in sub-Saharan Africa. This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, I outline my overall ethnographic framework of analysis. I do so by first exploring the anthropological approaches to the study of the state. I then outline four sets of practices (governance, bureaucratic, development and discursive) as conceptual tools capable of capturing the process of state formation at work in Ethiopia and locate them in the theoretical literature. The section furthermore makes two additions to the conceptual framework: the centrality of power and class. In the second section, I provide further context to the thesis by describing the vernacular term *mengist* (which refers to both the state and government) as well as providing analysis of the interface of the state and party politics in Ethiopia. There is no doubt that each of these topics warrants exhaustive consideration in its own right. However, given the scope of the thesis, I provide only a general overview with the aim of establishing some national political context for the everyday forms of state formation.

#### **2.1. Anthropological approaches to the state**

The study of the state has been an important and long-standing preoccupation of social scientists for over a century. Yet, the concept remains elusive. As Philip Abrams (1988: 49) rightly notes, ‘we have come to take the state for granted as an object of political practice and political analysis while remaining quite spectacularly unclear as to what the state is’. Scholars have long, either consciously or unconsciously, taken the state to be an autonomous and coherent unit with extraordinary means to dominate. Partly underlying this understanding is Max Weber’s (1948: 78) famous definition of the state as ‘a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given

territory'. Although, as Joe Migdal (2001: 14) points out, Weber's intention was to provide only 'a heuristic, ideal type state', others subsequently stretched the concept to refer to real-life states. There is, however, a growing body of literature that is at variance with the Weberian assumption that the state as a discrete entity could be studied apart from society. In the following, I would like to draw attention to the works of scholars who challenged the Weberian understanding of the state.

In the preface to *African Political Systems* (1940: xxiii), Radcliffe-Brown laid a foundation for an alternative understanding of political systems by advising us to abandon the study of the state altogether, because, he argues, the state as being 'an entity over and above the human individuals that make up a society ... does not exist in the phenomenal world; it is a fiction of the philosophers'. What exists, he argues, is an 'organisation i.e. a collection of individual human beings connected by a complex system of relations ... there is no such thing as the power of the state; there are only, in reality, powers of individuals—kings, prime ministers, magistrates, policemen, party bosses, and voters' (xxiii). He argues that scholars should focus on studying government and politics.

In a posthumously published influential article, *Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State* (1988), Philip Abrams urges social scientists to follow Radcliffe-Brown's lead and abandon studying the state as if it existed as a unified and concrete entity. He argues 'the state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is'. Contrary to Radcliffe-Brown's radical proposal, Abrams emphasises that we should study the *idea* of the state 'extremely seriously' while suspending a belief in the concrete existence of the state as a political reality. In studying the state, he argues, a distinction should be made between the 'state system' and 'state idea' (58). The former, he argues, is a cluster of institutions and their practices that surround the governmental system; the latter refers to the image the state holds and projects about itself.

It is important, for the purposes of this study, to point out that Abrams' alternative reading of the state was specifically directed against Marxist notions of the capitalist state.<sup>10</sup> In the context of African societies, however, where the majority of the population are agrarian and qualities of governance are not exclusively confined to government institutions, Abrams' proposal is clearly not comprehensive enough to explore state-society relations. Nevertheless, Abrams's distinction between the state idea and state system, as I demonstrate later, remains useful for the aim this thesis to make sense of how the state is produced as something separate from society.

Subsequently, Timothy Mitchell (1991; 1999) takes up Abrams argument, but rather than distinguish between the state system and the state idea, he argues that they should be viewed as two sides of the same process. This is because, as Mitchell maintains, the state idea is not a purely ideological construct and it does not occur as a subjective belief that exists in the heads of individuals, but rather it is given substance by real material processes. Mitchell draws on Foucault's notion of disciplinary power to emphasise that the abstract expressions of the state, or what Abrams calls the state idea, 'arises from techniques that enable mundane practices to take on the appearance of an abstract, nonmaterial form'. The very 'appearance of a world fundamentally divided into state and society' is, as Mitchell argues, an effect of the 'spatial organization, temporal arrangement, functional specification, and supervision and surveillance' that we attribute to the state (1991: 95). These mundane practices of disciplinary power practices and discourses, according to Mitchell, produce the effect of the state as an autonomous entity. The distinction between state and society, Mitchell therefore argues, is not an expression of functional differentiation or a historically given fact but a product of an elusive

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<sup>10</sup> More specifically, his writing addressed the works of two Marxist scholars, Ralph Miliband and Nicolas Poulantzas, who, he argues, developed a reified notion of the state in capitalist societies. He argues, 'both perceived the non-entity of the state and failed to cling to the logic of that perception' (1988: 69).

‘structural effect’. The porous, elusive and uncertain line between the state and society does not therefore create two fundamentally separate and opposing realms. Instead, Mitchell (1991: 78) writes: ‘the distinction must be taken not as the boundary between two discrete entities, but as a line drawn internally within the network of institutional mechanisms through which a social and political order is maintained’. This leads him to the conclusion that the state is neither pure practice nor pure abstraction; it is an effect of all the above activities.

Mitchell’s central argument that the state is the ‘metaphysical effect’ of everyday practices is well received, and it finds resonance in anthropology within the work of many scholars who, for instance, view the state as a fetish, an ‘invented whole of materialized artifice into whose woeful insufficiency of being we have placed soulstuff’ (Taussig 1997: 3); as a myth, which is sustained by ‘the rather mundane practices of authorization and recognition carried out by the state’ (Hansen and Stepputat 2001: 21); as a set of cultural practices (Bevir and Rhodes 2010); and as an idea, rather than a coherent set of institutions, imagined on the basis of practices (Joseph and Nugent 1994; Gupta 1995; Nuijten 2003; Migdal 2001; Sharma and Gupta 2006; Corrigan and Sayer 1985; Das and Poole 2004).

Based on the insights of these scholars, this thesis takes an ethnographic approach to the study of the state in Ethiopia, thereby countering the long-standing propensity among scholars to reify the state in Africa as an imported, vacuous and inefficient ensemble of institutions that is elevated above society and separate from it. As such, it heeds Timothy Mitchell’s call to study the state as ‘a powerful, metaphysical effect of practices’<sup>11</sup> (89) rather than as a thing.

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<sup>11</sup> That said, however, African states lack the type of panoptic and disciplinary biopower (Foucault 1977) that emerged in Western welfare states. Hence, as I demonstrate below, this thesis adopts Bevir and Rhodes’s (2010) decentred approach to governance. The issue of power will be considered in detail later in this chapter.

Thus, the thesis, instead of viewing the Ethiopian state as a monolithic actor, deals with the modalities by which its discreteness, as separate from and above society, is re/produced.

How, then, does one locate the state in its empirical sense? Hansen and Stepputat (2001: 8) suggest the study of the state should encompass both ‘the practical languages of governance’ and ‘the symbolic languages of authority’<sup>12</sup>. A similar approach was advanced by Akhil Gupta, who suggests that the study of the state should involve ‘both the analysis of the *everyday practices* of local bureaucracies and the *discursive construction* of the state in public culture’ (Gupta 1995: 3750). Much work on postcolonial states has drawn attention to corruption as a fruitful research focus (Corbridge et al. 2005; Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2006; Roitman 2005; Gupta, 1995; Taussig, 1997). Works inspired by Foucault’s writings emphasise the need to explore the ways in which individuals are induced to conduct themselves (Rose 1996) and how people react to the state’s ‘everydayness and their senses of what it is to be a citizen’ (Corbridge et al. 2005: 8).

Ethnographic studies from West Africa stress the multiplicity of authorities in the context of public administration and collective service delivery. These studies, as I will discuss in greater detail later, emphasis on modes of governance and power relations within a variety of local institutions, paying close attention to themes such as public education provision (Korling 2010), public health care provision (Jaffre and Olivier de Sardan 2003) and corruption (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2006; Routley 2016). Some work on the postcolonial state in Africa has emphasised the importance of ‘political imagination’ (Friedman 2011) and the construction of

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<sup>12</sup> The language of governance involves the assertion of territorial sovereignty, the monopolization of violence, and the management of the national economy; whereas the language of authority involves the institutionalisation of the law, the materialisation of the state in signs and rituals, and the nationalization of the territory and the institutions of the state through the inscription of a history and a shared community of landscapes and cultural practices’ (Hansen and Stepputat: 2001:8).

the idea of the state. Hagmann and Péclard (2010) suggested the analytical framework of ‘negotiating statehood’, arguing the need to study the state in Africa in relation to power relations and negotiations at the intersection of the local, national and international levels.

Together, the preceding overview of the theoretical underpinnings of this work offers a multiplicity of entry points for the study of the state. However, what it also brings into view is an understanding that ‘the state’s referents vary so widely across different times, places, and contexts’ (Jessop 2015: 21). There is no single point of departure allowing one to analytically grasp the variations in power relations and multitude of experiences that produce state effects. This suggests that the state can only be grasped as part of an empirical analysis of the many ways in which people enact their agency in everyday life and make sense of politics.

For this reason, to capture the many referents of the state in Ethiopia and underpin my ethnographic perspective on state formation, drawing on ethnographic materials, I employ four conceptual themes: governance, bureaucratic, development and discursive practices. The analytical benefit of using these themes is that they shed light on the heterogeneity of practices and discourses that produce the state as a seemingly coherent entity. However, the distinction between them should be seen only as a heuristic for understanding the process of state formation. They are in fact intertwined and intersecting concepts. Governance, for instance, is too broad and elusive concept; it can subsume and encompass bureaucratic, development and discursive practices. It is also impossible to make a distinction between bureaucratic and development practices, especially in the Ethiopian context, where bureaucracy is used as an instrument for development administration. The analytical distinction, however, remains useful for capturing the processes and practices in which the state comes to be re/produced.

That said, it is essential to note that, in the literature reviewed above, the concept of practice cuts across various themes and emerges as central to understanding and conceptualising the

various ways through which the state effect is produced in everyday life. My analytical approach therefore invokes the concept of practice in order to establish an analytical link between the four key concepts of this study. I use the concept of practice to refer to governance, bureaucratic and development activities and discursive practices as ‘a set of actions’ that ‘exhibit a pattern, perhaps even a pattern that remains relatively stable across time’ (Bevir and Rhodes 2010: 75). My use of the term practice resembles Bourdieu’s notion in a sense that it is postulated in relation to the concept of habitus, the system of ‘durable, transposable dispositions’ (1977: 72). As such, this thesis views practices as social processes through which identities are negotiated and local interests are articulated and the state comes to be constituted and entwined with the everyday context of local life, which is the source of my ethnographic data. Yet, unlike Bourdieu, I argue that agents can change ‘acquired, permanent, and generative dispositions’ (1990: 290) and ‘reason and act in novel ways’ (Bevir and Rhodes 2006: 4). Viewed this way, practices allow us to postulate beliefs and discourses that are inscribed in diverse and contingent actions of agents within each theme. It is these contingent and unstable practices that help to constitute the state.

### ***Governance practices***

The conception of governance from which this thesis develops is rooted in the decentred theory of governance generated by Bevir and Rhodes (2010, 2016). Before outlining this approach, it may be worthwhile reviewing some of the governance literature on Africa. However, the literature on governance is too vast and very rich to be comprehensively surveyed here. Given the scope of this study, I provide only a more general overview, focusing largely on works that are relevant to my research focus.

Studies on governance in Africa have traditionally been concerned with understanding the multiplicity of governance norms, mostly focusing on what Oliver de Sardan (2015) calls the ‘problem of the gap’ (20), i.e. the gap between ‘the *official norms* that govern institutions’ and



‘the *actual behaviour* of public agents’ (19). This discrepancy has been theorised in the literature on the state in Africa in two predominant ways. The first set of literature sees the discrepancy of norms as arising from ‘the problematic intersection of tradition and modernity within Africa’ (Routley 2016). This intersection has often been framed from a neo-patrimonial perspective. The neo-patrimonial literature views governance in Africa as characterised by predation, clientelism and corruption, resulting in state crises and failure (see Clapham 1996; Jackson 1990; Thomson 2000; van de Walle 2001). This approach has been criticised widely for a number of reasons, not least because it is ‘too blunt and too formulaic an instrument for understanding the variety of African experiences and the contradictory interests, ideologies, and motivations of social actors involved’ (Mkandawire 2013: 52).

The second approach sees the discrepancy between norms as reflecting the ‘incommensurability’ (Herdt and Olivier de Sardan 2015: 5) between Weberian bureaucracy and the enduring precolonial ‘African political culture’. Bayart (2009), for instance, talks about ‘creolisation’, i.e. the dynamic process by which hybrid governance forms are produced and actors adopt and draw from a variety of discursive genres. Both these approaches have been widely criticised because of their emphasis on the lack or presence of norms rather than on practices (Blundo and Le Meur 2009; Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2014; Olivier de Sardan 2015).

The importance of focusing on ‘real governance’ on the basis of empirical case studies beyond policy-driven process and the ‘schematic theses’ which either ‘euphemise or pathologise’ (Blundo and Le Meur 2009: 2) the state in Africa has emerged in a number of recent studies on governance in Africa. Very broadly, I distinguish between and present two of these dominant approaches. The first approach analyses governance in Africa in terms of provision of public service from an empirical basis (Blundo and Le Meur 2009; Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2014). It draws critical attention to the ‘complex configurations in which

the African state is no longer the only actor of economic and social change and sole provider of public and collective services' (Blundo and Le Meur 2009). The emphasis here is on the multiplicity of modes of governance and institutions of a non-state nature that are engaged in the production of collective goods and services. In his synoptic account of governance literature in Africa, Olivier de Sardan (2009, 2014), for example, offers a typology of 'eight modes of local governance' based on the experience of Niger: chiefly (exercised by customary or traditional leaders); the bureaucratic mode of governance (state); communal (municipal and local councils that arise recent from decentralisation); project based (development agencies, national and international NGOs); associational (cooperatives etc.); sponsorship based (involving sponsors and big men); religious mode of governance (churches and brotherhoods) and a merchant based (private operators delivering public services). He argues that each of these modes of governance has its own distinctive character, its own actors, 'specific forms of authority and legitimacy', and that each has its own norms (Olivier de Sardan 2009: 8).

This approach presents an important point of entry to the study of the state in Africa because it unpacks the assumed boundary between state and society. However, it is anchored in a 'utilitarian' conception of public goods, especially on a predefined notion of 'public service' and, as a result, it loses its analytical traction to 'profile the *articulation* of public interest in specific settings' (Koechlin 2015: 2).

The second position focuses on an understanding of governance in terms of 'institutionalised modes of social coordination that produce and implement collectively binding rules or to provide collective goods' (Risse 2011: 9). The main emphasis here is put on 'areas of limited statehood in ... sub-Saharan Africa, where the state monopoly over the use of force is systematically lacking' (Risse 2011: 5). This approach has informed the analysis of 'governance without government' (Raeymaekers et al. 2008) in the cases of, for example, Somalia (Menkhaus 2006), Congo and the Central African Republic (Liese and Beisheim 2011)

as a legitimate form of governance. Scholars working within this framework maintain that governance should be understood as a process and a structure in an empirically grounded way, and in so doing they seek to unearth the ways in which effective and legitimate governance sustain in areas of limited statehood (Draude 2007, Raeymaekers et al. 2008, Borzel and Risse 2010). The main drawback of this approach, however, is that it fails to elaborate state-society relations in terms of the multiplicity of actors, contexts of overlapping spheres and networks of both state and non-state actors. Significantly, there is a distinct absence of personal agency in this approach (Koechlin and Forster 2015).

While I broadly agree with the literature reviewed above, I find that these approaches provide a limitation to my study by assuming a priori the existence of certain arrangements and governance mechanisms, thereby foreclosing the study of practices of governance which may show contingent patterns and dynamics. For this reason, I choose to use a decentred approach to governance (Bevir and Rhodes 2010, 2016). Hence, following Bevir (2013: 1), I conceptualise governance as ‘a set of diverse practices that people are constantly creating and re-creating through their concrete activities’. This approach emphasises not only the diversity of governance arrangements but also their contingency and contestability. As such, governance is defined and redefined through social actors and thus cannot be captured by a focus on disembodied structures or reified institutions. Hence, the study of governance requires discerning contexts in politics and social life, actors, the response of individuals to the dilemmas they encounter and the interpretations that actors attach to practice, actions and institutions (Bevir and Rhodes 2010, 2016).

Bevir and Rhodes (2016) articulated this theory in terms of a process involving the shift from government to governance and hierarchy to network in the context of Europe. It must be stressed here that while I agree with and use the decentred approach as a conceptual foundation for exploring state formation in Ethiopia, I do not find the distinction made by Bevir and

Rhodes (2010) between hierarchy and network to be applicable in the context of Africa, particularly that of Ethiopia. As we shall see throughout the thesis, the role of the central state and political institutions in Ethiopia are quite important and surely assume more than ‘a less hands-on role’ (Bevir and Rhodes 2010: 94).

This thesis thus examines the practices and processes by which governance takes place ‘through a maze of networks’ (Bevir and Rhodes 2006: 76) at the boundary of state and society. This is in line with the ethnographic literature on the state reviewed in the preceding section that emphasises the importance of focusing on local social realities that shape governance practices (Sharma and Gupta 2006; Hansen and Stepputat 2001). Further, the study also explores the dynamics of personalised and informal patterns of relationships that occur within the institutions that constitute the state and investigates the type of local actors and the nature of the public spaces in which governance practices take place.

The thesis also focuses on and recognises that ‘everyday practices arise from situated agents whose beliefs and actions are informed by traditions and expressed in stories’ (Bevir and Rhodes 2006: 94). This aspect draws attention to the ways in which state actors are imbricated in rituals and routines, and how they are socialised into a specific contingent of conducting business, etc. In this sense, governance constitutes ‘the stories people use to construct, convey, and explain traditions, dilemmas, beliefs and practices’ (Bevir and Rhodes, 2010: 94).

### ***Bureaucratic practices***

The significance of bureaucracy in the implementation of development policy, as I discuss in the next section, has long been recognised (Ferguson 1994; Scott 1998; Long 1992; Lewis and Moss 2006). However, little attention has been paid to the ways in which it contributes to the process of state formation. Too often political scientists tend to dismiss the bureaucracy in Africa merely as a façade of a Western style of governance, arguing that behind the façade lies

the real, 'the African way of doing things'. There are however convincing studies of the state that start with the postulation that the bureaucracy in Africa should be seen and interrogated as part of the 'real' (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2006; Routley 2010). Studying the state in Africa requires taking seriously the bureaucracy as constitutive of power relations and governance practices. This study particularly examines the dynamic in which the bureaucracy is oriented towards redrawing social realities or in the production of 'the society of the state',<sup>13</sup> i.e. the creation of a society in which the very sovereignty and authority of the state is defined. Chapter 9 demonstrates how specific bureaucratic practices (land survey and classification and the introduction of state legal norms) help to transform the Borana into 'the society of the state' in Ethiopia.

In pursuing the state in Ethiopia through the lens of bureaucratic practices, I also pay attention to the everyday nature of power and the articulation of hierarchy within the bureaucracy. I examine the ways in which state authority and hierarchy are reproduced and installed through a regularised set of bureaucratic practices (everyday institutional rites such as meetings), interactions between officials and the local people (public meetings) and ordinary people interacting with the institution of the kebele. In so doing, I build on anthropological insights about performance (Gluckman 1958; Turner 1974). In addition to the focus on performance, in drawing inspiration from the work of Ferguson and Gupta (2002), the thesis investigates how bureaucratic activities contribute to the reification of state power across two spatial metaphors: verticality and encompassment. Verticality refers to the ways in which the hierarchy and dominance of the state vis-à-vis society are produced, and encompassment is the process which metaphorically locates the state 'within an ever widening series of circles that

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<sup>13</sup> This takes place through 'a diversity of procedures among them being the incorporation and regulation or else the exclusion, marginalization, or suppression of communities, organizations or other forms of sociopolitical orders (including competing state entities) that may be present in their environment' (Kapferer and Bertelsen 2009: 3).

begins with family and local community and ends with the system of nation-states' (982). These spatial metaphors are particularly useful in understanding the processes by which the state embeds itself socially while ceaselessly enacting a hierarchy in which it positions itself as a dominant entity over and above the non-state realm (society and NGOs).

Finally, the thesis explores the images and bureaucratic representations that influence people's perceptions of 'what the state is' (Sharma and Gupta 2006: 18). Representations of the state such as 'organisational charts, official seals and photographs of state leaders' help to create the appearance of coherence to the institutions that constitute the state (Sharma and Gupta 2006: 19).

### *Development practices*

In trying to make sense of the process by which the state comes to be constituted as a thing that appears separate from society, I found it useful to explore the practices of development project implementations. These practices include, but are not limited to, the construction and management of an irrigation facility, the management of agricultural resources, sedentarisation and territorialisation projects, food distribution mechanisms and also NGOs' development-related activities.

There is a rich body of literature on development planning and practices (for an overview see Lewis and Moss 2006). In many of these studies, scholars have engaged with how realities are re/constituted through practices of development planning. James Scott, for example, examines how 'high modernist' – the belief in scientific progress that informs state development practices – interventions can lead to unintended consequences that are 'potentially lethal' (Scott 1998: 5). Similarly, Ferguson (1994) talks about the 'instrument-effect' of development – side effects unintended by planners. In his case of Lesotho, Ferguson argues that such side effects include the expansion of bureaucratic state power and depoliticisation of

poverty through the establishment of an ‘anti-politics machine’ (256). These effects, Ferguson (1994) argues, form a ‘strategically coherent or intelligible whole’ and thus serve as a way of exercising power.

There are numerous studies dealing with patterns of ‘state-society synergy’ (Evans1997) in development administration, which tackles the general themes of community participation, social capital and the role of bureaucracy in development efforts (for an overview see Lange and Rueschemeyer 2005). There is a particularly extensive literature that focuses on the role of the state and society in irrigation management (Wade 1982; Uphoff 1991; Lam 1996). Many of these studies reject the top down bureaucratic form of centralised implementation and management of most irrigation systems. They argue that top down bureaucratic irrigation management destroys community social capital. They instead suggest that a state-society partnership is instrumental to promoting accountability, optimising irrigation performance, and enhancing farmers’ participation (see Uphoff 1991; Lam 1996, 1997). Uphoff (1991), for example, through the case of the Gal Oya irrigation scheme in Sri Lanka, demonstrates that a participatory irrigation scheme that mobilised farmers to self-manage water improves equity of water distribution and contribute to the creation of social solidarity.

This thesis (in Chapter 6) explores the manner in which the idea of ‘state-society synergy’ (Evans1997) produces an ‘instrument-effect’ (Ferguson 1994) of creating and sustaining the distinction between state and society (i.e. community). It does so by examining the process of construction of an important local development scheme, the Koga irrigation and watershed management project. It unpacks assumptions that policymakers and development practitioners make about a priori existence of community and the state distinction and arranges them as functionally differentiated entities. I will also pay attention to the effects produced by the

‘boundary-making’<sup>14</sup> (Mayrl and Quinn 2016) logic of the project. My ethnographic descriptions of the effects of the Koga irrigation and watershed management project broadly echo Ferguson’s observations about the depoliticising effects of development practices. But it goes further to argue that the process of production of the state-society boundary not only depoliticises inequality, prevents meaningful participation and reproduces power hierarchies but also ghettoises abuses, corruption and resource conflicts by presenting them as community issues, as opposed to those of the state.

Related to the issue of development bureaucracy and interventions is the question of who performs and enacts practices, and how do they do it? This thesis engages with the heterogeneous nature of development actors, their performance and how their actions feed into the process of state formation. Here, I draw inspiration from Norman Long’s (1992, 2001) ‘actor-oriented’ and interface analysis of development. Long defined the ‘actor-oriented’ approach as an ‘ethnographic understanding of the “social life” of development projects – from conception to realisation – as well as the responses and lived experiences of the variously located and affected social actors’ (2001: 14–15). This approach moves away from the simple hegemonic and top-down approaches to development practices that framed the relationship between policies and their implementation as a linear process. Key to this actor-oriented understanding of development are the ‘multiple’ and ‘diverse social realities’ and dispersed notion of power and ‘interface situations’ (Long 1992: 6) in which different world views meet, interpenetrate and clash. The interfaces between the actors are ‘characterised by discontinuities in interests, values and power, and their dynamic entails negotiation, accommodation and the struggle over definitions and boundaries’ (Long and Villarreal 1993: 143).

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<sup>14</sup> I will elaborate what I mean by this in Chapter 6.



This thesis builds on these insights and uncovers how development meanings and practices are re/produced, contested and negotiated in practice. This approach helps us to grasp the enactment of power and production of identities. It also helps us understand how different actors' understandings of development relate to their social positions and the ways in which the state is differently constructed by differently positioned actors.

Importantly, it also brings out the differences, tensions and contradictions between formal development objectives and the strategies pursued by actors at different levels of the state bureaucracy. As will be shown in this thesis, this helps to capture the dynamic interplay and tension between a) the constitutive effects of central state strategies of development and their appropriations and enactments by locally situated actors (state and non-state officials); and b) attempts to separate the realms of responsibilities and activities between the state and community and the practices of and interactions between local state officials, local residents and customary leaders that blur the boundaries between state and society.

I see some of these contradictions and tensions as both productive and as a 'resource of power' (Mitchell 1999). They are productive because they create the appearance of a distinction between the state and society; they are a 'resource of power' because, although the boundary is permeable in practice, it enables institutions that constitute the state to mobilise labour and other resources for development initiatives (see Chapter 6). In this study, development practices are approached as part of the process through which the Ethiopian state comes into being.

### ***Discourses and state imagination***

In addition to governance, bureaucratic and development practices, I follow Abrams' (1988: 79) call to focus on 'the cogency of the *idea* of the state as an ideological power and treat that as a compelling object of analyses'. In so doing, I seek to capture the idea of the Ethiopian state

in the imagination of the people who inhabit it. Here, imagination refers to the multiple ways through which ordinary people ‘perceive, and talk about, represent and construct, and experience’ (Friedman 2011: 8) the state. Political imagination, although susceptible to illusions, exaggeration, falsehood and fantasies (Friedman 2011), arises as an effect of local discursive practices (Tsing 1993: 25) and is therefore crucial for the representation of the state as a coherent entity (Nugent 2001). My use of the concept of discourse requires some qualification. The concept of discourse as developed by Foucault is more than just language. Discourses, Foucault (1972: 49) maintains, are ‘practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak’. However, Foucault also argues that central to an understanding of practices is the multiple meanings that make practices possible (Bevir and Rhodes 2015). Here Foucault, as Bevir and Rhodes (2015: 13) point out, appears to suggest that ‘discourses develop randomly as products of time and chance’. Hence Bevir and Rhodes (2015) suggest replacing the concept of discourse with tradition. However, instead of abandoning the concept of discourse in favour of tradition, I treat it as a contingent mode of action and set of social practices that arise from situated agents, their experience and their beliefs and which are expressed in language. To treat discourses as both manifest and produced by human agents helps us to bring governance, bureaucratic and development practices to the fore. These practices relate to peoples’ lived experience and social interactions, which simultaneously relate to knowledge and discourses. As a result, discourses construct and reveal links between practices and the cultural meaning of practices. I view state imagination as a product of this process.

Against this background, to demonstrate how the state is popularly imagined, I analyse the corruption and development discourses (and counter-discourses) found in kebele public domains. By the kebele public domain, I mean the habitual social spaces such as tea and coffee houses, *tella bet* (literally meaning beer house) and the informal roadside gatherings where

local inhabitants engage with a variety of issues that shape the idea of state and moral rights and wrongs. As the next section will argue, a discussion on discourses must also be aware of the importance of power and what Foucault calls ‘counter discourse’/ ‘critical attitude’.

In addition to analysing the state imaginations arising from public space, I pay attention to ‘the practices of representation and interpretation which characterise the relationship between people and the state bureaucracy and through which the idea of the state is constructed’ (Nuijten 2003: 17). Nuijten’s (2003) study on issues of power and communal property in Mexico provides us with the view that the cultural construction of the state generates both hope and despair. On the one hand the state is constructed as a ‘hope generating machine’ while on the other, it is represented as ‘opacity, distrust and conspiracy, which always surrounds conflicts, negotiations and dealings with the bureaucracy’ (2003: 17). Thomas Blom Hansen (2001) offers us another view on how the imagination of the state, in the case of Mumbai, was marked by a constitutive split between its ‘sublime’ and ‘profane’ dimensions. These distinctions are important and they are also important in the development of this thesis. The finding of the thesis demonstrates how people in Degga and Odda make distinctions between a corrupt local bureaucracy and an impartial central state. The hopes and expectations generated by the bureaucratic machine are constitutive of state power and serve the important function of producing legitimacy for the national leadership.

Yet state imagination is not solely a product of modernist practices and people’s interaction with the bureaucracy. It is also intimately tied to the cultural world view of the local people. In the view of this study, the latter cannot be divorced from particular bureaucratic practices and power relations. The state, after all, is a cultural construction (Bevir and Rhodes 2010; Sharma and Gupta 2006) built around a complex matrix of social relations and cultural contexts. In my attempt to demonstrate the modalities by which the state comes to be imagined, I therefore pay attention to the religious language and metaphors that make for a particular political culture.

By political culture, I mean the system of signs and meaning through which people make sense of politics. My contention is that the political-cultural is not a self-evident repertoire of political common sense or a source of legitimacy for political authority but rather a contingent process that is ceaselessly constructed and reconstructed through a power/knowledge nexus. One site through which power and political culture in North Ethiopia operate and are instituted is the church. In Chapter 7, I will demonstrate how religious language and metaphors enable people to imagine the state. I do not, however, address religious discourses directly but instead make reference to the metaphors, expressed through narratives, which denote the cultural understanding and world views relevant to state imagination and the elements of particular principles that underlay relationships.

### ***Power and class***

This thesis builds on two additional analytical frameworks. First, cutting across the four dimensions outlined above is power. Second, governance and power dynamics allow for the emergence of class. In what follows I outline in more detail how these concepts inform this thesis.

### ***Power***

This thesis builds on Foucault's work which treats power as a relational and diffused concept. For Foucault, power is not a system of domination which is exclusive to the state, a social class or other social group. He argues that power does not emanate from a particular agent but is in fact embedded in all social relations. Power relations, Foucault (1980: 142) argues, are 'interwoven with other kinds of relations (production, kinship, family, sexuality) for which they play at once a conditioning and conditioned role', and hence 'power is co-extensive with the social body'. Power is exercised and flows through and within discourses and as a result, rather than search for its origin, Foucault argues, it should be investigated as a network of connections and through its effects on social relations.

Foucault's understanding of power helps us to move away from the conventional dichotomies between state and society, centre and periphery, and private and public. This thesis emphasises the dispersed character of power and argues that it is the primary mode through which underdeveloped subjectivities are formed (see Chapters 6 and 9) and the idea of the state is produced. However, Foucault's decoupling of power and agency allows little room to trace how social and political processes are mediated, shaped and reshaped by situated actors within a particular tradition. It also leads to the idea that meanings that inform practices stem from disembodied 'quasi-structures' such as ideology, discourse and language. To come to terms with the problem of agency and practice, Bevir and Rhodes (2010) distinguish between agency and autonomy. They argue that individuals can act and reason in novel ways, albeit against the background of the tradition and contexts that influence them. Therefore, they argued for the concept of 'situated agency'.

The concept of 'situated agency' provides us with some much-needed space for exploring how governance is made possible by the contingent activities of individuals and how the state comes to be imagined by people enacting their political agency within the banality of everyday life. Bevir and Rhodes's (2010) concept of situated agency resonates with Norman Long's conception of the actor. Like Bevir and Rhodes's (2010) situated agent, the actor for Long is a social and cultural being who is knowledgeable and capable but at the same time shaped by intersubjective reality. In this context, Long argues, 'power is composed here and now by enrolling many actors in a given political and social scheme' (Latour 1986: 264 cited in Long 2001: 17). Hence, Long argues, agency (and power) depend crucially upon the emergence of a network of actors who become partially, though hardly ever completely, enrolled in the "project" of some other person or persons' (Long 2001: 17). I treat individuals as 'knowledgeable' and 'capable' (Giddens 1984: 1–16) of dealing with 'dilemmas' (Bevir and Rhodes 2010), and as a conceptual point of entry to grasp practices and the way in which

knowledge is produced and circulated. The concept of power as applied in the thesis is therefore linked to agency.

I want to make two more points here that are of particular importance to this thesis. First, in placing power at the front and centre of this study, I am not arguing that the state is an effect of the sum total of micro-networks of power relations, as alluded by Mitchell, or as an ‘institutional condensation of social relations’ as emphasised by Poulantzas (cited in Joseph 2002: 90). In the case of Europe, as Foucault points out, political forces select, codify and apply different techniques of power from institutions such as schools, prisons, the army, the police, hospitals and factories. Hence, the techniques of governance that underpin power relations arise from below (see Jessop 2007). However, in the case of Africa, the techniques and technologies of domination do not always emerge from below or within African societies (Roitman 2004). Instead, one of the ways in which social forces acquire techniques and technologies of domination, articulate ideologies and pursue particular interests in Africa is through what Bayart (2009) calls resources of extraversion (international connections), which include diplomatic, military, cultural resources and Western know-how. In regard to the latter, Bayart argues that ‘mastery of western knowledge also conditions mastery of the state and the economy’ (75). Here, I do not dispute – in fact, I underscore – the importance of social relations and political culture in shaping the state in Africa. The point is rather that state formation is informed by a wider matrix of power relations than I am able to fully explore.

Second, I argue that Foucault’s notion of power, specifically his emphasis on ‘counter-conduct’ as a critical element of power, has broader implications for the understanding of state and society in Ethiopia. It opens the way for an exploration of how ‘counter-conduct’ is inscribed in everyday life. Foucault used the term ‘counter-conduct’ to denote the pursuit of ‘a different form of conduct ... wanting to be conducted differently by other leaders ... towards other objectives ... through other procedures and methods’ (Foucault 2007: 194–5). For

Foucault, the question of governing is inseparable from the critical attitude of ‘how not to be governed’ and ‘the art of not being governed quite so much’ (ibid). He contends that resistance is integral to power: ‘where there is power, there is resistance’ (1978: 95).

The question, then, is how does the attitude of counter-conduct emerge? Foucault identifies three ‘historical anchoring points’ (1997: 27) in the interaction between the ‘art of governing’ and the attitude of being critical. First, he points to the art of governance in Medieval Europe, where the mentalities of individuals were shaped by scriptures and the art of governance was established in the authority of the church. In this way of governance, Foucault notes, ‘being critical was biblical’ (Djaballah 2013: 271). Second, Foucault points to the prominence of legal institutions in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and noted, in this context, being critical was constituted as ‘the counter-practice of being governed is juridical’ (Djaballah 2013: 271). The third has to do with epistemic orientation or the rejection of ‘dogmatic claims to knowledge, and the certainty of claims to truth based on authority, accepting them only if one has grounds to do so oneself’ (Djaballah 2013: 271).

The concept of counter-conduct and the context within which it emerges as outlined above is germane to my analysis of how ‘*the art of being governed*’ and ‘*the will not to be governed*’ (Foucault 1997) are conceptualised within the field of power in Ethiopia. In this thesis, counter-conduct is related to the development and anti-poverty discourses which are periodically mobilised by ‘the state’ to legitimise development politics and political power. These discourses, I argue, form the ‘critical attitude’/ ‘counter-conduct’ (Foucault 2007) against which people at both my fieldwork sites deploy to voice the perverse effects of governance practices and discrepancies between promises and practices, and to constitute themselves as deserving citizens and reimagine the state (see Chapter 7).

In addition to development discourses, I will demonstrate that, in northern Ethiopia, critical discourse is substantially articulated in the widespread religious metaphors and idioms which define the roles and obligations involved in governance. It informs the ways in which people understand hierarchy, insist on accountability and define governance and how they enunciate visions of injustice and rights talk. I will return to the question of hierarchy, culture and power in Chapter 4, but I would now like to end the discussion by reiterating that counter-conducts are not the rejection of governance itself but are an expression of the pursuit of a different mode of governance. As Foucault notes, it is about ‘the will not to be governed thusly, like that, by these people, at that price’ (1997: 72). It is in this sense that resistance does not exist outside of power.

### *Class*

I argue that power and governance dynamics are how the processes whereby control over land and state resources are structured and contested. They are fundamental to how class polarisation is established, thereby allowing the study of class relations to provide insights into the everyday dynamics of state formation. The kind of class polarisation I discuss in this thesis is the ascendancy of the rich farmers and pastoralists who are dependent on the state for an accumulation of capital. The rise of the model farmers was aided by the means of primitive accumulation which involves the displacement and dissociation of farmers and pastoralists from the means of production (such as land and agricultural input) and the systematic transfer of those means of production to rich farmers. My use of the term primitive accumulation is not in a strict Marxist sense<sup>15</sup> but rather has to do with the struggles and power relations that arise around the introduction of new techniques of governance that seek to transform rural livelihoods. Central to these new techniques of governance are the rational discourses on

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<sup>15</sup> As originally formulated by Marx, primitive accumulation is associated with the process by which workers are alienated from their means of production in the context of capitalist transition.



human development in relation to agricultural productivity, hygiene, birth and disease control and the importance of modern education. These new technologies of governance combined with the necessities of party politics provide a framework of what Jessop (2007) calls ‘strategic selectivity’ at the local level, i.e. they are systematically made to be open to individuals with a certain level of education and social capital at the same time as marginalising others. This way power relations lead to the constitution of class forces.

## **2.2. The concept of *mengist* and state-party relations in Ethiopia**

So far in this chapter, I have sought to establish the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that will carry through this thesis. The remaining section of the chapter concerns itself specifically with Ethiopia. As a way to contextualise my usage of the concept of the state vis-à-vis the vernacular term *mengist*, I first examine the different conceptions of what constitutes *mengist*. Next, I provide an analysis of the relationship between the ruling party – the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) – and the state. The exploration here seeks to answer the following questions: What constitutes the Ethiopian state as an idea and set of institutions separate from the ruling party? How might one distinguish the state from the party in an empirical sense and make it available for ethnographic analysis? In my attempt to answer these questions, I introduce the party’s two crucial guiding ideologies – revolutionary democracy and developmental state – and examine them in relation to the Ethiopian state. In so doing, I make an argument for the critical importance of distinguishing between the party and the state system, thereby opening the state to an ethnographic investigation.

### ***The idea of mengist***

The concept of the state in Ethiopia is commonly associated with the Amharic word *mengist*, a derivative of the term *neges*, which means the act of becoming a king (Toggia 2008). It signifies extensive notions of power, royal privilege and authority. The word *mengist* does not make a distinction between government and state (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003). However,

often academic discussions about the state in Ethiopia start with the same conception. Recently, however, Mesfin Woldemariam (2013), criticising the uncritical use of the concept of *mengist* by historians, noted that state and government have historically been separate concepts in Ethiopia. He asserted that early royal chroniclers<sup>16</sup> used the term *hagere-mengist*, a combination of *hager* (which in common parlance means ‘country’) and *mengist* (government), to indicate the idea of a state that is made up of four key elements: population, territory, government and sovereignty. This understanding views *mengist* as an a priori or predefined agent composed of static elements that can readily be identified. It produces a reified conceptualisation of the state.

On the other hand, the constitution of Ethiopia produces a distinction between state and government. The idea of the state that is enshrined in the constitution is that of an entity which is subject to the sovereignty of ‘nations, nationalities and peoples’ (Art. 8, FDRE constitution). The preamble of the constitution begins: ‘We, the nations, nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia: Determined to build by the exercise of our right to self-determination, for ourselves and of our own free will, a single political community ...’ The constitution confers rights to self-determination to all of the country’s recognised language groups<sup>17</sup> (nations, nationalities and peoples) that include the right to preserve and develop their own languages, culture and history, participate equally in the federal government and ‘form their own state’ (article 47, FDRE constitution) or secede from the federal arrangement (article 39, FDRE constitution) ‘if they felt their rights had been denied or abrogated’ (Vaughan 2015: 285).

The essence of the constitutional idea of the state is thus one formed based on cultural identity and the sovereignty of language groups. In other words, the constitution invokes an idea of a state that is formed through the coming together of distinct sovereign entities rather

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<sup>16</sup> Personal conversation, Addis Ababa, December, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Ethiopia has more than more than 70 recognised ethnic/language groups (Vaughan 2015).

than an idea of state imbued with historically developed coherence, indivisibility and essential unity. The state, in other words, is an ‘assembled entity’ rather than an organic one. The concept of government, on the other hand, is linked to the principle of popular sovereignty, which holds that government legitimacy stems from popular sovereignty (universal suffrage and direct, free and fair elections held by secret ballot) (see articles 8, 38). This conceptualisation of the state and its distinction from government, however, is an attempt by political actors to legitimise the state as embodying the common will of the ‘nations, nationalities and peoples’.

In view of this thesis, neither the vernacular Amharic word *mengist* nor the constitutional conception of the state and government tells us much about the Ethiopian state itself – in terms of what it actually means to the people. To take such a conception as the starting point of analysis of the Ethiopian state, therefore, as Fuller and Harris argue, risks turning the state into a master concept which ‘purportedly explains more than it possibly can’ (2001: 10). In the view of this study, the concept of *mengist* cannot singularly capture and explain what all Ethiopians – who are positioned differently – actually think, imagine and do. Rather, this thesis argues that the concept of state and the way through which it comes to be understood, imagined and constituted has to be explained by exploring ‘what the state variously means and does’ (Fuller and Harris 2001: 10) for the people of Ethiopia.

### ***The Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)***

In this section, I highlight some of the defining characteristics of the ideologies and practices of the ruling party vis-à-vis the state system. My aim here is to distinguish the state from the party and open the first to anthropological investigation. Further, as noted in the previous chapter, since the local cannot be conceptualised as a closed domain but rather is a nodal point embedded in trans-local networks of power, studying the kebele requires attention to national contexts of party politics and development ideology.

Since the mid-1990s, Ethiopia has been governed by a coalition ethnonational party called the EPRDF. The four parties that make up the EPRDF are the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) and the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Front (SEPDF).<sup>18</sup> These four parties govern the dominant regional states (Tigray, Amhara, Oromia and South Nations and Nationalities) and the municipalities of Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. Other EPRDF-allied ethnonationalist parties govern the remaining five peripheral states of Afar, Gambella, Somali, Benishangul-Gumuz and Harari (Vaughan 2015).

The EPRDF is guided by what it calls a revolutionary democracy (*abiyotawi democracy*) ideology which can be understood as a vernacularised and syncretic form of Marxist-Leninism which combines the politics of class with paternalist discourses of cultural emancipation and ethnic nationalism. It is framed around the interpretation of Ethiopian society as a 'pre-capitalist', 'backward', uneducated and oppressed mass (Lefort 2015) to be enlightened and dignified by strong visionary party leadership. A number of features characterise the EPRDF's revolutionary democracy ideology. The first is the Leninist democratic centralism which structures the EPRDF in a very strict hierarchal organisational format. A party statute explicitly states: 'All organizations that come under EPRDF umbrella are those which are led by democratic principles and those which respect democratic centralism' (cited in Bach 2011: 647). Deference to authority and party unity are maintained by regular application of one of the organisational principles of Bolshevism – criticism and self-criticism (which is known as *Gimgema*). *Gimgema* is also used as an instrument for the appointment and discharge of civil servants (Hagmann and Abbink 2011).

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<sup>18</sup> The latter three of these parties were established under the auspicious of the TPLF and have continued to be dominated by it ever since.

Secondly, the ideology of revolutionary democracy is further distinguished by its emphasis on ‘mass participation’ rather than ‘individually oriented pluralism’ (Vaughan 2015: 308) – a practice which is inspired by the ‘proletarian democracy’ of mass mobilisation in economic and political administration. Mass and ‘inclusive participation’ functions as a tool for governance and development. At the local level, participation in governance and development matters is ensured through state/party-organised groups called *lematawi buden* (development groups), which are made up of 20 to 30 individuals residing in a commonly defined neighbourhood. The role given to *lematawi buden* is simply to implement plans designed by highly placed actors within the party and state apparatus, engage in group work (school building), and help each other harvest crops. Membership and participation are compulsory; all male household heads in rural Ethiopia are members. *Lematawi buden* are typically led by cadre farmers who serve as a liaison between the group and the kebele administration, ensure the attendance of members and exact fines on absentees (50 birr in Degga and 30 birr in Odda).

Thirdly, the EPRDF conceives of revolutionary democracy as a dominant ideology instrumental in fostering a uniform conception of the world across Ethiopian society (see Paulos 2001: 91). The manifest drive of the EPRDF to impose a uniform worldview is all the more evident in its ambition to create national consensus, as I demonstrate below, around developmental state ideology through the acquiescence of the mass.

Fourth, revolutionary democracy is used as a discursive tool to create an ‘antagonistic political field’ (Gupta 1998) through which the EPRDF excludes those political groups, institutions<sup>19</sup> and classes over which it is unable to establish or exercise hegemony. Revolutionary democracy is built on the old Marxist-Leninist identification of reactionary and

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<sup>19</sup> An example of this is the Oakland institute which was labelled as an anti-development institution because of its criticism of the government’s land policies (Mousseau and Martin-Prevel 2016).

progressive, the mass and the ruling class, capital and labour, etc. In this regard, ethnic federalism, development and security are often key and stable terms of reference and ideals of revolutionary democracy. For example, by identifying itself as a developmental capitalist force, the EPRDF (as a revolutionary democratic party) explicitly condemns those individuals and groups it excludes (including the private economic sector) as ‘rent-seekers’, ‘anti-development elements’ and ‘agents of neo-liberal forces’ (de Waal 2015: 169). By claiming to be addressing the alleged legacy of national oppression (again, as a revolutionary democratic party), it labels groups such as the Oromo Liberation Front and Ogaden National Liberation Front, and the individuals associated with them, as ‘narrow nationalists’ and pan-Ethiopianists as ‘chauvinists’ and anachronists (see Asnake 2013; Semahagn 2016). Revolutionary democracy can, in this sense, be seen as a polarising discursive tool which leaves no room for compromise, accommodation or a pluralistic conception of politics; it rather uses class, ethnic and political differences as the means with which to claim moral superiority (Vaughan 2015) for the party. I will demonstrate in Chapters 6 and 7 the strategic appropriation and use of ‘Manichean discourses’ of development and modernity (developmental vs lazy farmer; change receptive/modern farmer vs change-resistant/backward farmer) by local dominant classes to justify their monopolisation of development resources.

Finally, the EPRDF considers revolutionary democracy to be a transitory ideology which functions to serve the ultimate goal of ‘developing the country’s political economy to establish the class basis for development and democracy’ and ‘building a capitalist society’ (de Waal 2015: 163). In Marxist-Leninist terms, the EPRDF sees itself as a vanguard party overseeing capitalist transition from a pre-capitalist to a capitalist society. As a result, the EPRDF aims to give farmers and pastoralists (as pre-capitalist forces) a central position within its policy agenda and thereby represent itself as the party of the peasants.

### *Developmental state*

The main vehicle to capitalist transition for the EPRDF, since 2001, has been the ideology of the developmental state. The notion of a developmental state was firmly tabled by the ambitious late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. He not only wrote endlessly to articulate the ideology of the developmental state but also managed to emulate and turn it into a dominant party policy agenda and instrument of legitimation. In this section, I try to very briefly sketch out Meles's framework of the developmental state and its material impact and significance in everyday state formation.

Two of Meles's works, *African Development: Dead Ends and New Beginnings (n.d.)*<sup>20</sup> and *States and Markets: Neoliberal Limitations and the Case for a Developmental State* (2012), sketch out the fundamentals of his ambitious project of establishing a developmental state and transforming the Ethiopian economy. These works offer a trenchant critique of neo-liberal political economy and expound the developmental state as an alternative model to Africa. For Meles, the experiences of South Asia (particularly South Korea and Taiwan) appeared to have offered a type of political economy that could be accommodated with the ideology of revolutionary democracy. He maintained that structural transformation in Africa could only be realised through a complete rejection of the economic and political models of neo-liberalism. He argued that democratic politics for Africa has the risk of becoming 'riddled with patronage and rent-seeking'. He described the liberal political economy in the Third World as 'trickle-up democracy' in which 'factions contested for which one could best loot the state' (de Waal 2015: 166).

Meles argued that the key to African transformation was to be found in the building of a growth-centred developmental state that was built around three important features: independence of the state from the private sector, obsession with 'development as a matter of

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<sup>20</sup> This is an incomplete master's thesis.

national survival’ and ‘hegemony of development discourse’ (cited in de Waal 2015: 164). These components are intended to prevent the monopoly of rent by the private sector and the emergence of a predatory state. He argued that an activist state should capture rent and strategically allocate it for value creation (de Waal 2015:164). A developmental state, Meles argued, unlike a neo-liberal state, has the motivation to avoid ‘socially wasteful rent-seeking activity’ because ‘its purpose is to accelerate growth and it can do so ... by rewarding growth enhancing activities and restricting and penalizing socially wasteful activities’ (Meles 2012:169).

Adopting wholesale Meles’s mantle of development, as I briefly touch on in the next section, the EPRDF made an effort to institutionalise the ideology of the developmental state in both the organisation of the party and in the state system. The sustaining of this economic model, taken cumulatively, has resulted in economic growth<sup>21</sup> and also brought about dramatic changes in rural life and to local governance. It has massively expanded the state bureaucracy, created a new rural political class who bear the mantle of development (see Chapters 5 and 9), installed a sense of entitlement, given birth to everyday popular discourses of failed development and fuelled moral outrage and a backlash against what is seen as the widespread problem of corruption and misuse of development resources and the failure of development projects. These effects – having been manifest through everyday governance practices – not only constitute the state but also provide, in the view of this study, a terrain upon which people imagine the state.

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<sup>21</sup> Ethiopian government claims an average of 11 percent annual economic growth since 2003, but this growth rate has been contested by the IMF and the World Bank (IMF 2012; Lefort 2015).



### *The idea of developmentalism and revolutionary democracy*

The EPRDF's interpretation and application of the developmental state is consistent with its revolutionary democracy ideology. In line with its revolutionary democracy ideology, the EPRDF has entered into a series of alliances with the 'pre-capitalist' dominant rural classes, and under the leadership of this alliance (all kebele positions are occupied by model farmers), mass support from the subordinate classes (the rural poor) is mobilised. This can be seen, as Sarah Vaughan (2011) puts it, as an 'all-encompassing project' with which the party leadership 'seeks to unite state, party and population to form a so-called "development army", designed to mobilise communities' (307–8). At the national level, the party, since 2005, has expanded its membership from 760,000 to 4 million members and the number of kebele administrative councils from 600,000 members to 3.5 million (de Waal 2015). This alliance is crucial because the national bourgeoisie is deemed to be a 'rent-seeking' (de Waal 2015) entity that promotes its own interest at the expense of the people (Lefort 2015) and is therefore unable to create the conditions for capitalist transition – thereby, a liberal society and state. The implementation of liberal democratic and civil rights enshrined in the constitution is seen as a shackle on capitalist transition; therefore, it is something which had to be postponed 'until Ethiopia had achieved middle-income status' (de Waal 2015). In this regard, Meles wrote:

Developmental policy is unlikely to transform a poor country into a developed one within the time frame of the typical election cycle. There has to be continuity of policy if there is to be sustained and accelerated economic growth. In a democratic polity uncertainty about the continuity of policy is unavoidable. More damaging for development, politicians will be unable to think beyond the next election etc. It is argued therefore that the developmental state will have to be undemocratic in order to stay in power long enough to carry out successful development (n.d).

Legitimation of the state is therefore to be established based on securing ‘accelerated development’ (Meles 2012), by efficient allocation of development benefits to ‘pre-capitalist’ sectors and population groups and also by political indoctrination of population groups through mass organisations (de Waal 2015). This, I will show in the thesis, is counterproductive in that it contributed to the monopoly of state resources such as agricultural inputs (chemical fertilisers, pesticides, high-yielding variety seeds) by party-affiliated farmers, encouraging a form of primitive accumulation by political means and thereby creating local class polarisation (see Chapter 7). But, at the same time, as I will show in Chapter 7, such class polarisation helps to create a legitimacy for the state and national leadership by making it possible for people to create a distinction between the idea of a benevolent distant state that supplies development resources and corrupt local officials who monopolise and ‘eat’ them up.

Clearly, the EPRDF has established itself as a dominant party; as such, Ethiopia can be said to have a single party-dominant system. However, there are several fundamental reasons to distinguish between the ‘state idea’ and ‘state system’ (Abrams 1988) on the one hand and the party on the other, thus making the state as an idea and institution available for ethnographic studies. Firstly, the EPRDF has not established ideological hegemony over several segments of the Ethiopian population in the way presupposed by the party elite. One is over pan-Ethiopian nationalists – especially the predominantly Amhara and many others who owe primary loyalty to the idea of a biblical Ethiopia<sup>22</sup> (Ostebo 2013; Lefort 2012). Here, rather than exercising a pan-Ethiopian cultural leadership, the party constructed itself as a ‘counter-hegemonic bloc’ by employing an ethnic-nationalist discourse of self-determination that disparages ‘pride in Ethiopia’s heritage’ as ‘a dead end’ and ‘jingoism with an empty stomach’ (cited in de Waal 2013: 475). Consequently, the EPRDF, in the words of Meles Zenawi himself,

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<sup>22</sup> By biblical Ethiopia I mean the idea of an ‘Ethiopian state that has endured since antiquity’ (Sorenson 1993).

is seen by many people as ‘a sin against the idea of Ethiopia’ (cited in de Waal 2015). In short, the EPRDF has failed to create a common-sense legitimacy to ensure cultural and ideological hegemony. What this cultural struggle suggests is that, for many people, the idea of Ethiopia is larger and more enduring than the party.

On the other hand, the contradictions between the EPRDF’s democratic centralism and the developmental state ideology on the one side and strong constitutional federalism on the other have contributed to the ambivalence to the party of those population groups<sup>23</sup> that supposedly embrace an ethnic form of politics. In other words, the effort to represent the EPRDF as a party which stands for cultural autonomy and self-determination of federated regional states is often at the fulcrum of an authoritarian model of development (Assefa 2014). For instance, even though the constitution confers on regional states the right to self-autonomy in matters related to land administration, their self-autonomy is often violated, resulting in popular resentment and protests (Dessalegn 2014). In this regard, notable examples include the transfer of land to what is called the Federal Land Bank (of as much as 1.4 million hectares in Benishangul, 1.2 million hectares in SNNP and 1.7 million in Oromia regional states) for the government’s land-lease programme to foreign and domestic investors<sup>24</sup> and the acquisition of land for the construction of 12 sugar factories (seven of which are located in the Omo in SNNP regional state) (Dessalegn 2014).

Secondly, the EPRDF’s ambition to create a hegemonic party-state is undermined by its inability to penetrate the civil service:

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<sup>23</sup> The EPRDF claims to guarantee the cultural and political self-determination of all ethnic groups that were supposedly exploited and marginalised by the Amhara (See Vaughan 2003; Young 1998).

<sup>24</sup> This was initiated to take advantage of the 2007/8 global food price and food supply crisis (Dessalegn 2014).

... the party faced problems in bending the civil service to its philosophy. Government institutions are hidebound and bureaucrats are skilled at subverting political decisions through, procrastination, sabotage or – that most effective of bureaucratic measures – strict working rule (de Waal 2015).

Thirdly, as I will show in the thesis, the ‘state system’ is not an independent sphere that is detached from society to exercise hegemonic party politics. Instead, the state at the local level is deeply embedded in the wider social formation. As a result, not only state policies but also party discourses are reconfigured and shaped by local interests and social relations. In this context, at the local level, individual politicians and public authorities are more important than party ideology or state policies.

Taken together, these observations suggest that the state as an idea and ensemble of institutions is better viewed as maintaining relative autonomy from the party. In adopting this view, this thesis goes beyond the party-state frame and instead empirically explores state formation by looking at heterogeneous sets of local governance practices and discourses.

Having offered the theoretical frameworks and necessary contexts that will carry throughout this work, the remainder of the thesis elaborates on the importance of these arguments through ethnographic fieldwork accounts of everyday state-making. But before proceeding to present the fieldwork chapters, I first wish to present an account of my fieldwork choices and methodology. The next chapter outlines the methodology employed in this research. Secondly, in Chapter 4, I will position this thesis in relation to the existing literature about state formation in Ethiopia.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Situational and Interpretive state of affairs: Field accounts, Methods and Techniques**

The theoretical and conceptual approaches mapped out in the preceding chapters point to specific methodological options. They particularly call for a qualitative research method based on ethnographic accounts of governance, development and bureaucratic and discursive practices (see Gupta 1995; Mitchell 1999). This study therefore draws on a range of ethnographic methods that enable an analysis of the state as a structural effect of practices and power relations (Mitchell 1999). First, I have applied two varieties of interpretive methodology, with one interpretive method applied to the study of culture (Geertz 1973) and a second to the study of governance and bureaucracy (Bevir and Rhodes 2010; Bevir 2013). An interpretive method, as developed by Geertz (Geertz 1973), is a semiotic approach to ethnographic analysis which views culture as a ‘text’, something to be read and interpreted. This approach is referred to as an interpretive approach to culture and is given a distinctive tweak to the interpretation of political actions, institutions and governance practices (Wagenaar 2006). Bevir and Rhodes (2010) propose the use of an interpretative approach for the study of governance. This approach is based on a de-centred understanding of governance as a contingent product of actions by social actors.

The two interpretive methods hinge on different epistemological foundations, those of anthropology/culture and political phenomena (Wagenaar 2006; Della Porta and Keating 2008). However, both methods focus on the centrality of meaning-making, ‘subjectivity, situated knowledge, ideas, cultural specificity’ and both advocate ‘close interpretation of governance practices’ and specify participant observation, discourses, narrative analysis and thick description as methodological tools (Turnbull 2016: 382). In relation to this study, the

interpretative approach to governance provides us with the opportunity to explore my themes of governance and bureaucratic practices by way of interpreting contingent patterns of beliefs and practices. It helps us to move away from an institutional and top-down understanding of practices and decentre governance to examine the beliefs and practices of actors and how they construct meanings (Bevir and Rhodes 2010). The interpretative approach to culture helps us understand the narratives, metaphors and symbols through which people perceive, talk about, represent and construct the state. Together, the two interpretive methods allow us to analyse both the everyday practices (governance, bureaucratic and discursive) and cultural construction of the state idea.

Second, in studying the Ethiopian state through the lens of everyday practices, I was also inspired by the Manchester School and its situational analysis methodology (Gluckman 1958, 1964; Mitchell 1983; Kapferer 1987). Situational analysis can be defined as ‘the intellectual isolation of a set of events from the wider social context in which they occur in order to facilitate a logically coherent analysis of these events’ (Mitchell 1987: 7). The purpose is to isolate a small set of social and political activities for meticulous analysis (Long 1992: 162). Mitchell (1987: 9) offered some epistemological distinctions that are useful for carrying out fieldwork from this perspective: a set of events (social encounters); the situation (the meaning individuals give to events and activities); and the setting (the structural and institutional environment within which activities take place). This thesis is therefore based upon the daily social situations such as meetings and informal gatherings that I participated in and observed as a researcher.

In addition to situational analysis, I will make use of the work of scholars who, under the influence or direction of Max Gluckman, developed and extended situational analysis and extended case study methods. I use, as I explained in Chapter 1, Bruce Kapferer’s (1988) comparative approach to juxtapose my two fieldwork sites. I also employ Norman Long’s

(1992; 2001) ‘actor-oriented’ and ‘interface analyses’ to analyse how development practices contribute to state formation. I use, as I discussed in Chapter 1, Burawoy’s (2009: 45) four ‘extensions’ to account for the heterogeneity of state’s referents across times, spaces, and contexts and the complexity of the everyday aspects of state formation, and to also provide the unity of the thesis. Apart from the methods which I have so far described, I used procedures of coding derived from grounded theory<sup>25</sup> (Strauss and Corbin 1998) to analyse interviews and discourses generated through participant observation.

Thus, broadly, my approach combines situational analysis and interpretative methods. The situational analysis helps us isolate and focus on specific events and practices (Mitchell 1987: 7) whilst the interpretative method allows close interpretation of practices as well as the exploration of broader (Geertz 1973) social and political processes within which such practices are situated.

In the remainder of this chapter, I first present a brief account of my entry into the fieldwork. Secondly, I describe the data collection processes and techniques employed. Finally, I present data from the analysis methods and techniques used.

### **3.1.Entering the field**

I spent three months at each of the fieldwork sites, whereby I conducted interviews and recorded daily bureaucratic activities. In West Gojjam, the fieldwork was carried out from 1<sup>st</sup> September to 28<sup>th</sup> November 2014. In Borana, the fieldwork took place between 10<sup>th</sup> December 2014 and 28<sup>th</sup> February 2015.

In the early stage of the fieldwork, the research activities undertaken at both of my field sites included establishing rapport with local residents (through key informants, acquaintances and

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<sup>25</sup> ‘Grounded theory is a general methodology, a way of thinking about and conceptualizing data’ (Strauss and Corbin 1998: 163)

my interpreter), learning about cultural norms, ethnographic observation of spaces (kebele offices, local bars and public spaces) and the collection of secondary data sources. At this stage, my purpose was to gain the trust of local residents and to identify the local issues and actors involved in the local political and socio-economic issues. As part of this process, I was also able to identify those social situations and public spaces where I was able to position myself as a researcher to participate in discussions and observe daily activities. These included roadside and neighbourhood gatherings in Degga and a popular shop in Odda where men would gather to socialise. My entry into the fieldwork was not, however, a prelude to the actual work; rather, as I will demonstrate throughout the thesis via a series of vignettes, it was very much part of the fieldwork. As I began to gain access to and the acceptance of local residents, and as the salient issues which were particularly significant or were reflective of broader trends in social and economic relations (such as corruption, development and livelihood issues etc.) started to emerge, attention was given to them. However, the process of gaining access was not completed at this stage. My entrée was rather a ‘continuous process of establishing and developing relationships’ (Schatzman and Strauss 1982: 22) with a variety of persons including farmers, pastoralists, politicians and non-governmental organisation (NGO) staff.

A typical day in the field would begin with a visit to the woreda or kebele administrative offices, where people would come to seek help for a variety of issues. Hours might be spent observing a series of meetings or encounters between kebele officials and local inhabitants. This would continue with house-to-house visits for interviews or with an appointment with a government official, NGO staff member or notable local individuals such as model farmers/pastoralists, customary leaders or community elders. The evening would usually be spent intermingling and talking with a wide range of interlocutors at shops, roadside or village gatherings, kebele or woreda bars.



Although this thesis is primarily about governance practices and the construction of the state idea in two particular localities, the trans-local character of the state bureaucratic system described earlier meant that my fieldwork was multi-sited (Marcus 1995; Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 2002). Consequently, my approach to data collection was informed by ‘mobile ethnography’ (Marcus 1995: 96), whereby I moved around different kebele-, woreda-, zone- and regional-level offices in order to understand the various relations within the bureaucratic network of power and the connections of spatial hierarchies. The multi-local character of my fieldwork reflects multi-vocality, that is, voices are linked to spaces and local narratives about the state are shaped by social and physical spaces (Rodman 2003). My interlocutors at different spatial scales construct narratives of hierarchy and state in particular ways and from different points of view (see Chapters 5 and 10). The thesis engages with multiple spaces and explores how the state is re/produced by multiple agents in different contexts (Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

### **3.2.Data collection**

My approach to data collection included a range of different ethnographic techniques such as in-depth interviews/conversations, direct and participant observations and shadowing. It also included an examination of governmental and non-governmental texts. The particularities of the techniques and processes of data collection are presented below.

#### ***Interviews***

At both of my fieldwork sites, most of my interviews involved in-depth conversations ranging from between 20 minutes and 1.5 hours in duration. I conducted the interviews firstly by asking broad, descriptive questions about farming, animal husbandry and the local development situation, prior to moving on to more focused questions. Almost all of the interviewees were asked to reflect on issues that were pertinent mostly to the state. More specifically, in order to bring agency into my research and explore different meaning-making, I framed questions

largely in the form of a life-history narrative and biographical approach. I was an active interviewer; I would often ask about my interviewees' interpretations of concepts, metaphors and stories. Due to the sensitive nature of some of the themes under study, I opted to take notes rather than tape-record the conversations. I took detailed notes during the interviews and then reconstructed them from memory immediately afterwards. Almost all of the conversations were jotted down in direct speech.

My interviewees included 'ordinary' farmers and pastoralists, housewives, NGO staff members, civil servants (development assistants, health extension workers, teachers, kebele managers, etc.) and politicians (kebele chairpersons, kebele council members, etc.). My interviewees of course had multifaceted identities, and hence their inclusion within these categories is only as organising heuristic. In the process of selecting the interviewees, convenience and purposive sampling were used. During the early weeks of the research, I interviewed almost anyone who was willing to talk. At later stages, I used purposive sampling to better reflect a balance of gender, age and class.

However, I encountered both gender and class differences in how I was spoken to during the interviews. For example, in Degga, the women would in most cases tell me to speak either to their husbands or to their grown-up male children. On the rare occasions when I interviewed a husband and wife together, the women would constantly defer questions to their husbands. On those occasions when the women did consent to being interviewed on their own, the sessions turned out to be extremely difficult to run because the women would be busily engaged in doing household work. During the interviews they would routinely either be cleaning, cooking, feeding cattle or distilling liquor (to supplement the family's income). This is obviously indicative of how women's identity is built around the identity of men and associated with duty.

Similarly, in Odda, the women were more hesitant than the men with regard to being interviewed. The women in Odda were also busy with household responsibilities (cooking, child rearing, etc.) and tasks for daily survival such as selling milk and collecting and selling firewood. In addition to these responsibilities, the women are expected to contribute their labour to safety-net programmes in exchange for grain and oil. Extracting labour from poor women who do not have time to spare became embedded in the state development programme (see Chapter 9). As a result, women, when compared to men, were inaccessible for interviews. Some of the most revealing interviews with women emerged from serendipitous encounters in different contexts. One such example arose from the occasion that I met a middle-aged woman, whom I called Elima, at the woreda office (see Chapter 9).

Some 'ordinary farmers' told me that I should speak to someone who knew how to give articulated speeches or to someone who worked for *mengist*. During the interviews, some of them were worried that they were talking about something that was not relevant. I had to repeatedly stress to them that everything was of interest to me. That said, I should mention that in Degga, some non-literate farmers were pleased to have someone from a very different, urban background taking a personal interest in them. In Odda, too, many pastoralists/farmers appreciated that a doctoral student from a *ferenji* (roughly meaning European) country was providing them with an opportunity to tell their stories. The interviews were carried out at several locations, including interviewees' private homes, local bars, and the side of the road.

In West Gojjam, my knowledge of local customs combined with me being a native speaker of Amharic, the official language of Ethiopia, which is also the language of the local community, enabled me to find suitable informants and conduct interviews. In total, I met, conversed with and interviewed more than 70 local inhabitants.

When working in Borana, where I do not speak *Afaan Oromo*, the language of the Oromo community in Odda, I worked with a research assistant. The issue of language posed a challenging situation in terms of gathering data at this particular site. However, I overcame this difficulty by asking my research assistant to take his own notes in the field, which we then discussed, along with the interviews, at the end of each day, to check ambiguities and complex translations of idioms and to establish whether there was a need to follow up the interviewees for further clarification. Working through an interpreter also meant that the background and position of my research assistant were subject to the same level of, if not additional, scrutiny as my own, with the interviewees enquiring about his place of birth, means of income and whether he worked for the government. My research assistant was employed by a local NGO and found it easy to gain the trust of a cross section of the local population. My interpreter's cultural awareness also meant that he assumed the role of 'an informant in an ethnographic sense' (Bragason, n.d: 7), especially with regard to introducing me to the local customs of greeting, starting a conversation and other points of social etiquette (see also Bujra 2006; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007).

The Borana Zone, unlike West Gojjam, had a higher presence of NGOs that were involved in development and humanitarian activities. I formally and informally interviewed NGO representatives and staff. On a few occasions, I accompanied them on field visits. We informally discussed their work and engaged in conversations about national and global political developments. In total, I undertook in excess of 50 in-depth interviews with purposively selected local inhabitants, kebele, woreda and zone officials and NGO employees. I also conducted key informant interviews with *Abba Gadaa* (the elected leader in the Gadaa system) of Borana, *Abba Reeras* (sub-kebele leaders) and *Abba Ollas* (village leaders).

### *Participant observation*

In Gojjam I attended as many local public and official events and meetings as possible. Being viewed as an ‘insider’ by the local community, I was invited into both formal and informal spaces to which an ‘outsider’ would not readily be welcomed. I accompanied senior kebele officials and notable community leaders to the local bars where they met to discuss political and social topics. I observed a series of meetings and encounters between kebele officials and local inhabitants.

Compared to my experience in Degga, attending public and official meetings and carrying out direct observations of encounters between state functionaries and local people proved to be extremely difficult. This was largely due to the language barrier. My fieldwork activities were therefore restricted to interviews, focus group discussions and informal conversations with a wide range of actors that included farmers, pastoralists and kebele-, woreda- and zone-level authorities.

Throughout the fieldwork, depending on the situation and the setting, I assumed the different roles as outlined by Gold (1958) and Junker (1960): the complete participant, the participant-as-observer, the observer-as-participant and the complete observer. In formal administrative meetings, I acted mainly as a complete observer, listening and taking notes on the speeches, non-verbal behaviours and physical settings associated with the meetings, etc. On some occasions, I was, as a complete observer, able to ‘lurk’ in the kebele premises and undertake simple ‘patient, unobtrusive observation’ (Hollier 1986: 62) of bureaucratic practices and the ways in which the politicians and civil servants acted with both each other and their clients. This helped me to gain a detailed understanding of the lives of local politicians both within and outside their work environment. However, unless I was invited by kebele officials or cases were discussed with me by local people in public spaces, I have chosen to exclude stories and information about local people.

In the informal roadside or neighbourhood gatherings, where conversation topics involved corruption and/or development failure, I assumed the role of observer-as-participant. To avoid being perceived as taking sides in such highly contentious local issues, my participation was limited to seeking clarification or to obtaining some idea of the meanings that the participants attributed to their narratives. In Degga, I gained access to such public-space discussion circles through what is known as the snowball sampling method. This involved using a small number of initial contacts and acquaintances to expand my network of connections, thereby creating entry points into different local informal groups. To gain access to places where the local elite congregated, I sought the help of kebele gatekeepers such as the chairman and local elders, who brokered my entry into the elite spaces (Chapter 7). In Odda, my interpreter was a helpful source of access to state officials and NGO staff members. In public-space discussions, due to the language constraint, I assumed an observer-as-participant role for the majority of the time.

While interacting with local residents at tea houses or kebele/woreda premises both in Gojjam and Borana, where people would meet to discuss less contentious livelihood issues or their business of doing in the kebele, I was able to assume a participant-as-observer role, taking a visible researcher position while at the same time participating in group discussions and activities. I should mention that in participating in both formal and informal meetings and gatherings, I was able to identify some of the most contentious and favourite daily topics of discussion and statements that invoked heated debates (see Chapters 7 and 10).

I rarely assumed the position of complete participant; this was only on those occasions when I interacted with NGO staff members and when discussing issues pertaining to international political developments. Overall, my choices in assuming a variety of roles along the continuum of complete observer to complete participant were based on ethical considerations and by what I was allowed to do.

In terms of recording, while I occasionally wrote some of the key words and phrases on the spot, following each event I would immediately rush to make notes on everything I could remember about the conversations, manners of speech, physical details and moods.

### ***Shadowing***

In order to better understand the complex web of personalised relationships between local non-state elites, local communities and the representatives of the various institutions that constituted the state at the kebele level, I obtained permission to ‘shadow’ (Czarniawska 2007; Bevir, Rhodes 2010) three powerful individuals in Degga and two NGO staff members in Odda. In Degga, I followed the chairman for two full days and one evening to observe his daily routines at a variety of sites (these included the office, a bar and the church). I also shadowed a community elder, who invited me to his house on multiple occasions (see Chapter 7). In Odda, I accompanied two NGO staff members on their field visits, observing their work process and reflecting on their experiences and views about working with state agents on the move (see Chapter 9). While the chairman in Odda twice agreed to have my research assistant and myself follow him, during the days it became clear that he was taking out-of-kebele personal business travel.

Finally, my fieldwork is supported by documentary analysis of government proclamations, policy papers and directives, news articles and consultancy reports. Such sources, in particular the consultancy papers on an irrigation project in Degga (Chapter 4), may not reflect the policy of the Ethiopian government and are therefore used in conjunction with interviews and other official records.

### **3.3.Positionality**

In Gojjam, my insider/outsider status served as both a benefit and a disadvantage. On the one hand, it meant that I was able to establish a good rapport with a broad range of people and, as

a result, I was able to secure access to local events, meetings and informal discussions. However, it also brought a challenge in the form of retaining the trust of ordinary members of the local population at the same time as being seen in public with unpopular kebele authorities. To overcome such challenges, I made several home and village visits in order to reassure members of the local population of my impartiality. This meant I was required to renegotiate my status as I interacted with variously positioned individuals and moved around the different public sites. Thus, my ethnographic encounters and interactions were shaped by my own identity and by my uneasy insider/outsider status (Riles 2006; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007).

Moreover, in Gojjam, my insider status was constantly brought up to cut short explanations, with the respondents often wondering why I was asking obvious questions, saying ‘you know how things are in here’, ‘why you?’. I was aware that my insider status may have impeded my ability to discern patterns that would be clear to an outsider. I therefore made a conscious effort to manage my insider status through reflexive techniques such as constant disconfirming, deliberately enquiring about details that I would otherwise have taken for granted, blocking and deconstructing my own assumptions and seeking alternative interpretations of narratives.

In Odda my outsider status was both an advantage and a disadvantage. It was an advantage because people were curious and willing to speak to me. However, most of the residents were more careful of what they said compared to during the interviews with local residents in Degga. Especially at the early stage of fieldwork, my outsider status produced numerous assumptions and rumours about the purpose of my presence and doing in Odda. The most common assumption was that I was working for the government as either a surveyor or spy or as a livestock trader. In order to overcome this suspicion regarding my presence as well as to enable me to obtain an in-depth knowledge of everyday life, I undertook a tour of villages and chose one particular local shop to be my main locale. Here, many residents (especially men) would



spend a certain amount of time every day socialising. This gave me the opportunity to explain the purpose of my visit as a researcher and to explain that I was bound by the rules of anonymity and confidentiality. While interacting with local residents at this particular shop, I opted for active participation and obtained the confidence of the community.

My outsider status was particularly disadvantageous in terms of capturing a detailed account of complex political discourses, idioms and metaphors. Clearly, while I was an outsider in terms of language and local customs, I was also viewed as an insider by virtue of being an Ethiopian. I noticed that civil servants, NGO staff members and some pastoralists were willing to share their opinions with me because I was Ethiopian.

### **3.4.Data analysis**

In the preceding section, I outlined the field techniques employed to collect the data upon which this thesis is based. In this section, I describe how I analysed the vast amount of material generated by the field techniques.

In analysing the data obtained through the interviews and discourses generated through participant observation, I made use of Strauss & Corbin's (1998) open coding and axial coding techniques, which produced 'thick description' (Geertz 1973) of a variety of themes. The first technique (open coding) involved breaking down the data for the purpose of identifying, categorising and conceptualising salient social, cultural and political themes. The categories identified at this stage included agricultural input distribution, development failure, corruption, participation, water distribution complaints, subject sensibilities, territorialisation, sedentarisation, corruption talk, rights talk, livelihood security, and self-perception. The second stage (axial coding) involved bringing the different themes identified through open coding back together to establish connections between them. At this stage I began to identify the patterns and contexts under which social and political interactions occurred. This meant exploring the

relations between agricultural resources distribution and corruption discourses; the relationship between state development discourses, participation and subject sensibilities; livelihood conditions, class relations and corruption discourses; and the work conditions of the state vis-à-vis NGO staff members and how this shaped their understanding of the state.

Finally, on the basis of the themes identified, the analysis was completed and presented through ‘thick description’ of the processes and practices by which the state comes to be re/produced and imagined in the banality of everyday life.

### *Discourses*

In my attempt to provide ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973), I approached the wide spectrum of public discourses that emanated from within the people at my two fieldwork sites through Thompson’s (1984: 134) ‘methodology of interpretation’. Thompson (1984) helpfully identified the following three ways of dealing with discourses: as narrative, as an argument, and as a syntactic strategy (such as the use of metaphor and metonym). In this thesis, I found two of the discursive features to be significant: the narrative and the metaphorical and metonymic statement. My purpose here was to chalk out the ways in which discourses illuminate my broader objective of understanding how the state idea comes to be constructed in everyday life.

In my analysis of the stories generated by the local residents, I paid particular attention to corruption and development failure narratives. I found local narratives about corruption and development failure to be helpful in understanding normative moral concepts of appropriate behaviour relating to state officials, against which corrupt practices are evaluated, measured and judged. In everyday public narratives, characters such as the disinterested national leaders and their local representatives, the unscrupulous local functionaries, help people make sense of politics and imagine the state. Moreover, narratives help us to grasp the local understanding of

the state as a ‘feeder’ and the ways in which national discourses of development and claims to eradicate poverty intermesh and are reproduced, in addition to the ways in which personal narratives come to relate to them.

My analysis included exploring meanings in metonymic and metaphorical statements. The purpose was to study cultural representations and complexities of meaning pertinent to everyday politics and the state. Metaphor analysis allowed me to explore how local residents draw on other meanings to elucidate what constitutes *mengist* and how they invoke meaning through a network of associated ‘entailments’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). I also explored metonymic statements, that is, the substitution of *mengist* for a person/national leader. In so doing, I showed how practices of governance are built around discourses (narratives, metaphors) by which the meaning of what constitutes *mengist* is imbued.

### ***Public events***

In analysing events such as meetings and other public events, the approach I take is situational analysis in the tradition of the Manchester School (Gluckman 1958; Van Velsen 1967). In using this method, I not only present the ‘abstractions and inferences from ... field material but also ... some of the material itself’ (Van Velsen 1964). In my analysis of events, I approach official meetings as ‘ritual moments’ in which the idea of the state as a coherent institution is staged; where the ideal relationship between the state and local people is articulated; where development-related events as ‘complex social dramas’ or ‘interface situations’ (Long 1992: 2) are staged; and, where social classes and underdeveloped subjects are produced. This approach to analysing events is congruent with a situational analysis of rituals, including of the production of hierarchies and the display of power (Gluckman 1958; Geertz 1973; Turner 1974).

I particularly build my analysis by focusing on the presentation of sets of events, the meaning individuals give to events and the structural and institutional environment within which activities take place (Mitchell 1999). Concretely, this means presenting and interpreting the different aspects of rituals and performances that are embodied in events and meetings. These elements include the environment of meeting sites (meetings held in the kebele hall, in the kebele premises, alongside funerals, etc.); the seating arrangements of the participants; which sections of the local population (social status, gender, age, etc.) participate; the ways in which people participate (i.e. passive/active); who leads and controls the dialogue and the timing of the meetings; whose ideas are taken on board or abandoned; the displays of material symbols (banners, T-shirts and caps, photographs, furniture etc.); actions (physical gestures, facial expressions, posture etc.); and, finally, the words spoken (rumours and gossip amongst the participants, official speeches etc.). This sheds light on the performative and representational dimensions of state formation and the patterns of local relations of power.

My analysis of development practices also involved ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973) of everyday interactions at the interface (Long 2001; Long and Villarreal 1993) between state functionaries and local people as well as those of the staff of various NGOs and variously positioned local residents. This enabled me to analyse how the idea of the state emerges in the ‘interface situations’ (Long 1992; 2001) where different actors, with different organisations and norms, interact, confront and clash. Importantly, an actor-oriented analysis of the interview materials helped me to unearth how development is appropriated and reproduced by those who are often seen as passive, targets and the end users of development. This means paying close attention to how development shapes the understanding and positioning of the self vis-à-vis governance practices. Actor-oriented and interface analysis, in short, allowed me to identify those individuals who defined modes and patterns of interaction at the kebele level and the way in which culturally specific development identities were enacted (see Chapters 6 and 9).

Finally, I used the interpretative method (Bevir and Rhodes 2010) to analyse mundane bureaucratic practices that constitute the state as an institution. I paid close attention to the regularised set of bureaucratic activities (such as data collection), encounters (between the governors and the governed), material representations (officer paraphernalia) and perpetual institutional rites (such as meetings). This enabled me to look into the governance stories (Bevir and Rhodes 2016) that constitute vertical connections and in which the idea of the state as an institution is embedded. I was also able to examine the complexities and levels of informality of norms and relationships that operate within institutions that constitute the state as well as the pressures and dilemmas (see Chapter 8).

### **3.5. Ethical considerations**

Upon commencing the interviews, participant observation and shadowing, I made my objectives and intentions clear and explained the requisite ethical considerations to all of my participants, such as the requirement for anonymity and confidentiality. I explained to all of the participants that their participation in the research was entirely voluntary. I always made sure to obtain the participants' informed consent. In terms of anonymity, I made sure that all of the participants would be referred to by their social status (age, gender and socio-economic status) and that details that might reveal their identity would be avoided. I always made it clear that all data would only be used for the purposes of this research project.

The fieldwork presented me with a whole range of personal ethical dilemmas. For example, I was asked to help in resolving disputes between friends in public spaces; some local residents asked me if I could report corruption cases to *mengist*. I was also asked on numerous occasions by local residents to comment on individual corruption cases or to provide information about ways in which they could obtain foreign funding for local projects (church and cooperatives). Instead of allowing myself to be drawn into these situations, I would instead communicate that I wanted all parties to resolve their disputes amongst themselves. Instead of providing any kind

of information, I would candidly reiterate that I was a PhD student and made clear my purposes. Hence, I had to constantly maintain a balance between conducting the fieldwork, relying on the hospitality of the people, official permissions, the cooperation from kebele officials, and the different issues that my informants tried to draw me into.

Another ethical dilemma I confronted was how to deal with people's poverty and hardship. For some people, their immediate concern was for the basic amenities of life, such as food, and what they needed most was immediate material assistance. This afflicted me throughout my fieldwork in both Degga and Odda. However, I never made any contributions or paid any informants for their interviews or hospitality. I did sometimes pay for drinks, however, in accordance with local customs. On some occasions, I witnessed acts of verbal abuse by state officials against local people. I had to avoid involving myself in such situations in order not to compromise my research.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Contested conceptualisations of Ethiopian statehood**

So far, in the previous three chapters, I have sought to establish the theoretical, methodological and conceptual frameworks that will be continued throughout this thesis. I have also established a broad context for discussion on the state in Africa, although the remainder of the thesis is concerned specifically with Ethiopia. In this chapter, I want to discuss in more detail why I chose Ethiopia as a case with which to study state formation in Africa. Moreover, in working towards the ethnography of the state, this chapter in particular, and the thesis in general, attempts to highlight and challenge several bodies of literature that, in various ways, focus on making sense of the nature and role of the state in Ethiopia.

This chapter's analysis takes its point of departure from two difficulties in the conceptualisation of the state in Ethiopia. First is the problem of locating the place of the Ethiopian state in Africa. Scholarly discussions about the state in sub-Saharan Africa have tended to accord only a marginal place and level of analysis to the Ethiopian state. This is because, for many scholars, Ethiopia is considered an anomaly in Africa. In the first part of this chapter, I will make the opposite point. Ethiopia represents one sociocultural and political formation in a diverse continent.

Second, we face the problem of locating the historical and conceptual specificity of the Ethiopian state. Indeed, there is no shortage of historical literature relating to state formation in Ethiopia. But the very term state, for instance, is taken for granted by many as a very straightforward concept to the extent that it was wilfully avoided or reduced to a mere reflection of ethnic politics. In seeking to move beyond this impasse, in the second part of this chapter, I wish to address the following relevant questions: How can we locate the historical specificities of state formation in Ethiopia? Can we use the category of state to describe the political systems

over several centuries? Can we make a clean break and abandon employing the concept of state to explain historically specific collective politics? In addressing these questions, I highlight several bodies of literature across a wide range of disciplines – anthropology, history, politics, sociology, etc. In so doing, however, my intention is not to provide a full account of the history of Ethiopia or debate how the Ethiopian state has evolved over time. Rather, my overall aim is to examine some of the dominant perspectives on the conceptualisation of the Ethiopian state in light of the theoretical perspective of this thesis and establish the broad context for an ethnographic study of the state in Ethiopia.

#### **4.1. The Ethiopian state in African studies**

In the introduction to *Understanding Contemporary Ethiopia: monarchy, revolution and the legacy of Meles Zenawi*, Prunier and Ficquet (2015: 1) write:

Ethiopia is a land which, like Israel or Tibet, is often thought of first and foremost through myths before it is seen as a real country. Many people who would have some difficulty in precisely pinpointing Ethiopia on a map of the world have nevertheless heard about our hominid ‘grandmother’ Lucy, the Ark of the Covenant, Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, the medieval quest for Prester John, as well as the more recent imperial figures of Menelik II and Haile Selassie I, the independence of the country during European imperialism in Africa, and the Lion of Judah, a symbol of sovereignty that has been used on covers of Rastafari reggae albums. The public at large also remember the images of recurrent famines that often end up negatively symbolizing Africa. The Power, the Glory and the Tragedies. Ethiopia is oversized in the public mind and it often tends to be oversized in the minds of its own inhabitants, who are the first to believe in the mythical quality of their motherland. It is one of the few countries in the world which has an Encyclopaedia devoted to it ...



The title of my thesis, ‘The Everyday State in Africa’, was intentionally chosen to draw attention to and challenge the long-standing assumption that Ethiopia has anomalous and unique social and political qualities and a state structure not seen in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa. The ‘mythical quality’ that Prunier and Ficquet refer to in the above extract is not only implanted in popular imaginations but has also long defined academic discourses surrounding the Ethiopian state. Many writers consider Ethiopia to be ‘the oldest African country, yet in many respects it is in rather than of Africa’ (Jesman 1963: 10). Ethiopia has predominantly been seen more as oriental than African, so much so that ‘more is written on Ethiopia in the *Journal of Semitic Studies* than in the *Journal of African History*’ (Teshale 1995: xvi). The discussions about the state in Africa, largely informed by this perspective, are reluctant to take Ethiopia as a fully African state.

While political organisations in sub-Saharan Africa are predominantly conceptualised in relation to European colonial legacy, where the state is viewed as an imported alien supra-institution grafted onto indigenous social and political structures, Ethiopia is said to have maintained a culturally rooted state for more than three thousand years (Teshale 1995; Toggia 2008). Ethiopia, alone in the continent, successfully forestalled colonial domination and thereby avoided direct imposition of colonial institutions. As a result, the Ethiopian state is often bypassed in the mainstream accounts of African state analysis. Jean-Francois Bayart (2009), for instance, treated Ethiopia as an exception on account of the existence of a long and continuous tradition of power which, he believes, does not correspond to the rest of ‘Black African’ state experience.<sup>26</sup> In his global order of cultural essentials, Samuel Huntington (1996: 47) described Ethiopia as a ‘civilisation of its own’ in contrast to the rest of sub-Saharan Africa which, he argues, lacks a distinct indigenous civilisation. Even prominent Ethiopianist

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<sup>26</sup> Although Bayart’s famous metaphor of ‘the rhizome state’ did not include Ethiopia in its analysis, Ethiopia is nonetheless typical of the type of patronage politics that he describes (see de Waal 2015).

Christopher Clapham (1969) characterised Ethiopia as ‘an odd man out among African states’.

Teshale Tibebu (1995: 31), an Ethiopian historian and advocate of Afrocentric analysis of Ethiopia’s past, wrote:

Ethiopia is not like Chad or Burkina Faso, Central African Republic or Mali – a piece of territory carved out by a European power and given a name. Ethiopia is like Egypt, China and Iran; very old ....

Similarly, Gebru Tareke (1996: 26) contrasts the Ethiopian state to the state in other sub-Saharan African countries as follows:

... the Ethiopian state is differentiated from others in the continent by its greater linkage to society. In the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, state apparatus was bequeathed by colonialism and thus lack indigenous roots.

For a large number of scholars working on the state in sub-Saharan African, the contemporary modes of power in Africa are derived from colonial legacy. Institutional frameworks forged by colonial rule, such as the direct rule of citizens by civil law and the indirect rule of natives/subjects by customary law (Mamdani 1996), and the colonial mode of governmentality<sup>27</sup> built on relations of subjection and violence (Mbembe 2001) are believed to have been the defining feature and the root cause of state crises in contemporary Africa.

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<sup>27</sup> Colonial governmentality represents an act of governance, Achille Mbembe (2001) argues, which was established on Hegelian and Bergsonian condescending imagination of Africa. On the one hand, the Hegelian tradition conceived Africans as a mere ‘body-things’, not even deemed subjects but animals. Hence, he argues, the only form of relationship possible was one of violence and domination. On the other hand, according to Mbembe, the Bergsonian tradition saw the natives as animals that could be domesticated. He argues a sympathising, familiarising and domestication of natives thus brings them into subjugation and submissiveness. Postcolonial states, according to Mbembe (2001), inherited these colonial traditions of impunity and unconditionality.

The Ethiopian state is characterised as a 'state' in the true Weberian sense of the term, unlike the African state which is described as neither 'African nor state' but as 'a dubious community of heterogeneous and occasionally clashing linguistic, religious and ethnic identities; their claim to force is rarely effective and much less monopolistic; their frequent predatory nature fails the test of legitimacy; and their territoriality is generally at best hesitant and contested' (Englebert 1997: 767). Postcolonial African states, Jackson and Rosberg (1982) argue, do not have a legitimate monopoly on the means of violence in their territorial jurisdictions; therefore, Weber's empirical definition of the state is insufficient to adequately explain the nature and survival of African states. Rather, they are juridical entities protected by international law. Ethiopia, on the other hand, is described as 'the lone continental exception to juridical sovereignty' (Englebert 2009: 155).

Indeed, the Ethiopian state is relatively specific, in the sense that, unlike the rest of the sub-Saharan African states, its historical trajectory includes no experience of colonialism. However, because Ethiopia remained independent throughout European colonial rule in Africa and developed a long-lasting and relatively well-organised political system does not necessarily indicate it is organised differently from the rest of Africa (Donham 1986). Most significantly, the appropriation of European instruments of rule, as I demonstrate below, by the ruling elites in Ethiopia and the rest of Africa, which resulted in the centralisation of state power in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, generated parallel structures and trajectories in the contemporary era.

Recent studies have shown that colonialism did not suspend the historicity of African societies nor lessen their capacity to pursue strategies to produce their modernity (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Bayart 2009). Colonialism instead brought political, economic and military access to the dominant indigenous groups. African actors seized an open opportunity introduced by colonisers, traders and missionaries to amass wealth and gain power. Therefore, Africa was not just a passive victim of colonialism but was also active in the pursuit of economic gains through

what Bayart (2009) terms strategies of ‘extraversion’ – a process through which political actors are disposed to mobilise resources from their relationship with the external environment as a result of weak productivity and internal social struggle.

In a comparable way, despite Ethiopia exceptionally claiming three centuries of state experience, it was the imported exogenous ideas such as the mechanisms of the modern bureaucratic machinery, the adoption of modern European law (the penal and civil code which was introduced in 1958) and the notion of constitutionalism that profoundly moulded its current shape.<sup>28</sup> While it was colonialism that introduced new areas of domination – both ideological and technological – in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, the indigenous elite, particularly Emperor Menelik and Haile Selassie I, have been credited with the introduction of modern instruments of rule in Ethiopia (Andreas 2003; Bahru 1991). As Addis Hiwet (1975) observed, imperialism offered the Ethiopian elite ‘real advantages in the modification, rationalisation and organisation of a modern state apparatus – ministers and bureaucracies and military power... their own socio-economic needs were more than sufficiently catered by the goods of the world capitalist system’ (78). The desire of the ruling class to ‘modernise’ itself, i.e. to imbibe the Western system of knowledge and lifestyle and the ambition to create a European modernity (Clapham 2006), was important in shaping the state.

In this sense, the centralisation of Ethiopian state power was realised in the same way as in other sub-Saharan African countries, where, as Bayart (2009) tells us, foreign contact and the appropriation of European modes of rule were a major resource for ‘the centralisation of power and accumulation of wealth’ (23). One can then include Ethiopia in Bayart’s claim that the articulation of African politics and societies, in this particular context, ‘could no longer be

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<sup>28</sup> For a comprehensive summary of the literature relating to how Ethiopia imported the various instruments of modernity, see Bahru 1991, 2008; Markakis 1974; Addis Hiwet 1975; Andreas 2003; Shinn & Ofcansky 2004; Clapham 2006.

distanced from the technological civilisation of the West' (24). The substantive difference rather seems to be the mode of appropriation of exogenous institutions and ideologies. While it was direct colonial intrusion through conquest in the rest of 'Black Africa', in Ethiopia the state elite was responsible for the appropriation of the ideologies and institutions of Europeans through strategies of 'extraversion'.

Such parallel trajectories have contributed to the emergence of comparable political processes and economic conditions in both the Ethiopian state and other sub-Saharan African states. As such, Ethiopia possesses most of the characteristic features that are currently used to identify Africa: ethnic and religious diversity, poverty, famine, indigenous polity, economic growth and so on.

Here I do not want to imply that colonialism and the incorporation of global resources and technologies within a state are similar. As mentioned above, Ethiopia possesses a quite specific history that distinguishes it from the rest of Africa. And I acknowledge the immense importance of the distinctive features of the Ethiopian state (the presence of a specific tradition of power, the conceptualisation of politics through 'graphic reasoning' (Bayart 2009) and so on) in shaping the composition of the Ethiopian state and the popular idea of the state. Yet, to view Ethiopia as an exception based on such traits and counterpose it with the rest of the sub-Saharan African states presupposes the latter to be a singular category.

Here it is important to note that underlying much of the discussion about postcolonial African states and Ethiopian exceptionalism is the assumption that colonialism had a homogenising effect throughout the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. Recently, however, scholars have raised questions about the homogenising effect of colonialism, pointing out that 'the influence and effects of colonialism have been extremely varied throughout post-colonial Africa' and as a result 'pre-existing diversities – although hardly unchanging – persisted

throughout and beyond the colonial interlude' (Harrison 2010:15). Ethiopian exceptionalism thus becomes less convincing as one downgrades the importance of the homogenising effect of colonialism on the composition and nature of the postcolonial sub-Saharan Africa states. If anything, the Ethiopian state represents one sociocultural and political formation in a diverse continent. Therefore, rather than see it as an anomaly, this study takes Ethiopia as a case to elucidate how the state in sub-Saharan Africa is constituted in the mundane materiality of everyday life. However, Ethiopia is not taken as a representative case, that is, this study does not attempt to make any empirical generalisation to either sub-Saharan African states or even Ethiopia. The thesis rather aims to outline those principles that underlie the *modus operandi* of the state which can be analytically and theoretically significant in understanding the state in sub-Saharan Africa.

#### **4.2. The conceptualisation of the state in Ethiopia**

This section discusses the conceptualisation of the Ethiopian state. It provides important background information and insights into problems with the existing literature. It does this by bringing together an ambitious set of dispersed literature from different disciplinary fields and presenting them thematically.

##### ***The Great Tradition thesis***

The predominant and classical approach, known as the 'Greater Ethiopia' thesis, provides an account of a transcendental state. This conceptualisation is anchored in a historical metanarrative of what Christopher Clapham (2002a) aptly termed 'the great tradition' – a belief in the continuity of ancient state tradition. The 'great tradition' projects an image of a long territorially unified state backwards into the biblical past.

The core narrative of 'the great tradition' *oeuvre* often begins with Aksum, an ancient kingdom which flourished in the present-day Tigray province of Ethiopia and Eritrea between the first and seventh centuries, as the first recognisable Ethiopian state. Aksum is seen as a

‘bedrock state’, so much so that the origin of the institutions of imperial Ethiopia, such as the office of the Emperor and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (Clapham 1969), as well as Christian culture, the ox-plough agricultural system and Ethiopic script, are imputed to it. The narrative continues linearly and relates the history of the fall of Aksum and the rise of what is considered an ‘illegitimate’ non-Solomonic<sup>29</sup> dynasty known as the *Zagwe*, whose extraordinary achievement and enduring legacy is the construction of rock-hewn churches. By 1270 the ‘legitimate’ Solomonic dynasty was, they say, restored and consolidated state power, expanded its territory and defended itself against its historic enemies – its Muslim and Pagan neighbours – for the ensuing six centuries until its last Emperor, Haile Selassie I, was deposed in 1974. After the fall of the Solomonic dynasty in 1974, history continued to serve to reify the state by narrating the story of the military regime until 1991 and the Federalist regime since 1991 (Marcus 1994; Clapham 2002a; Toggia 2008).

This narrative is corroborated by records such as ‘a list of kings, royal chronicles, hagiographical literature, Greek epics, Arabic and European travel history, royal epigraphic memorials, and such archaeological findings in coins, thrones, and palace remains’ (Toggia 2008: 322).

This classical approach presents historically disparate sets of activities, political discourses and institutions as a coherent and unified political entity contained within the concept of ‘state’. The account simply glosses over germane anecdotes of governance practices among non-Christian communities and occupational groups, informal and alternative political power structures such as banditry,<sup>30</sup> traditional political systems and the historically very variable

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<sup>29</sup> The Solomonic dynasty consists of rulers of Ethiopia who claimed to trace their roots back to Queen Sheba of Ethiopia and King Solomon of Israel (Marcus 1994).

<sup>30</sup> Historically, the practice of banditry was widely entrenched throughout northern Ethiopia. Bandits operated with impunity within their ‘jurisdictions’ and exercised sovereignty over a segment of the population through, at

territoriality of various political entities. Political writers and historians working within this tradition invariably use the notion of state to refer to all ‘kingdoms and empires in ancient and medieval periods, as well as the modern Ethiopian states’ (Toggia 2008: 331). In other words, the modern concept of the state is simply projected onto the historical past, and, as such, the Ethiopian state is represented more as an already well-formed and well-organised trans-historical entity that evolves linearly and steers the course of social life than as a social formation produced at a specific and recent historical juncture and as one which is in a constant process of construction through social struggles and cultural idioms. This approach suffers from what Derek Sayer (1987) calls the ‘violence of abstraction’, that is, the disentanglement of concepts from historical facts.

The Great Tradition thesis subsequently enabled Ethiopianist scholars to construct a civilizational hierarchy which orders cultural differences in Ethiopia into systems of centre and periphery: between Christian and non-Christian communities, Semites and non-Semites and Geeze civilisation and barbarian traditions (see, for example, Ullendorff 1973).

This language of civilizational hierarchy was furthermore linked to racial category – in particular, in terms of a nested set of racial oppositions between Semitic immigrants and African tribes:

... the Ethiopian Empire of the twentieth century consists of a number of previously autonomous and distinct ‘African’ tribes subordinated under an alien Semitic minority.

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times, a monopoly of violence. Banditry, until the last quarter of the 19th century, was, as Crummey (1986) argues, ‘a tool for career mobility’ (33). For example, the first two most prominent modern Ethiopian Emperors, Tewodros II (r. 1855–1868) and Yohannes IV (r. 1872–1889), came to the throne through banditry. Once they assumed power, it was the idea of the state that gave them credibility – or, to use Abrams’ (1988) term, ‘legitimized the illegitimate’ (76). According to Crummey, the use of banditry for political office competition by the Ethiopian ruling class proves the ‘criminal undercurrents of all forms of state power’ (1986: 133).



This view is a natural consequence of beginning Ethiopian history, as scholarly convention has had it, with the supposed Semitic immigrations of the first millennium B.C. (Levine 2000: 26).

The Ethiopian state is thus understood as a bifurcated structure, as we shall see when we examine the centre-periphery approach, which found its expression in a sharp civilisational split based on tradition (great and little tradition), culture (Christian and non-Christian) and space (highland and lowland). The result is that, in the words of Christopher Clapham (2002a: 40–41), the Abyssinians, ‘notably those who speak Amharic and Tigrinya’, are constructed as true ‘Ethiopia, whereas other peoples [are seen to be] [...] *part of Ethiopia*’.

### ***The rise of the modern Ethiopian state***<sup>31</sup>

Over the years, scholars from a wide range of academic disciplines – history, political science, anthropology, etc. – have paid a great deal of attention to the genesis of the modern Ethiopian state. The emphasis of these studies has broadly been on the making of imperial Ethiopia, especially on the nature and consequences of Menelik’s conquest<sup>32</sup> of the south during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In order to capture the conquest, many scholars draw on a wide range of aphorisms and appellations – ‘enlargement of the state’ (Markakis 2011), ‘imperial expansion’ (Donham 1986), colonisation (Holcomb and Ibsa 1990), ‘military feudal colonialism’ (Addis Hiwet 1975), restoring and uniting ‘medieval territories of Ethiopia’

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<sup>31</sup> In Ethiopian historiography, the state that emerged following Menelik’s conquest (see below) is commonly considered to be the modern Ethiopian state (see Bahru 1991). The use of the word ‘modern’ also signifies the inculcation of European instruments of governance, such as constitutionalism (see Clapham 2006)

<sup>32</sup> Ethiopia acquired its contemporary shape between 1896 and 1906 through imperial conquest. At the turn of the century, Menelik II subdued several kingdoms and societies, including the emerging Oromo monarchic states such as Gera, Gomma, Garo, Gumma, Jimma, and Limmu-Ennarea other kingdoms like Kefa, Sidama, Kembata, Wolayta, and the Omotic speaking peoples (Bahru 1991; Markakis 2011).

(Teffera 1997: 37) – which were lost in the aftermath of Gragn and Oromo expansion<sup>33</sup> (Getachew 1986). These aphorisms, broadly speaking, are expressions of a wide range of divergent and competing views and positions about the Ethiopian state. In this and the following sections, I attempt to highlight some of these debates focusing on issues surrounding the formation and functioning of the imperial state to identify those historical processes and themes that have been of utmost importance in shaping the contemporary Ethiopian state.

One debate concerns the interplay between internal and external historical forces that gave rise to a highly centralised Western-style state. In scrutinising the history of the Ethiopian state, Christopher Clapham, in his classic work *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (1988), analysed the structural changes that recreated and modelled the Ethiopian state along European lines, a process which, he argues, ensured Ethiopia to be recognised as a ‘sovereign jurisdiction existing on terms of formal equality’ (26–27) with European states. The first change concerns the means of access to state power from primogeniture to ‘the control of force’. This, according to Clapham, resulted in the rise of ‘great centralising emperors’ or state builders – Tewodros II (1855–68), Yohannes IV (1871–89) and Menelik II (1889–1913) – who restored a ‘powerful Ethiopian state’. The modern Ethiopian state, Clapham argues, was created by Menelik at the turn of the century through the conquest and subjugation of ‘peoples of the southern marches’ (Donham 1986).

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<sup>33</sup> In 1529 the Muslim sultanate of Adal led by Ahmad ibn Ibrihim al-Ghazi (nicknamed *Gragn* or the left handed) invaded the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia leading to the partial occupation of the Ethiopian highlands for a little more than ten years, between 1529 and 1543 (Bahru 1991; Henze 2000). The eventual defeat of *Gragn* was immediately followed by the Oromo clan’s expansion towards central, northern and western Ethiopia (see Bahru 1991; Mohammed 1994).

The second and most important change has to do with the process of centralisation (Clapham 1988) and subjugation of 'regional lords to a progressively increasing level of imperial control - a process ultimately completed only by Haile-Selassie, following the decisive reduction of regional autonomy during the Italian occupation' (Donham 1986).

Finally, the third important change is the increasing level of external diplomatic, economic, educational, military and administrative contact with Europeans. This resulted in two important developments: firstly, the creation of European-style centralised bureaucratic institutions (Clapham 1988). This involved the introduction of 'a standing army, ministerial bureaucracies, national taxation, and a codified law to protect landed elites' (Donham 1986: 25) and the transformation of what had been the traditional elite into a European-educated bureaucratic elite. These transformations had given rise to a state that is understood to have become a partially but increasingly modernising, rationalised and bureaucratised entity presided over by an elite detached from society (Markakis 1974; Addis Hiwet 1975). We can see here, as argued in the previous section, with the influence of Europe, that the Ethiopian state, instead of being the outcome of a unique indigenous process, is as much a product of, in Bayart's word (2009: 24), 'syncretic articulation' as other sub-Saharan African states.

Secondly, external contacts created a foreign exchange economy 'through which to pay for imported goods and provide a tax base for the imperial government' (Clapham 1988: 29). The economic foundation of the state thereby shifted from a complete dependence upon the taxation of Abyssinian subsistence farmers to cash crops, especially the production of coffee in the newly incorporated territories of the south and west.

Overall, Clapham's historical analysis focuses on the contributions made by actors and process to the emergence of Western-style state structure in Ethiopia. As such, structural

transformations occurred during the 120-year period, from mid-nineteenth onwards, are viewed as manifestations of the Weberian process of rationalisation of state power.

### *The great man approach*

Since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the study of state and society had been ignored by Ethiopianist scholars in their drive to account for the personhood and power of the sovereign – great emperors. This tradition was set in motion, according to Markakis (2011: 20), by Thomas Carlyle's (1841) 'hero-worship' approach which inspired numerous 'encomiastic portraits of past leaders', especially of Haile Selassie. Many scholars working in this tradition, as Bahru Zewde (2008) remarks, were infatuated with the person of the late Machiavellian Emperor and eschewed any broad social analysis. The state, rather, was predominantly discussed in relation to the purportedly 'modernizing zeal' (Perham 1969: 62) of a man who is said to have 'shaped rather than waited upon events' (Mosley 1965: 151). Even Halliday and Molyneux (1981), who took a structuralist political economy approach to the study of Ethiopia, remarked: 'the history of modern Ethiopia has to a considerable degree been encapsulated in the biography of the man who, for many years, ruled it and represented it to the outside world.' This characterisation is sometimes taken to the extreme, as when, for instance, Haile Selassie is described as 'omnipotent' and 'omnipresent', 'intervening at will in the smallest details of any aspects of administration' (Clapham 1988: 23).

Haile Selassie is simply represented as the 'singular and transcendental' figure of a Machiavellian prince (Foucault 1991: 91), who embodied not only the state but also history and rules to maintain personal control over his territory. While Haile Selassie's progressive view (which Bahru Zewde (2008) rather scathingly characterised as 'panegyric of money') significantly contributed to the transformation of the imperial government, it is too reductionist to regard the monarch as a 'quintessence of the state' (Raphaeli 1967: 422) and make him a

subject of scientific inquiry as a substitute for the state and society. In these studies, analysis of the state is highly tethered to what Foucault (1991) conceptualised as a sovereign understanding of power – i.e. power is assumed to be a centralised force wielded by great emperors who oppress, impose laws and build institutions.

### ***The state and ethnicity***

One of the recurring themes found in Ethiopian studies concerns the interface between the state and ethnicity.<sup>34</sup> There are several strands to this theme. One strand sees state-society relations in terms of the state as a unified, dominant and sovereign institution that is primarily constructed and controlled by a predominant ethnic group. In this respect, the Ethiopian state is deemed to be established by and centred on the Amhara ethnic group. Donald Levine (1965b: 247), for instance, argues, ‘it is a conspicuous fact that the Ethiopian state has emerged through the ascendance of one of the people’s in the country, the Amhara, over the others’. Here, Levine saw that the state was not only dominated by the Amhara but also used as an instrument to carry out ‘cultural imperialism’, namely ‘Amharization via school system, the spread of Amharic custom and religion through settlers, traders, and colonial missionaries’ (247). While Levine emphasises the importance of the Amhara’s dominance,<sup>35</sup> he is also committed to what he calls the *Greater Ethiopia* approach (2000). He characterises *Greater Ethiopia* as a cultural/civilizational area where the various ethnic groups that inhabit the Ethiopian state share a number of ‘pan-Ethiopian’ cultural traits – including similarities in family and descent structure and belief system. It is in this context and process of cultural contact that the Amhara,

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<sup>34</sup> I do not examine the literature on ethnic politics. This important issue has been addressed by others. For example, see Vaughan 2003; Praeg 2006; Aalen 2011; Asnake 2013.

<sup>35</sup> Levine’s much-used analysis of Amhara political culture and its contribution to the constitution of the state will be discussed later in this chapter.

Levine argues, ascended and developed a centralised state structure by extending their culture across the Greater Ethiopia civilisation area.

Similar to Levine's analysis, Christopher Clapham (1988) argued that the Ethiopian state is not a neutral entity equally open to all cultures of the country. He pointed out that:

... participation in national political life normally required assimilation to the cultural values of the Amharic core: the Amharic language, Orthodox Christianity, and a capacity to operate within the structures and assumptions of a court administration (21).

Clapham (1988) reminded us to pay attention to the 'plasticity' of the term Amhara which, he argues, should not be associated with 'the descent-based ethnic identities characteristic of many other African societies' (24). He states:

Being Amhara is much more a matter of how one behaves than of who one's parents were; and without this capacity for assimilating other peoples into a core culture which can be regarded as national, and not the exclusive property of a particular group of people, the Ethiopian state would probably have been unable to sustain itself in the first place (23).

Clapham argues that the Amhara, therefore, are 'capable of forming the core element of a multi-ethnic state, only because ... their own ethnicity is so weakly defined' (23). But again, Clapham admits that Ethiopia is commonly associated with the identity of one people that offers to others the chance to participate in the state system and simultaneously requires 'the subordination of one's own original affiliation' (25). This, according to Clapham, means the Ethiopian state is fraught with 'much more intense problems of national identity and integration than other African states' (24) such as, for instance, the creation of a bifurcated state structure – between the highland core and the lowland peripheries – which is traditionally 'expressed in terms of a clash between Orthodox Christianity and Islam' (25). As such, the state institutions are seen to

have had no autonomy from the dominant ethnic groups and, as a consequence, the relationship between the state and society functions based on exclusion of 'the mass of the population from the process of government, and the economic exploitation of the producers by an ethnically defined ruling class, into which some other elites assimilated' (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003: 82) and the cultural suppression of less dominant groups.

Another strand of thought about the interface between state and society focuses on ethnic subjugation. Here, the Ethiopian state is studied in the context of Menelik's territorial expansion and the subsequent consolidation of state power by Haile Selassie. Gilchrist (2004), for instance, contends that:

Through the creation of the modern Ethiopian state the Abyssinians eventually subjugated the Oromo in a political system reminiscent of European colonialism in the rest of Africa.<sup>36</sup>

Conversely, Holcomb and Ibsa (1990) describe Ethiopia as a 'dependent colonial empire' created as a result of an alliance formed between European capitalist states (Britain, France and Italy) and the Abyssinian kingdom in the interests of the former. They argue that the Ethiopian state is not an ancient indigenous entity but rather is as much a child of colonialism as any other African state, spared from direct subjugation for being an agent for colonial powers in the Horn of Africa.

Ethiopia is the name that was eventually given to the geographic unit created when Abyssinia, a cluster of small kingdoms in northeast Africa, expanded in the mid-1800s

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<sup>36</sup> For a similar view, see Mekuria 1996; Leenco 1999.

by conquering independent nations in the region using firearms provided by European power (1).<sup>37</sup>

Other scholars have taken a different approach, focusing on the complexity of the interface between state power and ethnicity. For example, with respect to the Oromo, Merara (2006: 104) wrote: ‘the irony of Oromo history therefore is that they were among of the conquerors and the conquered, that they produced kings and queens while at the same time reduced to ‘*gabbar*’ (serf) and tenants alienated from the land of their ancestors.’ Overall, these views bring to the fore the question of national and cultural oppression and other forms of inequality inherent in the state system which have been disguised by the grand ‘great tradition’ narrative.

### ***Class contradictions and the demise of the imperial state***

Some Ethiopianists who look to the past focused their studies on class relations in the late imperial period. The paradoxical structural transformations that the Ethiopian state system underwent from 1896 to 1974, namely, ‘the creation of a stronger and more centralised bureaucratic state and the increasing commercialisation of the economy’ (Donham 1986: 25) on the one side and the concomitant entrenchment of the ancient aristocratic class system on the other has made scholars question the liberalising and modernising capacity of the state as an actor. Many have concluded that the imperial state’s capacity to modernise society and transform the economy (especially the agricultural sector) was impaired by its ‘semi-bureaucratized’ structure (Gebru 1996), i.e. by contradictions between ‘commercial purists and patron-client relationships’ (Donham 1986). This socio-political development led to further discussions among Ethiopianists concerning where the Ethiopian state fits in the international system of states. Bahru Zewde (2008), for instance, drew comparisons between imperial Ethiopia and Perry Anderson’s late European absolutist states during their transition from

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<sup>37</sup> For a similar argument, see Sorenson 1993; Asafa 1993.



feudalism to capitalism. Similarly, Teshale Tibebu (1995:30) sought to investigate: ‘In the global survey of modern state formations .... Where does the Ethiopian variety fit in?’.

Writing about class and revolution, Markakis and Nega (1986) described the late imperial state as beset by a conjunction of national and class antagonisms. The first, they argue, was a product of the strain caused by the imperial expansion into the south and the subsequent drive by national leaders to centralise state power. Second, they saw class antagonism as a product of the introduction and expansion of western capitalism. They argued that the foreign domination of the economic sector prevented the formation of a national bourgeoisie and turned the petty bourgeoisie (the salariat in public and private sector and the self-employed in retail trade) into radicalisation. The petty bourgeoisie, along with the students, they argue, was able to make a ‘common cause with the workers and the peasants’ (53) by politicising the issues of land and workers’ exploitation. This prepared the ground for revolution of 1974. Similarly, Halliday and Molyneux (1981) saw contradictions between the advanced administrative system and the backward economy producing the conditions for the demise of the imperial state. Writing about the cause of the 1974 revolution, Halliday and Molyneux (1981) described imperial Ethiopia in terms of radical division between two economic sectors: the agricultural sector, which was attached to the pre-capitalist mode of production and administration system, and the industrialising sector represented by the expansion of industries in urban areas and large-scale commercial farms in some rural areas:

The state apparatus became a partial promoter of capitalist development and, at the same time, the site of a conflict between groups associated with this capitalist development and those associated with the pre-capitalist order. The gulf thus created within the state was to be more than a reflection of the conflicts within the socio-economic formation as a whole; it became the politically most acute contradiction within Ethiopian society, the

conflict that was to determine the fall of the *ancient regime* and the nature of the new post-revolutionary system (69–70).

Instead of immediate social conditions such as a wave of student protests and public demonstrations at a 50-per-cent oil price hike, corrupt officials and the infamous deadly famine in the north, the victims of which the emperor allegedly blamed for defaming his reputation by dying of famine (de Waal 1991: 57), Halliday and Molyneux (1981) argued that the insoluble contradictions in the state system produced a ‘revolution from above’ in 1974.

### *Changes to the structure of the local state*

It is important to pause here to give a little historical context to the genesis of the kebele in this particular period of history. In September 1974, the Derg<sup>38</sup> (which literary means committee) deposed Emperor Haile Selassie I, renamed itself ‘The Provisional Military Administrative Council’ and introduced a ‘declaration of socialist state’ on 20 December 1974 (Shinn & Ofcansky 2004). Following this, the Derg introduced a series of radical social, economic and political reforms including the redistribution of land to the peasants, abolishment of the monarchy and nationalisation of the economy. However, the most important transformation in the context of this study took place at the local level, where the Derg introduced rural peasant and urban dwellers’ associations known as *kebeles*. The kebele was first introduced by the *Development Through Cooperation, Enlightenment and Work*<sup>39</sup> campaign of 1975, known in Amharic as *Zemecha*, to facilitate rural land redistribution, villagisation and other programmes. The kebeles were later transformed, in 1976, into permanent local state administrative units

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<sup>38</sup> The Derg (the Geez word for ‘committee’), first formed by a group of junior military officers to investigate abuses of senior officers and grievances of the army, refers to the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) (Poluha and Elehu 2016).

<sup>39</sup> In the campaign, fifty thousand students and teachers were distributed over four hundred stations of the country to teach the rural population about socialism, to teach reading, writing and to explain the land reform (Donham 1999).

and charged with the crucial tasks of tax collection, security provision and the registration of houses, residents and marriages (Clapham 1988).

The kebele functioned not only as a civil administrative unit but also as a political structure and ‘an effective and efficient means for the state to keep a tight control of their citizens and to clamp down on any opposition activities’ (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003: 41). Through kebeles ‘neighbourhood defence squads were created, numbering from 15 to 25 armed individuals, and they became ruthless neighbourhood arms of the regime during the Red Terror. They patrolled their neighbourhood day and night and sometimes operated outside the control of central authorities ... they were responsible for a considerable amount of urban violence, torture, and intimidation’ (Keller 1991: 234). The kebele, which remains the basic and primary unit of local administration, constitutes the ethnographic site of this study.

### ***The Derg and the continuity of state idea***

One of the most interesting studies of the Ethiopian state focused on the continuity of the representation of a historical idea of the state. A number of writers have described how idea of an ancient Ethiopian state and its ‘message of domination’ was appropriated and portrayed by the Derg during the regime’s revolution period. In his book, *Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution*, Donald Donham (1999), for example, outlines how spectacular ritual and pageantry formed an essential part of the state’s authority. Donham tells of an occasion in 1984, for example, where the Derg organised a splendid celebration for the tenth anniversary of the revolution at a cost of US \$50 million dollars. One of the programmes involved a museum exhibit:

The exhibit was placed along a wall, in front of which a red carpet led viewers from one installation to the next. The first stop was the bones that American palaeontologist Donald Johanson had found in Hadar, Ethiopia, of an individual he named Lucy (after the Beatles’ song), supposedly the earliest evidence of our hominid ancestors ... After

[which] came photographs of stelae from the earliest civilisation in Ethiopia, Axum. After Axum came the famous rock church of Lalibela from the twelfth century. The exhibit continued to the battle of Adwa in 1896, in which Ethiopia defeated Italy and thereafter, alone in Africa, managed to remain politically independent during most of the twentieth century. Finally came the overthrow of Haile Sellassie in 1974 (1999: 14–15).

Clearly, progressing through the exhibition from the beginning to the end showed Ethiopia to be a cradle of humanity and attempted to sustain a powerful myth of a trans-historic idea of the state. Moreover, the Derg appropriated the symbolism of imperial power as integral to the idea of the ancient Ethiopian state idea. In this regard, Clapham (1988: 79) draws a parallel between Mengistu Haile Mariam and Haile Selassie:

In the time of the imperial regime, it was common to see pictures in which Father, Son and Holy Ghost, enthroned in the clouds, projected a beam of light onto the emperor (symbolically situated at mid-point between heaven and earth), who in turn diffused it to a waiting people. At the tenth anniversary celebrations [of the Ethiopian revolution] along with the official decorations provided by the North Koreans, it was also possible to find homemade tributes in which the gift of grace, embodied in a celestial trinity of Marx, Engels and Lenin, similarly descended to the graceful masses by way of Megistu Haile-Mariam.

Similarly, David Korn (1986: 107), who was in charge of the American embassy in Addis Ababa at the time, observed:

... in his rare public appearances in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian leader sits on a kind of throne, a red velvet upholstered gold-lacquered chair emplaced above and in front of the less ornate seats provided for the other senior figures of the regime. In these and in other

ways, Mengistu Haile Mariam can be looked upon as a monarch, an emperor, a successor to Haile Selassie and to Menelik.

In an attempt to project himself as a champion of Ethiopian unity (guardian of the ancient Ethiopian state idea), Paul Henze (2000) tells us that Mengistu compared himself to the fiery 18<sup>th</sup>-century Emperor Tewodros II, who initiated the unification of the country following its fragmentation by provincial warlords. I. M. Lewis (1983) also commented that Mengistu's penchant for pomp and public spectacle, focused on the statue of Menelik, was 'hardly accidental' but rather a projection of equivalence with his 'illustrious predecessor, the founder of the expanded Ethiopian empire'. More generally, these spectacles, through their performance and cultural projection of power and tradition, stress the continuity of the idea of the historic Ethiopian state.

To sum up, it seems thus far that at the centre of Ethiopian studies about the state, society and governance lies the question of whether we have to conceptualise the state in terms of a broad historical continuum of some two thousand years or whether it has to be understood as being a 'dependent colonial' entity carved out to meet European imperial interest or as a set of institutions dominated by class and ethnic interests and yet separate from and acting upon society. Although extremely rich and interesting, these studies have offered only a top-down analysis of the state in Ethiopia. They pay little attention to local governance practices, or to how the people interact and negotiate with the state authority. In their attempt to historicise the Ethiopian state, they have become susceptible to sweeping generalisations and, as a consequence, conceal dispersed and localised patterns of governance practices.

### ***Centre-periphery approach***

A milestone in Ethiopian state studies was the frontier, centre-periphery approach. This approach, according to Donald Donham (1986: 4), 'connects centre to periphery, and so

provides a way of linking the history and social anthropology'. Scholars working within this framework define the Ethiopian centre as the foci of state power which are constituted through the cultural idioms of Orthodox Christian followers of the Amharic- and Tigrinya -speaking groups of highland Ethiopia. The periphery, on the other hand, is seen to be non-Abyssinian groups who were identified in terms of their physical proximity to the capital, Addis Ababa, as a nodal point of communication, their level of incorporation to the state structure and their degree of self-identification with the 'Greater Ethiopia' myth (Clapham 2002a). This cleavage is understood to be the most important defining feature of the Ethiopian state and history. Donald Donham (1986), for instance, wrote that the centre-periphery constitutes:

... the secret of modern Ethiopian history. It has often been mentioned that the poorest peasant from the north considered himself superior to any southerner. This cultural expression was not just the result of primordial sentiments; it was underpinned by the material inequalities created in the new Ethiopia (24).

However, Donald Donham (2002) also wrote that with the secession of Eritrea and a large number of Ethiopians being abroad, the shape of the Ethiopian space has shifted from 'a hierarchical arrangement of cores and peripheries', a political dynamic which 'remained stable for roughly three-quarters of a century' until the 1974 revolution, into 'a more open series of interactions drawing upon partially shared and intersecting 'ethnoscapes' of the imagination' (2). He suggested James Scott's concept of 'mapping' as an alternative approach to the study of the state.

Christopher Clapham (2002b) made use of this concept and provided a cogent analysis on how Haile Selassie and the *Derg* and EPRDF regimes attempted to spatially reconstitute the Ethiopian state. He coined the concept of 'encadrement' or 'incorporation into structures of control' to explain how, for instance, the *Derg* regime controlled its territory through land distribution, villagisation, state farms and other projects.

The centre-periphery perspective, however, gained renewed interest following the publication of Markakis's (2011) book *Ethiopia: the last two frontiers*. In this book, Markakis argues that instead of geography, the centre should be seen in terms of a monopoly over power and the state apparatus, and the periphery in terms of a relative absence of it. He identifies two frontiers in the periphery: the highland periphery and the lowland periphery. While the Ethiopian state is successful, he argues, in both politically and economically integrating the highland periphery, the 'integration process has barely begun' in the lowland periphery:

... neither the civil code nor the penal codes of the state have much currency here, every man is armed, no one pays taxes and the people rely on themselves and traditional leaders for justice ... the people subsist on the side of the state, outside the national economy, cut off from highland society and culture, and at the whim of a political system whose periodic dramatic swings they scarcely comprehend (16–17).

Underlying this conceptualisation and characterisation seems to be an understanding of the state in terms of the existence of bureaucratic institutions. However, as Nielsen (2007) pointed out, in the case of Mozambique, local understandings of state exist even in the relative absence of government institutions. This approach therefore fails to recognise that the state is more than a physical political structure. Moreover, in most of the Ethiopian peripheries the absence of government institutions has historically not been constraining the government from collecting taxes and from making its presence felt through recurrent military incursions (Hagmann and Korf 2012).

All in all, the centre-periphery approach, from the point of view of this study, is fraught with the problem of what Joel Migdal (2001: 199) termed the 'beachhead imagery', an analytical construct in which a 'Great tradition' or the centre – the beachhead of change – is assumed to impose its will over the periphery. People at the periphery are depicted as lacking agency and

only passive ‘... recipients of commands and of beliefs which they do not themselves create or cause to be diffused, and of those who are lower in the distribution or allocation of rewards, dignities, facilities, etc.’ (Shils 1982: 59). In other words, the relationship between the centre and the periphery is seen only in terms of a relationship of control, domination or isolation.

### **The Borana in the academic literature**

Outside the rubric of the centre-periphery approach, there is a wealth of literature documenting the systems of livelihood and the social and political organisation of the people of south Ethiopia (see, among others, Asmerom 1973; Baxter and Triulzi 1996; Donham 1999; Bassi 2005; Dereje 2011). This section focuses specifically on the literature on the Borana, as a contextual backdrop to the empirical chapters. I do not intend here, however, to offer an exhaustive account of the literature. I have chosen instead to very briefly review the literature that highlights the general themes of governance and livelihood in Borana. Further background to the context of the historical dynamics and long-term processes of state territorialisation efforts in the Borana is provided in Chapter 9.

The Borana have been described variously as peripheral, marginalised and even isolated people (see Fecadu 1994; Markakis 2011) or as maintaining distinctive traditional ways of life (Asmarom 1973). State discourses have portrayed their system of production as backward and as a factor contributing to environmental degradation (see in Crane 2013; Butler 2010). By contrast, with the rising importance of the international rhetoric of natural resource management, the Borana are viewed as stewards of the environment, as models for sustainable community-based natural resource management systems (see in Watson 2003; Bassi 2010).

There is, however, a vast and burgeoning body of literature that explores the social, political and economic changes in Borana, focusing especially on the ways in which different political regimes have dealt with the pastoralists and their environment (see, for



example, Coppock 1994; Helland 1977; Hogg 1992, 1997; Boku 2008). Scholars see a pastoral way of life, their systems of social organisation and resource management increasingly undermined by state planned development policies (Hogg 1997; Galaty 1999; Boku 2008). For example, much has been written about how changes associated with the introduction of commercial ranches in the late 1960s and state ranches in the 1970s set in motion the processes of rangeland privatisation and changes in the customary resource tenure of the Borana (Hogg 1990; Oba 1998; Boku 2008). Another focus of discussion in the literature in Borana has centred on the realignment of administrative boundaries. Many scholars have detailed how the introduction of kebeles has weakened and sidelined the traditional resource management system of the Borana (Oba 1998). Several studies highlight how ethnic-based decentralisation that imposed new boundaries altered the ways in which resources such as grazing lands and water wells are owned and managed as common property (Helland 2002; Oba 1998; Boku 2008).

These studies illuminate our understanding of how different political regimes exert intrusive and regulative power in borderland societies and reveal important issues concerning the systems of extractive power relations. The social and political dynamic created by development interventions and internal administrative boundaries, as I demonstrate in Chapter 9, has larger implications for the realignment of state-society relations. However, in focusing on state-level activities and how local settings have been altered by larger political and economic contexts and processes, these studies do not tell us much about the everyday governance practices that involve non-state actors and pastoralists. They pay little attention to the importance of the involvement of NGOs in altering the local social and environmental landscape, the ways in which pastoral populations interact and negotiate with state and non-state authorities and how this feeds into state formation.

In this thesis, I will explore how the governance practices of the state are facilitated by NGOs, informal structures and are embedded in and shaped by local practice. In so doing, I underscore how change (and hence governance and power relations) in the Borana, as central as state interventions and its institutions are, does not always emerge from a single source. Here it is important to note that I do not suggest that these scholars consider the state and other formal decision-making structures as the main spheres through which governance and power are exercised in Borana. On the contrary, most of them espouse analysis based in terms of the complex interface of customary, state and non-state institutions and the changing political, economic and social alignments which shape the relations between pastoralists and the state. For example, Marco Bassi (1997) and Richard Hogg (1992) brought to our attention the significance of the conduct of international actors and NGOs on local relations of power and on the politics of space. Bassi (1997), for example, forcefully demonstrated how the United Nations High Commission for Refugees was involved in the ‘demographic politics of space’<sup>40</sup> by facilitating the resettlement of refugees into the Boranaland. In a recent article, Bassi (2010) highlighted attempts by international development initiatives to bring the state and customary structures together through rhetoric that promotes the need to integrate the customary institutions within modern systems of governance and by arranging local-scale meetings between pastoralists and state representatives. This thesis stresses the significance of NGOs and other non-state actors in reconfiguring the local pastoral physical and social landscape. It advances this insight by looking ethnographically at how the involvement of NGOs in development practices promoted sedentarisation and hence the creation of a ‘society of the state’ (Kapferer and Bertelsen 2009).

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<sup>40</sup> Bassi defined this as ‘the planned attempt to gain control over land by means of forced or voluntary migration or by any demographic strategy’ (2010: 241).

In some of the more recent literature, explicit concern has been expressed regarding the issue of the relationships between development agencies and customary institutions in Borana. One study in this regard is Elizabeth Watson's (2003) investigation into the fragile partnership of pastoralists and international NGOs and development agencies. She warns against oversimplifying local institutions for the benefit of natural resource management, pointing out their deep embeddedness in other social relations.

Other recent literature on Borana has focused on the dynamics of the nature of the relationship and interaction between state and customary institutions. Sarah Lister (2004) examined the extent to which 'interaction between formal and traditional systems mediates between citizen interests and policy outcomes, and thus fulfils a "representation" function'. Similarly, Marco Bassi (2010: 222) discusses the 'multifaceted attempt to co-opt customary institutions and community elders' by the state. This has involved instrumental deployment of customary institutions for development purposes and conflict resolution.

This thesis seeks to supplement the work carried out by these scholars, looking at the contingency of the formal/traditional split and the entanglement of the two through mutual recognition and protection. In so doing, I pay attention to the potential effects of the presence and conduct of state agents, NGO workers and the ways in which this contributes to state imagination. I demonstrate the contradictions, interstition and aspects of negotiation between state agents, NGO workers and customary leaders, in addition to the diversity of discourses employed by various actors in the everyday production of the state.

Finally, an extensive body of research on Borana pastoralists has examined the fragility of pastoralism, poverty and livelihood security. In recent years a debate has emerged around the viability of pastoral systems in Borana as well as in the wider region of the Horn of Africa. Scholars widely agree that wealth and welfare among pastoralists are in decline. But

they differ in the nature of their concern: some advance the argument that the problem lies with the existence of ‘too many people, too few livestock’ (Sandford 2006). Hence, they seek to address the problem by looking at exit options such as expanding alternative livelihood-generating activities while others focus on ‘limiting the number of people who make a living from pastoral livestock production’ (Helland 2010) through long-term capacity building (Devereaux and Scoones 2006). On the other hand, authors like Catley (2010) focus on the underlying politics in the degradation of pastoralist systems and the changing forms of access to environmental resources. Others advance solutions that are focused on the restoration and strengthening of customary governance for the management of natural resources (see Homann and Rischkowsky 2008).

These studies are extremely rich and provide clues to the changing nature and complexity of pastoralist systems. However, what is significant for this study is not the viability and future of pastoralist systems or resource governance, but rather the ways in which the processes of change are being affected, how practices of governance are articulated at the interface of multiple actors and how this feeds into the project of state formation. I highlight the internally diverse nature of the local population in terms of how individuals view the state and the multiple strategies that they devise to cope with their changing circumstances (Long 1990: 8) in order to secure livelihood. The thesis situates the process of transformation in pastoralism within the processes of state formation which, in turn, is part of the emergence of many of the national-level practices that have to do with expansion of the developmental state.

### *Abyssinian culture and state formation*

Some of the most detailed studies about Ethiopia have focused on political culture, including the classic works of Donald Levine (1965a, 1965b, 2000) and Allan Hoben (1970). While scholars working within this approach, as I demonstrate below, have not explicitly theorised

the state, they do describe the political culture around which the Ethiopian state is organised and the mechanisms and system of meaning through which ordinary people make sense of politics, social relations and state institutions.

In what follows I elaborate on the ideas of Donald Levine. I have chosen to focus on Levine because of his substantial influence on those working on Ethiopian politics, society and history. In his article *Ethiopia: Identity, Authority, and Realism* (1965b), Levine outlined the cultural conditions that inform political life in North Ethiopia. He begins with the argument that since Ethiopia had for long been ruled by the Amhara, any attempt to understand its politics should start with the ‘fact of Amhara dominance’ (248). He states:

... the ideas, symbols, and values which govern Ethiopian politics are drawn from Amhara culture. The national politics of Ethiopia have on the whole been shaped in accordance to what may be called *Amhara political culture* ...

He points to three features that define the Amhara political culture: ‘orientation to authority, to human nature and to polity’ which, he believes, ‘have changed very little over the centuries<sup>41</sup>’. On the first component, authority, as an essential defining character of the Amhara political culture, Levine (1965b: 250) wrote:

... the complex of beliefs, symbols and values regarding authority constitute a key component of Amhara political culture. Throughout, Amhara culture appears the motif that authority as such is good: indispensable for the well-being of society and worthy of unremitting deference, obeisance, and praise. Every aspect of Amhara social life is anchored in some sort of relationship to authority figures, and the absence of such a relationship evokes feelings of incompleteness and malaise.

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<sup>41</sup> It should be noted that Levine wrote this in 1965 and he would probably not make the same comment in the context of current circumstances.

He draws our attention to the pervasiveness of hierarchy in a whole range of social contexts, including in family relations – manners during mealtimes, obedience to parental authority, in children’s playing groups (dominated by the eldest), school discipline and gestures of respect to superiors, etc. (250–252). For Levine, the exercise of authority in social and family relationships in the Amhara society resembles that found in institutional contexts: ‘the household is less a family unit than it is a vertically ordered set of status-roles’ (2000: 123). He describes the nature of life in Amhara society as ‘highly political in that the wielding of authority is a basic and pervasive feature of their social relationships’ (1965b: 251).

The second component has to do with the Amhara conception of human nature, which Levine characterised as ‘realistic humanism’. He argues that the Amhara view of human nature is ‘radically unegalitarian’ (257). This, Levine argues, is reinforced by the Amhara fatalistic conception of the universe. He argues that *Edel*, or fate, which has to be accepted, is tethered to authority (divine) and conceived of as more important than human effort. This, according to Levine, buttresses ‘a disposition to respect and obey figures of authority’ (261). The wider political implication, he emphasised, is that ‘society no more than human nature is to be made the object of systematic efforts to apply transcendent principles or to transform the status quo’ and the process of governing becomes ‘to accept such conflicts and strains as exist and to work, by skilful manipulation, adjudication, and occasional coercion, to maintain a minimum of order and retributive justice’ (261).

Finally, Levine draws attention to national politics by referring to the Amhara culture as placing insignificant value on ‘the notion of civil community’ (262). Thus, social cohesion is maintained by a ‘sharing of common religious, territorial and linguistic identifications’ and ‘subordination to individual authority figures’ (262). On the other hand, Levine argues, national sentiment is tied to the tradition of the monarch and that of the church. Levine argues that, taken together, the three elements, representing the Amhara political culture, ‘furthered the

establishment of legitimate national government’ but also obstructed its ‘rationalisation’ and ‘affected both positively and negatively the receptivity to social change.’ (271).

Levine has helpfully identified two aspects that characterises political culture in North Ethiopia: the pervasiveness of hierarchy and complex of beliefs, symbols and values regarding authority. However, his analysis of the belief system fails to take into account complex relational principles and ideas that shape power relations and hierarchical transactions.

Since the publication of his work, echoes of Levine’s analysis of Ethiopian politics and society are noticeable in various early political and cultural studies. One notable example comes from Donald Donham (1986: 4),<sup>42</sup> who saw the Abyssinian (Amhara and Tigray) sociocultural formation of the ‘... the pre-nineteenth-century period [as] the basis for the new Ethiopian state’. Donham (1986) sought to describe the Ethiopian state in terms of a system of surplus extraction that, he believes, defines the centre-periphery assemblage, building on the Abyssinian notions of domination, constraint and extraction. He wrote:

The very word in Amharic for nobility, *mekwannint*, derives indirectly from the verb *konene* which means to discipline, to constrain, to inflict pain. The word for lord, *melkenya*, derives indirectly from the verb *meleke* meaning variously to vanquish, to govern, to expropriate. The notion of extraction in particular was evident in the phrase commonly used to describe the appointment of lords to fiefs: they were sent to eat their respective countries (6).

Donham went on to explain what he described as the ‘unadorned system of force and extraction’ (6) that imbues the imperial Ethiopian state system:

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<sup>42</sup> Donald Donham relies prominently on the works of Donald Levine. He also cites accounts of early European travellers to substantiate his analysis.

The notion of constraint and extraction to prevent ‘satisfaction’ seems to have pervaded the major inequalities in Abyssinian society: the relation between God and his Orthodox Christian believers, that between lords and their following, and finally between husband-father and their wives and children. With regard to the first, fasting was and is the symbol of adherence to Ethiopian Orthodox faith. Its centrality can be appreciated when fasting is seen as God’s extraction designed to constrain sinful human nature, to keep believers in line, and to prevent the ‘satisfaction’ that encourages people to take more than they have a right to. The relationship between lord and their following was seen in much the same light; in fact, the word for the lord’s demesne, the field worked by the *corvee* labour of his peasants, was *hudad*, the same word for the difficult and long Lenten fast. Finally, husband-fathers played the same role of disciplining their wives and children. According to a common saying: *setinna ahiya yale dula aykenam* (‘A woman and a donkey can’t be kept straight without the stick’) (1986: 6).

In Donham’s analysis, the hierarchical relations that frame the Abyssinian society are ordered, based on principles of domination and extraction, into a whole. In this formulation, the whole is the phenomenological world – that is, God’s desire of extracting sinful human nature – and the social and political system is simply its material expression. In other words, the whole contains within it and serves as the basis upon which the distinction of political and social rank and hierarchy is constituted.

Recently, Teferi Adem (2004) explored the gaps between the objectives of the national agricultural extension programmes and the reality of their implementation in Wollo through the lens of ‘national political culture’ (85). Teferi, building his analysis largely on Levine, argued that the problem of implementing extension programmes was complicated by the pervasiveness of cultural dispositions, such as habits of suspicion and distrust, a masculine and militaristic ethos and the tendency of national leaders to import foreign ideologies and



development programmes. Here there remained the tendency to assume the existence of certain cultural dispositions and national political culture, rather than testing for it, implying the nature of political culture is the same everywhere.

Other contemporary scholarship has drawn attention to the complex overlap and interface between traditional values and formal institutions. Abbink (2006: 176), for instance, offers an interesting perspective on the 2005 elections and their aftermath. He particularly sought to illuminate ‘Ethiopian political culture in the light of neo-patrimonial theory ... emphasizing the continued need to reconceptualise the analysis of politics in Ethiopia, away from the formal political science ... towards a view of politics in more cultural terms, taking into account ethnic/kinship networks, local conceptions and psychologies of power, the role of ideology, and (informal) business interests’. In so doing he argued that formal institutions in Ethiopia are deeply embedded in informal power networks.

The study of political culture was given a different theoretical shape by Sarah Vaughan and Kjetil Tronvoll (2003), who, using Barnes’ theory of power, moved beyond the ‘waxen form of politics in Ethiopia, to illuminate its “golden” alternate [i.e.] the relations and systems of power and convention which underpin and give it life and meaning’. They treat power as ‘both function and constitutive feature of the interaction of a social collective’ (25). In so doing, they demonstrated the social processes by which power relations are rooted in the system of social networks.

This thesis explores this process and refines these insights by exploring the complex process by which hierarchy, culture and ‘counter-conduct’ (Foucault 2007) intersect. At the same time as I recognise the importance of the hierarchical conception of authority in North Ethiopia, I also suggest that our theoretical frameworks for studying power relations, authority and the state in Ethiopia need to take more account of resistance and the relational

principles which are embedded in the cultural conception of hierarchy. Ethiopian history is replete with resistance, including peasant revolts (Gebru 1996), banditry (Crummey 1986), armed resistance (Young 1997) and other everyday forms of resistance such as oral poetry (see Getie 1999). It seems to be necessary to ask ourselves the questions of how does one account for ‘the endless succession of revolts, part peasant rebellion, part feudal *jacqueries*, repressed in one place only to break out in another’ (Chojnacki 1993: 61)? How does one harmonise ‘unremitting deference’ (Levine 1965b: 250) to authority and the pervasiveness of resistance? What does the pervasive presence of resistance tell us about the nature of power relations and the state in northern Ethiopia?

Messay Kebede (1999) offers us a clue to the nexus of power and resistance: i.e., how ‘the art of being governed’ and ‘the will not to be governed’ (Foucault 2007) are conceptualised in traditional Ethiopia. Writing about land tenure and governance, he makes a distinction between peasant protest that arises due to the abuse of governors and ‘peasant rebellion emerging from deep discontent with the system itself’. He argues that the ‘latter never occurred in Ethiopia, the former was frequent’ (Messay 1999: 171). An important implication of this insight is that people take the land tenure and hierarchical system of authority for granted, whereas individual actors occupying a position of authority are subjected to ‘critical attitude’ (Foucault 2007) and resistance. In this regard, Messay further tells us that in traditional Ethiopia patrons are culturally expected to be ‘beneficent for the sake of justice, in the name of clientship’ and those who refuse to do so end up either betrayed or abandoned. However, the patron is not expected to be beneficent on the basis of the principle of equality because ‘the high respect for social hierarchy empties justice of the notion of equality’ (203). Hierarchy is thus seen to represent the natural order of things. However, at the same time, the bases of power and the legitimacy of leaders are not defined by their position within the hierarchy but rather in how people imagine good patrons and

good relations with them ought to be and what obligations they think these relations entail. Hence hierarchy, as I demonstrate in Chapter 7, is encompassed by cultural and religious values and the notion that the higher one (God, *mengist*, husband, etc.) encompasses the lower one (the people, family, etc.) in terms of being both more powerful and more responsible. The thesis further expands these insights by exploring the myriad ways in which *mengist* vis-à-vis local officials are culturally constructed in Degga in relation to discourses of development and corruption.

The discussion so far allows us to see the ways in which power is entailed in culture. Here the distinction the Comaroffs (1991) make between hegemony and ideology is instructive; the former is the nonagentive and hidden face of power and the latter is the agentive face of power that refers to highly articulated world views and system of meanings within a cultural field. To ground these ideas in the case at hand, the values that encompass hierarchy constitute the agentive face of power in culture (i.e. ideology which is a self-conscious systems of values and hence contestable), whereas hierarchy constitutes the non-agentive aspects of power in culture which people take for granted as natural. Thus, the people and principles (ideologies, value systems) that are embedded in unequal relations of power are subject to resistance while hierarchy or the system that underpins it operates unnoticed. Hence, the concept of culture used in the thesis is tied to seeing culture in terms of power relations. Culture can thus be understood as ‘the space of signifying practice, the semantic ground on which human beings seek to construct and represent themselves and others - and, hence, society and history’ (Comaroffs 1991: 21). It is a field in which ‘critical attitude’ (Foucault 2007) is formed, and domination and resistance take place.

In Chapter 7, I will demonstrate how critical discourse is articulated in corruption discourses and through the religious metaphors and idioms which define the roles and

obligations involved in governance. It informs the ways in which people both understand hierarchy and experience and image the state.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to summarise several decades of discussion about the state and society in Ethiopia by drawing on a wide range of academic fields. One important question that emerges from the literature is whether one can describe the state without being drawn into an analysis of a politically constructed and idealised image of the state whose origins lie in the state itself. In the view of this study, the literature on the Ethiopian state, especially ‘the great tradition’ and ethno-nationalist perspectives, are partly categories of thought produced and imposed by successive political regimes. Therefore, in seeking to escape such a problem, the thesis heeds Bourdieu’s (1999: 53) caveat and attempts to avoid ‘...the risk of taking over (or being taken over by) a thought of the state, that is, of applying to the state categories of thought produced and guaranteed by the state and hence to misrecognize its most profound truth’.

The literature concerned with an understanding of the history of the Ethiopian state is, on the other hand, quiet about the nature of relations between state and society at the local level. This is partly because of the absence of colonial rule in Ethiopia through which anthropology contributed immensely to the understanding of practices of governance in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa (James 1990). Recent anthropological writings are also comparatively biased towards what is described as ‘peripheral’ parts of the Ethiopian state and rarely focus on the broader question of local governance practices in relation to the concept of the state. By contrast, as I have highlighted in this chapter, the ‘core area’ is described largely in terms of Levine’s classic work on the Amhara political culture. This thesis, in an explicit endeavour to counter this impasse, attempts an ethnographic account of the Ethiopian state both in the so-called core and periphery areas, with a special emphasis on the former.

Taken together, the state in Ethiopia is largely viewed in the literature as a centralised apparatus of power which acts upon society in the interest of one or another class, world power or ethnic group. Viewed from an anthropological perspective, these approaches provide us with a limited grasp of the nature of the state in Ethiopia. It is therefore imperative in studying the state in sub-Saharan Africa in general, and in Ethiopia in particular, in Foucault's (1980: 121) words, 'to cut off the King's head' in favour of examining the state from below. The remainder of this thesis attempts such an analysis in order to empirically demonstrate the nature of the state as it is experienced and lived by local people in Ethiopia.

## Chapter 5

### The production of hierarchy and state spectacle

In undertaking fieldwork in West Gojjam, I had to go on a bureaucratic pilgrimage, which started within the bureaucratic labyrinth of the regional state administration, and proceeded through the lower level structures (woreda and kebele administrations) to request the various permissions required (for fieldwork, to attend meetings and obtain access to official documents), and to arrange interviews with officials. During my journey, I met with a number of people, some multiple times, at different layers of the state bureaucracy, who were either waiting for officials to arrive, for their papers to be signed or for their work to be completed. Curious about the odds of running into some of them in different offices, I would sometimes casually enquire about their business. Most would tell me that they were waiting for applications for job transfers, land realignments and title deeds, business licences, etc., being shunted from one official to another, one office to another, one government department to another. These are regular features in the day-to-day life of the state and the conditions within which people conduct their daily lives. From the point of view of my interlocutors, the bureaucratic pilgrimage signifies not only the ominous uncertainty of the outcome of their applications but also the authority of the officials and the power of *mengist* to make them wait and disrupt their daily lives. This was captured, in particular, by expressions such as *gezeyen belut* (they ‘eat up’ my time), *gezeyen akatelut* (they wasted my time), and *agulalugne* (they ruin my day). This is the contextual field within which people encounter the state, and the way in which power and hierarchy are generated.

In this chapter, I study the institution of the kebele and elaborate on the performative dimension of power and the everyday formation of the state. Specifically, I attempt to uncover the manner in which state hierarchy is reproduced through mundane bureaucratic practices. In

so doing, I argue that the state is not an object with a natural hierarchy but rather a product of practices that is brought into existence through spatial and scalar representations and a regularised set of bureaucratic practices (such as data collection), encounters (between the governors and the governed) and perpetual institutional rites (such as meetings) that are ceaselessly performed and thereby durably institutionalised.

The chapter is divided into three sections. First, I discuss the constitution of the kebele. Here, I examine the ways in which the state comes to be represented as a centre of superior authority by the spatial and vertical organisation of its workforce and through the standard bureaucratic devices of office partitioning and the presence or lack of material paraphernalia such as computers and stationery. I also discuss how these hierarchies become embedded in everyday modes of interaction among state functionaries. Next, I further explore how hierarchies become routinised through everyday encounters between state officials – the kebele chairman and kebele manager – and local people. In the final section I will show how meetings, which are a key feature of the corpus of everyday bureaucratic rituals, constitute state authority. To illustrate this, I will analyse both administrative and public meetings held in Degga during the course of my research.

## **5.1. The constitution of the kebele**

### ***Politicians***

The kebele is staffed by politicians and civil servants. Politicians such as the kebele chairman, the security issues (militia) head, committee members<sup>43</sup> and the party leader, etc. are members of the kebele council<sup>44</sup> who all are elected every five years. The kebele council, and thus key

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<sup>43</sup> There are numerous committees both at the kebele and sub-kebele levels. These include kebele land use and administration committee, sub-kebele land arbitration committee, security affairs committee and women's affairs committee.

<sup>44</sup> The council is the legislative body of the kebele. It is composed of 200 elected members.

executive positions, is dominated by model farmers – a class of largely semi-educated, local notables who maintain relatively significant land holdings and wealth. They are chosen, according to the woreda administrator, for their ‘leadership qualities, progressive and developmental outlook’ and for their ‘self-made wealth’.<sup>45</sup> In my interactions with the model farmers, they invariably described themselves as ‘hard-working’, ‘developmental’<sup>46</sup> and ‘entrepreneurial’<sup>47</sup>, attributing their political power to their success in farming and to their work ethic. In contrast, they described ordinary residents by pointing out their ‘lack of discipline of work’, ‘laziness’<sup>48</sup>, ‘lack of receptivity to change’<sup>49</sup> and ‘anti-development mentality’.<sup>50</sup>

Model farmers are commonly linked to privilege, power and money. They are widely believed to have reaped disproportionately the benefits of the expansion of the developmental state. They are the first to exploit state resources such as improved varieties of seeds and chemical fertilisers and to take advantage of modern irrigation technologies and wheat procurement schemes (see Chapters 6 and 7).<sup>51</sup> This brought about increased agricultural yields, a higher rate of return from farming, enabling them to accumulate further wealth and consolidate their influence. Some of these model farmers diversified into non-agricultural activities, such as grinding mills, shops and timber trading.

Model farmers are also at the forefront of campaigns for the implementation of policies, especially on agricultural productivity and transformation and the promotion of cooperatives. They are also instrumental in the promotion of ‘rational’ discourses on human development in

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<sup>45</sup> Interview, woreda administrator, November 2014.

<sup>46</sup> Interview, model farmer and senior kebele official#1, October 2014.

<sup>47</sup> Interview, model farmer#2, September 2014.

<sup>48</sup> Interview, model farmer#3, September 2014.

<sup>49</sup> Interview, model farmer and kebele council member#1, October 2014.

<sup>50</sup> Interview, model farmer and senior kebele official#4, October 2014.

<sup>51</sup> See also Lefort (2015) on this point.



relation to hygiene, birth and disease control and the importance of modern education. They enjoy the patronage of the party, which they assist by maintaining grassroots support from peasants and also by increasing the reach of the state into every aspect of the lives of the people.

In Degga model farmers exercise power in two interlinked ways: they are embedded in the local tier of the state (kebele) bureaucracy and serve as the local executors of national policies, but are also linked through their own local networks of influence to the wider social field (see Chapter 8). The model farmer status therefore helps the national leadership to bind these politically important elites and kebele residents to the state, while also hierarchically arranging them into classes and political relations based on status and power. The rise of model farmers reveals the everyday processes of state formation, highlighting how political actors embed the kebele residents through local elites, while at the same time, as I demonstrate below, attempting to enact and legitimise the state as an autonomous actor standing above and outside local social and class relations of power.

### *Civil servants*

On the other hand, civil servants – health extension workers, development agents (DAs), teachers, land administration experts and community police officers – are professionals who enter government service via training at different state and private colleges. While the kebele politicians express their function regarding ‘governance’, ‘authority’, ‘decision-making’, ‘assessing needs’ and ‘annual planning’, civil servants describe their work in terms of ‘development’ and ‘implementing policies’.<sup>52</sup>

Unlike the kebele politicians, no civil servants hail from the local population. Most commonly, they are initially posted by the woreda administration in remote rural kebeles before

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<sup>52</sup> Interviews with kebele chairman, Degga, October 2014; council speaker, Degga, October 2014; security committee head, Degga, November 2014; two DAs (DA#5 and DA #6), Degga, October 2014; and health extension worker#7, Degga, October 2014.

making slow progress in the district spatial hierarchy. They are promoted, according to seniority and discipline, from kebele to kebele, as they circle closer to the woreda town, occupying the same post for as little as two years and sometimes for as long as eight. The most junior civil servants, underperformers and ‘troublemakers’ are posted to the most distant kebeles in the district. Only the most servile, the most senior and those with the strongest connections to the kebele and district officials are posted in urban centres. Few are able to rise up the hierarchical ladder through education and party political loyalty.

Clearly, the bureaucratic civil service posting/transfer system is one of the key instruments through which the state comes to be re/produced as a ‘vertically encompassing’ (Ferguson and Gupta 2002) singular entity. It hierarchically arranges spaces as dominant, regional and marginal, with Addis Ababa being dominant and Degga being marginal. Salary scales differ according to individuals’ positions within the spatial hierarchy of the state, with a higher position being paid on a higher scale than those below. Higher positions also provide civil servants with access to government vehicles, spacious private offices, the opportunity to engage in more desk-based work than fieldwork, and the power to inspect and blame failures on those ‘below’ them in the hierarchy.

By contrast, positions lower down the spatial hierarchy of the state are associated with a low salary, poor working conditions and low self-esteem. One DA, for instance, lamented his posting in Degga as ‘incarceration’. He said, ‘there is no electricity for TV. The only form of entertainment is chatting with the local people and listening to the radio.’ Similarly, a health worker said her posting in Degga was ‘strenuous’ and expressed her desire to move up in the state hierarchy because, she said, ‘you do less work and get more money’. Such discourses construct the local as a marginal space in the state system, reaffirming the verticality of the state.

This spatial ordering on a national scale is the foundation of the material order of the kebele bureaucracy. In other words, the conditions that constitute the state as a 'vertically encompassing' entity are reproduced at the scale of the kebele through the division of office spaces and other resources, as I demonstrate below.

### *The material production of hierarchy*

Status distinction among state functionaries in Degga, as in bureaucracies all over the world, is demarcated through office and desk size and the presence or lack of material paraphernalia (e.g. stationery, computer, etc.). The superiority of the chairman in the kebele hierarchy, for instance, is demonstrated by him being the only person to have a separate office of his own, which is graced by the presence of an imposing desk and several audience chairs. During my visits to the chairman's office, his desk was covered with an assortment of papers in plastic trays, and with pens, pencils, clips, notepads and coloured markers in plastic tubes. There were also a number of awards for excellence in agricultural productivity from the regional government, proudly displayed on the desk. On the wall, directly behind his chair, was a photograph of the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi displayed in such a way as to powerfully engage visitors in creating a visual connection between the chairman and the picture. The walls on the right were lined with metal cabinets containing loose files stacked in cardboard sheets. The distinctive status of the only desktop computer in the kebele was indicated by its placement in the chairman's room. The computer was treated as a prized object. Throughout the course of my fieldwork, it was carefully wrapped in a plastic bag to protect it from the depredations of dust, and strictly off limits to junior civil servants. All works were carried out on paper.

In contrast to the chairman's office, the kebele manager and the party chairman occupied an adjacent room where they sit behind less majestic-looking wooden desks. The room also contained few chairs for visitors, as well as cupboards for storing documents.

The community police officer, land administration committee chair, and land administration expert all shared one room. This 'office' contained neither desks nor cabinets/cupboards. Instead, a wobbly bench stretched into the middle of the room, where a pile of dust-covered files and EPRDF 'Revolutionary Democracy' newspapers lay on the floor.

DAs were crammed into a room which contained three desks and five chairs. Similarly, the health extension workers shared a single room in which most of the space was taken up by chairs and desks. Although the room was not large enough to accommodate more than one person, it was shared by four.

The walls of the offices occupied by the DAs and health extension workers were covered with graphs, charts and tables giving details about the total number of households included in the health and agriculture extension package programmes, a list of the variety of crops that grow in the kebele and annual plans, etc. While this display certainly represented the data-gathering element of civil service work, it also symbolised professional expertise and authority. This meant displaying knowledge, professional capability and performance that highlights their distinction as servants from politicians, which gives them a specific professional identity within the bureaucracy.

The most visible material distinctions among employees were the toilet facilities. Senior kebele and visiting officials have their own separate toilet. Keys to this toilet were held only by the kebele manager and the kebele and party chairpersons. The other employees shared two common toilets which were kept in an abysmal condition and during the course of the research I did not witness them being cleaned.

Overall, the rank and status of officials at each level of the hierarchy are marked by the kinds and types of access they have to toilet facilities. In contrast to kebele senior officials, for

instance, the woreda administrator has a toilet for himself, and I observed high-level regional officials who had access to toilets from the interior of their offices.

From the discussion so far, we can identify two ways through which state ‘spatial and scalar hierarchies’ (Ferguson and Gupta 2002: 119) comes to be re/produced. First, the vertical spatial organisation of the government workforce according to seniority and discipline is crucial to the production of an image of a centralised national state. This represents the state as a pyramidal structure with several different levels, where one level (the higher) encompasses the other (the lower) within an ordered hierarchy. Second, the spatial division of office spaces and the presence or lack of material paraphernalia such as stationery and computer constantly invokes the positions of junior and senior officials. The result is a reified hierarchical conception of the state. Consequently, as I demonstrate below, this enunciates the language and manner in which different modes of interactions and transactions occur among state functionaries.

### ***Interactions among state agents***

We have seen thus far how the constitution of the kebele is designed to institutionalise hierarchical political order, especially by vertically ordering spaces and maintaining divisions among its functionaries. In this section I will demonstrate how these material conditions allow for a whole range of hierarchical interactions, transactions and modes of doing business to occur within the kebele structure (as among its functionaries) and between the kebele and the woreda administrations and how this is central to the everyday performance and regularising of state power.

The modes of interactions among state functionaries and government work are suspended between the pressures of implementing policies and the normative requirement for personal loyalty. In their interactions with their superiors, civil servants, for example, often find themselves caught between the conflicting pulls of the impersonal, technocratic style of

supervision of woreda sector bureaus and the personalised methods of supervision of kebele politicians.

On the bureaucratic side, those above the kebele bureaucracy (i.e. at the federal, regional, zonal and woreda levels) set specific numerical or qualitative targets which they are expected and pressured to meet and report feedback through the material production of documents, reports and compilations of statistical figures. Health extension workers, for example, are required to maintain family folders, a data collection tool in which they record the health status of the family members of every household in the kebele (e.g. family planning, antenatal care, immunisation) and the status of households (e.g. access to latrines, waste disposal, hand washing, clean water supply). The folders are periodically (usually monthly) reviewed by woreda supervisors.<sup>53</sup>

Similarly, the DAs compile monthly reports detailing the number of farmers adopting technology packages (especially improved seed varieties) and regular routines such as the degree to which they mobilise farmers for group work, the frequency with which they organise field demonstrations and farmer-to-farmer field visits, etc.<sup>54</sup> Such technocratic aspect of regulating kebele civil servants, conducted through devices of enumeration such as report writing and compiling statistics, are taken extremely seriously by woreda sector bureaus. This is due to the fact that the health, education and agricultural data collected by civil servants serve as indicators of programme success and ultimately of regional and national economic and social development. As such, development targets are sanctioned by packages of incentives and

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<sup>53</sup> Interview, health extension worker#9, October, Degga 2014; Interview, health extension worker#10, October, Degga 2014.

<sup>54</sup> Interview, DA#7 Degga, November 2014; Conversation, DA#5, Degga, November 2014.

disincentives which reward those who meet targets and penalise those who do not by denying them salary increments, scholarships, promotions and transfers.<sup>55</sup>

On the kebele side, civil servants are placed under the political control of the kebele chairman. All of their local-level activities (including public meetings, giving training to farmers and implementing development programmes) are conducted with the cooperation and oversight of the chairman. Their everyday interactions are marked, however, by personal and at times conflictual relations that arise partly as a result of power relations structured around social differentials – semi-educated/educated, direct party affiliated/bureaucrat and rural/urbanised. Kebele officials often complain that one of the fundamental reasons for the failure of local social and development activities (such as children dropping out of school, poor performance in regional exams<sup>56</sup> and low agricultural productivity) is related to absenteeism, lack of motivation and the disengagement of civil servants,<sup>57</sup> who, according to the kebele chairman, are ‘interested only in finding ways out of the kebele’ and in ‘moving up’ to the position ‘above’ within the bureaucracy.

For their part, with their college educations, the civil servants often resent their subordination to semi-educated kebele officials whom they describe as *kadere* (cadres), though most are themselves party members. But the use of the term *kadere* is intended to capture the promulgation of unqualified political allegations and sycophancy to the party, thus having a negative connotation in local parlance. This sentiment was summarised by one civil servant:

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<sup>55</sup> Interview, woreda administrator, November 2014.

<sup>56</sup> The chairman often complained to me about the poor performance of grade 8 students in the regional exam. In 2013, the highest score was 74%. He said the kebele had hired a librarian for 300 birr a month to encourage students to read, but they were not supported by their teachers, whom he accused of absenteeism, negligence and a lack of in-depth pedagogical knowledge.

<sup>57</sup> Conversation with model farmer and senior kebele official#1 and kebele chairman, Degga, November 2014.

He [the chairman] has no understanding of how things work. He thinks he knows about everything just because he has power. This is the fundamental problem in our country. Cadres want to exercise their misconceived self-perception that their political position makes them experts about everything.<sup>58</sup>

However, at the same time, the chairman holds the key to their dreams of working in urban centres. One civil servant said:

You have to satisfy his vanity. You have to accuse his critics of ignorance, corruption and incompetence. My dreams of escape from this wretched place depend on my relationship with him. To be honest, he doesn't care whether you are good at your job or not as long as you are on good terms with him.<sup>59</sup>

The above comment encapsulates both the civil servants' cynicism and ambivalence towards the kebele chairman and the attempt to use him to their own advantage in terms of their career progression. Here, the threat of the political power wielded by kebele officials reaffirms the hierarchical nature of the relationship between the chairman and civil servants.

The hierarchical articulation of state power is also institutionalised in class relations within the kebele bureaucracy. One notable example is the interaction that takes place between the kebele chairman and the militias which resemble those of the lord and retainers in feudal Ethiopia. The militias frequently provide domestic labour, such as ploughing, to the chairman. They are also routinely used as his personal bodyguards. It was not uncommon to see the chairman – in vivid and ostentatious displays of power – roaming the road or attending social functions such as funerals escorted by one or two militias, with Kalashnikov rifles slung across their shoulders. This display of statist power serves not only as a marker of the chairman's

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<sup>58</sup> Conversation, civil servant#8, Degga, October 2014.

<sup>59</sup> Conversation, civil servant#12, Degga, October 2014.



superior rank and position but also symbolises the vertical authority and coercive power of the state. In return for their personal service to the chairman, it is well known that the militias gain access to agricultural resources and credit facilities.

Taken together, the different forms of interactions among state functionaries and between government departments shed light on the everyday performative aspects of state formation. On the one hand, the technocratic aspect of supervision and bureaucratic interactions construct the state as a rationalised institutional structure that is fastidious in maintaining hierarchy and which is appropriate for the impersonal enforcement of rules and policies. The formal technocratic modes of operation also serve to position the kebele as an integral part of the trans-local state system and a key nodal point in the bureaucratic power networks.

On the other hand, the personalised aspect of the kebele-level interactions and relations of power vividly underscore the image of a state that is governed by compromises between vested interests, personal loyalties and negotiations. Very clearly, the top-down articulation of state power is also local in that it is applied and manipulated by kebele officials. This was clearly reflected in the relations between the chairman and the militias.

At a broader analytical level my account of bureaucratic practices, material representations and the complex modes of interactions among the state functionaries counter with the argument that state institutions are absorbed by informal politics (see Chabal and Daloz 1999; Reno 2000) and are re/constituted by social forces i.e. hierarchies spread only from the social field to the realms of the political. By contrast, as this section has shown, hierarchies in the social realm are not given, but are constantly re/produced through bureaucratic mode of governance practices. As we have seen above, the iterative production and enactment of hierarchy that brings the state into existence also serves to foster status differences and reconstitutes class relations. For example, their designation as local state representatives and the associated social

and economic status gives the model farmers the power to dominate and regulate social relations (see Chapter 8).

State power therefore interweaves with and permeates class relations to shape modes of interactions within the kebele (among politicians and civil servants) and, as I will demonstrate in the next section, between the kebele and the local people. The institution of the kebele in this sense represents a site where not only bureaucratic rituals re/produce the state as a hierarchized institution but also re/produce residents along class lines. Meanwhile, as I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 8, the kebele is deeply embedded in local social relations and are shaped by local values.

## **5.2. Encountering the state: the governors and the governed**

So far, I have limited myself to the internal organisation of the kebele. In this section, I focus on the ways in which the performance of hierarchy, described above, is routinised in the everyday interactions between the kebele and the local people. I specifically focus on two kebele functionaries – the kebele chairman and the kebele manager – who are key figures in the operation of the everyday state. My aim is to get to grips with the micro-operation of state power by focusing on the work and identity of these officials in helping to represent and produce state verticality and hierarchy. In order to provide a context, I begin by introducing the roles of the kebele chairman and kebele manager.

### ***The kebele chairman and kebele manager***

The kebele opens Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. During the early hours of the morning, most employees can be found either at their desks or on field sites collecting data and conducting meetings. For the kebele chairman, however, the pattern of everyday bureaucratic life is rather different. Rather than spend his time at his office, he would often spend most of his working hours surrounded by friends in the circle of his regular haunts in the centre of the

rural town (see Chapter 8). When I enquired about his absence from the workplace, he explained that he was expected to be at his office on only two days per week as he was not in receipt of any remuneration for his work. Despite this, it was still rare for him to be at his office for two days per week.

Over the course of my many conversations with him, the chairman consistently told me that he was a ‘successful farmer and businessman’ and ‘known for good work’.<sup>60</sup> He thus asserted that his role in the kebele administration was not linked to ‘conducting paperwork’ but rather to being ‘a role model [i.e.] governing by example’ and providing ‘a positive image and being an inspiration’ to the local population. In choosing to represent himself as a self-supporting person, the chairman was keen to give me the impression that he, in Weber’s (1948) terms, ‘lives for politics’ as a ‘part-time politician’ rather than ‘live off politics’ as a ‘professional’ politician, i.e. as a person who has made politics his vocation. In other words, the chairman did not work in politics for money but rather for the moral cause of serving the local population as a part-time politician.

For the day-to-day running of the kebele, the chairman is heavily dependent upon the kebele manager,<sup>61</sup> whom I shall refer to as Alemaz. Well-versed with government matters, Alemaz represents the kebele to the woreda bureaucracy and, as such, deals with time-consuming paperwork and everyday administrative matters. She also performs the functions of cashier, accountant and finance officer. As a person who keeps the wheels of the everyday kebele business turning, she occupies a key intermediary position between the chairman and the local population. Alemaz’s key position in the kebele hierarchy defies the local normative gender

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<sup>60</sup> Conversation, kebele chairman, Degga, October 2014.

<sup>61</sup> The kebele manager, or *yesera halafi* in Amharic, is a civil servant who is appointed by and is accountable to the woreda. They attend both kebele council and cabinet meetings and supervise all development activities carried out by the kebele (see Emmenegger, Keno and Haggmann 2011).

hierarchy whereby women have negligible visibility in both public institutions and the local social and political life. However, she is noted locally for her callous treatment of ordinary people, usually with indifference and arrogance. Ordinary farmers who request an audience with or signature from the chairman find themselves constrained by her dismissive responses and unhelpful attitude. In the opinions of many men, the kebele manager and the community police officer, who also is a woman, constitute admonitions on the danger of women occupying public office. One man, for instance, described her as a ‘haughty woman’ with ‘little regard for farmers’ and ‘not fit to be called a manager’.<sup>62</sup> His description underscores the fact that, unlike male politicians and bureaucrats who treat farmers in a similarly callous manner, female office holders’ actions and behaviours carry additional weight because of their distinctiveness (which entails otherness), thereby amplifying matters.

However, on the other hand, the active participation of women in the repression of another subordinate section of the local population – the poor – and thereby the maintenance of the existing hierarchical state system while also contributing to its change complicates the essentialised view of hierarchy. The state, in this sense, figures as a hierarchical and dominant entity, but the hierarchical values embedded in its system (patriarchy in our case) are open to contention and change. The question, then, is how the behaviour and practices of these local officials help to constitute the state and its relations with the local people? I turn to this next.

### ***Waiting for the chairman***

The Kebele office for the local population is generally impenetrable and access to the often absent chairman, even outside the kebele office premises, is unlikely to occur without the approval of the manager or the help of other important connections. For many poor people, who are without cultural capital, literally weeks may pass before the chairman will sign letters,

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<sup>62</sup> Interview, model farmer#3, Degga, October 2014.

ID cards or grant them an audience. Consider, for example, the case of a middle-aged farmer I shall call Abebe, who went to the kebele to request a replacement for his lost ID card. Abebe wanted the replacement ID because he was asked to produce it when applying to join a microfinance cooperative. Abebe told me that to maintain his family he depended on a small income that he derived from farming a small plot of land. His family comprised his dependent parents, wife and two young children. Despite working hard as a smallholding farmer to extricate himself and his family from poverty, he doubted that he would be successful. His only hope, he explained, was to join the cooperative, borrow money and invest in a chicken farm in his own backyard.

A preliminary requirement for joining the cooperative and making himself eligible for a loan was the production of some ID, which he described as ‘unnecessary’ because ‘all the cooperative people know me personally very well’. He said, ‘there was a time when we trusted one another. Now, there is no work without paperwork’. Significantly, Abebe’s comment may have been intended to highlight the breakdown of village social bonds, but it is also shaped by a recognition of the changes in social relations wrought by the expansion of state services and the bureaucratisation of social life.

Nevertheless, as Abebe noted, ‘it is only the bit [ID] of paper that would allow me to join the cooperative’. When he first went to apply, he went to the manager’s office:

On the first day, she was not even willing to talk to me. She only told me to wait outside and then a few moments later she left her office and never returned. I came back the next day, and she said my ID could not be processed because she was busy with paperwork. She said to ‘return tomorrow morning’. The next day, I came early in the morning and waited all day long ... finally, by 4 a.m. she told me that I should bring evidence from the police which says my ID is lost. The next day I went to request a letter of evidence from the police officer. The police officer told me she would tell the manager orally that

I had lost my ID. I took her word and returned the next day to the manager. The manager was angry, scolded me and I went back to the police officer to get the paper. I took the paper and returned the next day back [to the manager]. She said to return tomorrow because she was about to leave. When I returned the next day, she accepted my picture and issued the ID and told me to return another day for the chairman's signature.

When I met him, Abebe had already visited the kebele office several times over a period of a week and a half and was told that 'the chairman is not available'. He therefore had to squat, along with others who were also waiting for the chairman, at the kebele open ground, gazing hopefully at the entrance. When I enquired as to why he would not want to approach the chairman outside of the kebele, he replied, 'he wouldn't even reply or even maybe look at me [unless] I would go to him with the recommendation of important people or the manager herself'. He further added, 'I can't do anything about it' and he blamed the situation on his own lack of connections and influence. Abebe's response tells us that when local people meet state officials, especially in non-state spaces, they do so with reference to important connections. Hence, Abebe had the option of either waiting or actively pursuing the strategy of soliciting the help of intermediaries in order to obtain the service of the state. But given his lack of connections, trips to the kebele premises and waiting would likely become a regular feature of his daily life over the coming days or weeks. In the meantime, the lack of ID, which he described as a 'bit of paper', continued to be an obstacle in his day-to-day life.

Abebe's was not an isolated case. The kebele premises were always full of local people waiting for the chairman's arrival or queuing up to be seen by the manager. I will return to examine how the local people encountered the chairman later in this section, but my purpose here is to highlight how, in its everyday mode of conducting official business, the state neglects the poor and thereby exhibits and normalises its power.

A number of important themes emerge from Abebe's experience. On the one hand, the actions of the chairman and the manager indicate the extent to which state work is beset by rigmarole and is predicated on arbitrariness. However, such arbitrariness should not be seen as an indicator of state dysfunction but rather as part of the process of the performance of power and hierarchy in that it defines the poor people's role as waiting and being accommodating to the demands, whims and caprices of state functionaries. The rigmarole serves to outline the type of relationship that should exist between the state and the people by positioning them hierarchically.

On the other hand, while, as mentioned above, the chairman indicated that he does not receive remuneration for his political services and that as a consequence he treats his position as a semi-official one, his regular absence from his workplace nevertheless points to something at the centre of state bureaucracy, namely that availability, accessibility and hierarchy go hand in hand. The more important an official, the less he/she is available for the ordinary public. For example, very much like the kebele chairman, the woreda administrator is often absent from his workplace. When I first went to the district office to request an appointment for an interview, the administrator's secretary told me the administrator was not available and that I should return in a few days. According to the secretary, much of the administrator's work was conducted beyond the woreda level. She described him as 'a very important' figure who consults, negotiates and regularly 'meets with high-level officials' at zone and regional levels for the benefit of the woreda.<sup>63</sup> Other members of the woreda administration office told me the administrator is 'a man of the people' who moves between inaugurations, kebele-level field visits and other public events where he represents the state and inspects local development

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<sup>63</sup> Conversation, the woreda administrator's secretary, woreda town, September 2014.

efforts.<sup>64</sup> However, his daily schedule, exact whereabouts or the precise nature of the public events and meetings he is purported to attend, despite my persistent requests, were not for disclosure.

Curiously, not many ordinary people I talked to at the woreda and kebele premises ever saw him conducting any field visits or attending public events. Yet he is reported by his colleagues to be a hard worker. When I asked for an appointment, the secretary told me she could not schedule one because she didn't know when he would be 'sitting in his office'. In the meantime, I continued with my visits to the woreda office several times a week for the next month until I finally met him (through a common acquaintance) and he agreed to set time aside for an interview.

This enactment of seclusion by the kebele chairman and woreda administrator highlights the everyday display and constitution of state authority and hierarchy. Seclusion clearly constitutes the prerogative aspect of state power that helps officials not only flaunt statish authority but also project an image of hard-working and busy administrators. The enactment of seclusion also demonstrates the everyday aspect of drawing a boundary between the state and the local population. It plays a critical role in shaping the understanding of the local population that state officials/authority are separate from them/society.

### ***Meeting the chairman***

Returning to the kebele chairman, during high-profile visits or when an inspection by woreda representatives was scheduled, the chairman would be seen running frantically between offices and meetings. There would be a high level of activity but once the big event had passed, the chairman would barely be seen on the premises. Employees would either wander in, vanish to

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<sup>64</sup> Interview with a woreda office administrator, woreda town, September 2014; conversations with two woreda administration bureau staff members.



tea houses in the town centre or simply leave early. The pace of activity would become slower. On the rare occasions when the chairman did show up, in the case of pressure to meet deadlines, for example, one could not fail to notice the stream of people forming a queue outside his door.

Once in his office, dealing with various clients, the mode of doing official business was based on the differential status and hierarchies of the clients. He, for instance, admits his clients in accordance with their status rather than based on the order of their arrival. His personal friends, guests and senior visiting officials are treated with great respect and admitted immediately. The amount of time taken by the chairman to deal with visitors is also conditional on the status of the visitor. Allies and important visitors would receive as much quality time as was necessary to discuss their issues or just chat with the chairman and pass the time of day. In the meantime, those without influence or who lacked connections experience maddening waits gathered on the open patch of ground, where the bustle would only increase over time.

It is important to note here that the familiarity with and greater access of influential individuals to the chairman did not necessarily stand them in better favour. In circumstances wherein the chairman is not able to dispense favour to his allies, he resorts to invoking the influence of *yebelay akalat* (authorities from above) over the decisions and activities of the kebele. Consider, for example, the following case. In 2012, the kebele commissioned a local contractor to build a bridge over a river between one of the three sub-kebeles and the main highway, for donkey-pulled carts to cross. However, the contractor had fallen two years behind schedule as of November 2014. In the meantime, the existing dilapidated wooden bridge was washed away by flooding, with a temporary bridge built by community labour in use ever since. However, the new replacement bridge was wobbly and could not bear the donkey-pulled carts that transport agricultural produces, commercial timber and quarry. The situation created such a political stir and disgruntlement among the rich that it prompted the kebele chairman to send a notice to the builder to resume and speed up the construction work, starting within a few

weeks' time. Failure to do this would result in his contract being annulled, and the kebele would issue a public tender to recruit another qualified contractor.

One day, while I was sitting in the office, the builder came to the chairman's office to convince him that he needed a time extension before he was able to resume the work. The contractor explained that he was caught in a protracted and costly lawsuit with a certain individual over unpaid construction fees, as a result of which he was unable to pay labourers to resume work on the bridge. The chairman listened sympathetically but explained that a further extension was impossible because the case had already been taken over by *yebelay akalat*. The kebele manager later disclosed to me that there was no *yebelay akakalat* interference in the case. The chairman apparently wanted to respond to public complaints at the same time as maintaining good relations with the contractor. To this end, by claiming to be acting according to the orders of *yebelay akalat*, rather than assert his own authority, the chairman deflected the social responsibility of dispensing favour.

Such a technique is commonly practised by officials when they find themselves caught between the social obligation of dispensing favour and the necessities of their work. The chairman's invocation of the influence of *yebelay akakalat* is thus indicative of the widely held assumption that power is held at the top and that important decisions are made by *yebelay akalat*. Claims of subordination to orders from above also serve to obscure the vast discretionary power of kebele officials over local issues. More fundamentally, this creates the appearance that the kebele, as part of the state system, is merely a token of the centre and that 'the state' speaks with one voice. In other words, the practice of invoking *yebelay akalat* implicitly represents the state not only as hierarchical but also as a unified and cohesive actor.

Back in his office, in stark contrast to the respect with which he treats important clients, the chairman admits any number of farmers at once and gives an audience to all of them

simultaneously. All of the ordinary farmers' matters are discussed in the presence of other clients in addition to, on several occasions, both myself and friends of the chairman who just happened to be on the kebele premises. In such a setting, discussions are always dominated by the chairman. From time to time he would switch his attention between his clients and myself, sometimes without allowing them to finish explaining their matters. Very often, he allowed everyone present to join in discussions about other clients' matters. But while the chairman is speaking, everyone tries to be careful, and acquiescent to what he says, to the point of fawning over him. If a particularly sensitive matter were to come up, the chairman would request that the client returns the next day or else retreat to one of his regular haunts (see Chapter 8). Most matters, however, were referred to his juniors to deal. The overwhelming majority of cases consist of people making a request for references and assistance in filing lawsuits for minor assaults and alcohol-induced brawls and feuds, complaints about fines and the encroachment of predatory farmers on neighbours' land, etc.

The chairman, with a sigh of resignation, would instruct some to select elders of their own choice and resolve their feuds in the customary way, sign others off to the manager or the police officer and dismiss others after two or three rounds of exchanges, asking them not to bother him with their trivialities. Most clients, often looking visibly dejected, would leave the room and mumble something about the futility of the kebele. Gradually, the kebele's open patch of ground would be cleared. As they lack any other form of recourse, kebele clients subject the chairman to criticisms, rumours of corruption and disparagement in their village public domains and in everyday private conversations (see Chapter 7).

The preceding discussion of the mode of conducting governmental work in Degga sheds some light on how hierarchy is embedded in the routinised practices of the kebele bureaucracy and how it legitimises various hierarchical modes of interaction between state functionaries and local people. In what follows, I turn to present and analyse two kebele-level meetings in

order to further unravel specific ways through which bureaucratic practices re/produce, display and regularise state power.

### **5.3. Kebele meetings: staging hierarchy**

Meetings are regular features of local state work, and they are also interwoven with the rhythm of the everyday lives of ordinary people in Degga. As I undertook my fieldwork, I observed and attended numerous meetings. In fact, it seemed that it was a rare day when I didn't hear about, observe or attend some kind of meeting that was taking place. Meetings are not, however, simply 'rational-legal' (instrumental) administrative tools; rather, I argue they constitute a key means by which the verticality of the state, as an authoritative symbol of society, is produced. In this section, I examine two types of meetings. The first is administrative and involves people in positions of formal authority (such as kebele politicians and civil servants). The second type is public meetings involving members of the local population.

#### ***Administrative meetings***

Here, for the sake of analytical clarity, I distinguish between two types of administrative meetings – semi-formal and formal meetings. Semi-formal meetings include sub-kebele-level and committee-level administrative meetings. These meetings are unscheduled. A sub-kebele-level land administration committee chairman, for instance, could convene a meeting on the sideline of a church gathering or a funeral. Typically, such meetings are long, lack focus and proceed at a very slow pace. People engage in casual conversations and the meetings are frequently interrupted by uninvited passers-by who engage in conversations or exchange greetings with the assembled committee members. Discussions often drift away from the main topic. At one sub-kebele meeting, for instance, a farmer interrupted the meeting to enquire about my study and note-taking skills. Another man asked me why Ethiopians living in the US are not helping with the rebuilding of their local church, leading to a long conversation about

the importance of repairing old churches. Half an hour passed before those assembled were able to refocus on the case at hand.

On another occasion, at a meeting called to discuss a dispute over grazing land, I observed the assembly debating whether or not a certain ‘fortune teller and sorcerer’ in the neighbouring kebele was a fraud. In such meetings, in the end, decisions are usually passed by mutual consensus, even if it doesn’t exist, or else the meeting would be adjourned with the issue carried over to another session.

By contrast, formal administrative meetings are where different layers of the kebele bureaucracy convene to discuss the routine management and administration of the kebele population. The participants usually comprise elected political representatives, kebele-level DAs, members of the kebele militia and sometimes visiting woreda representatives. Their regular occurrences are strictly ruled by hierarchy and bureaucratic procedures such as the detailing of proceedings and outcomes in official minutes and the subsequent archiving and sending of these to the woreda administration. They are almost always scheduled and meeting agendas are strictly followed.

This type of meeting usually takes place in the dedicated kebele conference hall which can accommodate between 50 and 70 people. The hall has a dais with a desk and three chairs at one end, at which only the most important people would sit. Facing the dais, the first row is an area usually reserved for civil servants, important kebele officials and visiting guests. Behind the first row, benches are arranged in a classroom style with the audience facing the dais. While a wide space onto the dais would separate and distinguish the high-level officials from other participants, the different types of chairs and a step onto the first row marks off the most important participants as separate from the ordinary ones.

In what follows, I provide an example of a formal administrative meeting. This particular meeting was called by the kebele chairman to examine the kebele's poor tax collection performance.

To provide some context, one of the principal responsibilities of kebeles in Ethiopia is the collection of taxes levied by the regional state governments on rural land and agricultural incomes. However, kebeles have no specialist team or separate department focusing on tax collection. In Degga, the kebele assigns the task of tax collection to semi-literate militia members and sub-kebele representatives. The kebele manager controls the activities of the militia, undertakes technical and accounts procedures and the chairman then submits the revenue collected to the woreda finance bureau. Below, I present my personal observation of the meeting as it was originally jotted down at the time of the fieldwork.

### ***Tax collection performance evaluation***

The meeting was scheduled to begin at 09:00, but at that time the conference hall was empty. I was the only one to turn up on time. After about 10 minutes, participants began to arrive in dribs and drabs. The DAs, sub-kebele representatives and security committee chairman eventually came to be seated on the chairs contained in the first row. The kebele manager and land administration chairperson sat at the head of the table, leaving the middle chair vacant. Members of the militia slowly filled the remaining seats behind the first row. This seating arrangement visually mirrors the territorial-administrative hierarchy of the kebele in that from the dais one can look down on the kebele territorial hierarchy, level by level, i.e. the civil servants and sub-kebele representatives, the sub-kebele land administration heads and the militia.

The participants continued waiting and conversing. Some people wandered in and out of the hall while others congregated to discuss their livelihoods and social issues. Sitting among the militia, I could overhear fragments of their conversations: 'When is the meeting going to begin?'

Is he [the chairman] coming?’ and so on. Fifteen minutes passed before the chairman walked in and sat down on the chair left vacant for him in the middle, reflecting his central position as a very important figure in the kebele hierarchy. Before the meeting started the kebele manager introduced me as a researcher working on the issue of government.

The kebele manager then called the meeting to order and introduced the business of the day. ‘We have called you today to discuss the poor tax collection performance of our kebele,’ she announced.

The chairman then took over and made a particularly long speech, lasting close to half an hour, which encompassed the importance of tax to national economic development and ‘the lack of self-motivation of tax collectors’. He denounced the fact that it took ‘19 days [for the militia] to fully collect our tax ... 4 days past the woreda deadline’. He then called upon the sub-kebele representatives and militia to account for their poor performance.

A moment of silence followed, after which the chairman went on to say, ‘I was summoned by the woreda administrator and the finance bureau and asked to explain why our kebele was performing poorly in submitting tax revenue on time ... Our failure to submit on time caused the woreda delay in transferring the tax money to the zone finance bureau ... our failure is causing failure to the woreda ... [by contract] our neighbours kudmi are the fastest kebele ... collecting and submitting their taxes in just 10 days ... [as a result] they are honoured as a model kebele in tax collection’. The chairman then emphasised that because ‘the reputation of the kebele was at stake’, the problem should be pinpointed.

Again there was no response from the participants. After a few seconds spent glancing at the assembled participants, the chairman began naming sub-kebele representatives and the militia and asking them why they had failed to meet their deadlines. As their names were called out, the concerned representatives rose to their feet and explained their reasons.

The first speaker said, 'It's extremely difficult to get people pay taxes at this time of the year. Children are starting school; parents have to buy notebooks, clothes and pencils. It was holiday season [new year and the Cross]; Most people had no money left to pay the tax.'

The chairman interrupted him, 'what do you mean people have no money? I don't believe this. This year we had good rain; we had a good harvest.'

The next speaker, a militia, got up and said 'no one has refused to pay'. The chairman interrupted him before he was allowed to finish speaking: 'why did you not then finish collecting on time?' The militia replied, 'some of the people had no cash to pay. I even went from house to house to collect tax ...' The chairman interrupted him again, 'we are paying 40 birr (£1.50) for a hectare of land. This government is farmers' government. We pay very little amount of tax. Do you have any idea how much the merchants pay? ... Our entire kebele pays less than the amount of tax one merchant pays.'

At this point, the manager said, 'You [the militia] should give me a list of people who have not paid their taxes on time.' She labelled farmers who were said to have failed to pay on time as 'anti-development elements'. She threatened 'measures' against them.

The next speaker had difficulty maintaining the requirements of the meeting speech. He began a rambling, off-topic monologue about the problem of the delay to construction of the local bridge project. The kebele manager interrupted to remind him to stay on topic. However, he went on to contextualise the subject in terms of the local history of tax collection by mentioning how it had worked during the Derg era. Time and again his failure invoked rounds of muted and at times raucous laughter among the participants.

The chairman reprimanded the participants and ordered them to keep their voices low, a practice which is part of the everyday performance of power. This rebuke underscored the



chairman's self-positioning and projection of power as a tough and strong statesman capable of governing, who was in complete control of the assembly.

Three more men made similar speeches, all citing the inability of inhabitants to pay on time. These time and again prompted the chairman to interrupt them with the seemingly unanswerable question of 'why have you failed?'

The meeting went on in a dramatic way, with the chairman and sometimes the manager almost always expressing their dissatisfaction at virtually every reason put forward by the participants. What was evident here is that the chairman was anxious about the reactions from the woreda officials who had made it clear to him they were aware of the kebele's inefficiency. Yet, at the same time, while emphasising the intolerance of the state to the inefficiency, the chairman implicitly communicated to his audience that the kebele was under the watch of the ranks of hierarchies – the regional state, zone and woreda; hence, he projected the coherence, chain of command and vertical authority of the state system. Here, we also see the verticality of the state represented in the cascading manner in which the regional government imposes levies and sets deadlines for zonal and woreda administrators, who in turn put pressure on the kebele to meet their deadlines. The pressure moves downwards to the tax collectors and then to the people in subsistence farming who are struggling to survive. On a personal level, the failure to collect taxes on time could be said to present a test of the chairman's capacity to govern.

Finally, an important aspect of the meeting was the performance of certain kinds of conduct – how to speak, where to sit, when to stand up and how to behave like political actors. The participants were reprimanded for undermining the official performance of meetings by talking off topic or laughing. The rituals associated with such meetings together with bureaucratic practices constitute part of the 'state effect' (Mitchell 1999) that gives the state idea substance

and meaning in the eyes of its employees. The state agents subsequently learn to adapt his/her behaviour in accordance with these performative rituals that constitute the state. Overall, the meeting embodied an everyday way of ordering the local people, regularising authority and hierarchy and performing state power.

### **Public meetings**

In contrast to administrative meetings, public meetings in Degga are numerous and varied. They include weekly cell and development group meetings, women's meeting, sub-kebele and kebele-wide meetings and annual party and development conferences. In what follows, I provide an analysis of a public meeting.

#### ***Anti-corruption discourses: attending state spectacle***

In November 2014, I attended a two-day kebele-wide public conference that had been organised by the state and EPRDF officials. The conference, in terms of its content, was essentially just a bigger version of the many smaller kebele-level meetings in which I took part. But, as an annual conference, it was exceptionally different in its scale, splendour and organisation. Unlike other weekly and monthly political meetings and events, local kebele officials barely played any significant role in its running. In the usual fashion of strict hierarchical state control, it was organised and led, in minute detail, by visiting officials from district and zone administrations. There were instructions on the selection of open space as a conference site in the kebele premises, the imposition of a quota on each household for the amount of food to prepare, orders to put up banners and instructions for the door-to-door mobilisation of farmers for the days of the conference.

Hierarchy was also physically and visibly embodied in the seating arrangements on the opening day of the conference. The importance of the zone and woreda representatives was displayed through the comfortable chairs, a table with tablecloth and peaked tent shade held above their heads to protect them from the scorching rays of the sun. Next, seated in chairs

without a table, were the kebele officials. Priests and community elders were seated on wooden benches at the far end of the open space. The remainder of the ‘ordinary’ participants sat on the ground in the inner circle under the withering sun, thereby marking their inferiority. The chair size of the zone representative accentuates his superiority over the district and kebele officials. This is particularly significant in a place like Degga, where the vast majority of ordinary peasants have no chairs in their homes and where it thus metaphorically, as everywhere else, signifies authority.

The dominant themes of the conference were unmistakable. The temporary conference site was decorated with vivid banners containing slogans denouncing corruption and promoting ‘Ethiopian Renaissance’, a major theme in the state development discourse. One of the bold slogans read: ‘End corruption for a bright tomorrow’. T-shirts and caps featuring a photograph of the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and a caption reading ‘visionary leader’ were distributed to all participants. Clearly, Meles Zenawi was portrayed as the people’s hero who bravely fought poverty and corruption. The background of one of the banners portrayed a panorama of the design of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. Clearly, these material representations reconstitute the hierarchy, authority and splendour of the state in rural communities, which are remote from the administrative capital as the centre of actual state spectacle.

These representative dimensions were further accentuated by the speeches given by state officials. With everyone taking their seats, the conference was opened with the district representative making a welcome speech and reading the official programme. This was followed by a speech by the zone representative about the development performance of Amhara regional state and a brief discussion on issues of productivity. After this, one of the officials, punctuated by frequent applause, began to read aloud a document that it was claimed had been sent from *yebelay akalat* (authorities from above) strongly condemning what he regarded as

‘entrenchment of the culture of corruption’ among government officials. ‘Corruption is an endemic disease; corruption is the bane of bad governance; corruption is rent-seeking behaviour,’ the visiting official continued, ‘the people need to expose those who demand bribes and syphon off *yemengist ena yehezab habt* [government and public resources] and those who damage state infrastructures ... We have clear choices. Either we swim together against the tide of corruption and poverty or we will drown together.’ The document clearly pointed to attempts by the state to present corruption, in an obviously hyperbolic way, as an existential threat to both society and the government. The struggle against corruption was depicted as a struggle against poverty.

The official reading the document was emphatic in saying that ‘unless we are resolute we will spiral back again to disaster’. But, then, in an interesting twist, the officer proclaimed: ‘We can reach an extraordinary and new level of greatness, by rooting out corruption.’ The implication of this statement was that national development can be achieved by rooting out corruption, through the cooperation of the people.

The document further outlined how the current government and national leadership demonstrated their ‘partnership to the public’ by deposing the dictatorship of the Derg regime and how it, in the same spirit, was resolute against the scourges of poverty and corruption. This was punctuated by references to the constitution and an elaborate tribute to the life and leadership of *talaku meri* (great leader), Meles Zenawi.

At the end, the participants were invited for discussion on the content of the document. After quite a number of notable individuals and ordinary farmers had given speeches, invariably praising *mengist’s* commitment to fighting poverty and corruption, the organisers blatantly urged the residents to be direct, face their officials and expose cases of corruption. But, notwithstanding the celebratory, warm and enthusiastic applause for the reading aloud of the

document, no participant was willing to expose and criticise any local official or talk about any case of corruption. Despite the incessant appeal and urging by conference organisers, the participants remained mute. I will return to the case of corruption in Chapter 7, but it is worth noting here that the participants were obviously reluctant to speak so openly of corruption out of fear of retribution. At the time of the fieldwork, corruption was the most talked about theme in the kebele public domains which, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 7, function as an important means by which people construct a particular image of the state.

In his closing words, the zone official reprimanded participants over their lack of courage to collaborate with *mengist* in fighting corruption. In doing this, he drew on a kinship-based analogy between the state and the people: ‘Would you be content if your children concealed anything which could potentially destroy your home?’ The official continued, ‘you certainly wouldn’t. Mengist is like a father to his people. You should be willing to collaborate in rooting out corruption.’ Such use of a father image as a metaphorical expression not only infantilises the local population but also naturalises state authority. Notably, the remark was a good illustration of how meetings are used as a discursive space whereby the ideal relationship between the state and the local population is outlined and dictated by officials. Finally, the official adjourned the conference by shouting a series of slogans: ‘We will overcome poverty’, ‘We will root out corruption’, ‘Ethiopian renaissance will be realised’.

To sum up, on the one hand, throughout the conference, the state was clearly presented and mediated through discursive (developmental) and material representations (banners, slogans and so on). On the other hand, the document constantly referred to *mengist* as a ‘public partner’ in contrast to the kebele officials who are implicated in corruption. What even more tellingly accentuated the discursive distinction between local officials and the state was that local officials remained peripheral throughout the conference. They only provided information and facilitated the provision of mineral water for their superiors. Overall, the removal of kebele

officials from the performative process of installing an anti-corruption and developmental state idea is a means by which a 'sublime state' (Hansen 2001) is communicated to the public (see Chapter 7). Finally, the conference could be read as a theatrical enactment of state hierarchy and superiority – as distinct from the people and residing above local officials – and yet claiming to represent and work for the people.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, my purpose was to demonstrate the modalities by which the state is brought into existence. Rather than taking the state as an object with a self-evident authority and hierarchy, I demonstrated how it is constructed as a vertically encompassing and authoritative entity through bureaucratic practices and spatial and scalar self-representations. The vertical organisation of the government workforce and the differential partitioning and distribution of material paraphernalia such as computers and stationery shows how the state is constructed as an organisation with many different levels. I have demonstrated that this spatial and material production of hierarchies became routinised and embedded in the everyday modes of interaction among state functionaries both within the kebele (among politicians and civil servants) and between the kebele and the woreda administrations through a technocratic style of supervision and personal ties. Similarly, meetings constitute another regular practice or ritual in which there is a vivid display of the hierarchies of authority and which act to demarcate the boundaries between the state and the people and regulate the behaviours of officials and local people in the form of proper conduct (where to sit, how to speak, stand and so on).

The performance of power and hierarchy is a crucial thread in the everyday interactions between state functionaries and the local people. State functionaries, such as the kebele chairman and kebele manager, re/produce the appearance of hierarchy and difference (between state and society) and thereby spread and regularise state power throughout society, both by making people wait as well as through a ritual of self-seclusion.

Overall, in this chapter, we have seen how the kebele forms a nodal point in trans-local power relations and also a site where administrative processes, interactions and spatial arrangements produce the state as a hierarchical institution. But it does so by interweaving rational practices of policy implementation and personal relationships into a single institution, a process which has proved to be a central feature of state formation. On the one hand, the local officials' informal and arbitrary style of conducting the business of government implies a socially embedded process through which the state is constituted. On the other hand, the performance of the state hierarchy and authority implies that state functionaries engage in everyday routinised bureaucratic efforts to produce an idea of a unitary state in local imaginations (Abrams 1988; Gupta 1995). At an analytical level this reminds us that, in examining the state in Africa, while we can learn much by seeing state formation as shaped by social practices, it is also important to recognise that bureaucracy plays a major role in re/producing a unitary and hierarchical state idea. We need, therefore, to pay attention to the oscillation and mutual constitution between state institutions and social networks. In the next chapter, I further demonstrate how the process that sustains the image of the state as a discrete entity ostensibly separate from society is reproduced.

## Chapter 6

### **Boundary-making: the construction of state-society distinction**

The previous chapter discussed the manner in which state power and authority circulate and how state coherence and hierarchy are reproduced through the regularising of specific sets of activities and bureaucratic rituals. This chapter explores how the state is constructed as a discrete and separate entity through an active state boundary-making practice. I use the concept of boundary-making to refer to ‘the delineation of the official edges of the government – and, consequently, the delineation of state from society’ (Mayrl and Quinn 2016: 1). I illustrate state boundary work through the case of an important state development project: the Koga Irrigation and Watershed Management (KIWM) scheme. This scheme is an interesting case study because there were clear sequential phases to its development (design, training, construction, implementation, etc.), where one is able to see, as I demonstrate below, local and high-level state functionaries engaged in activities that differentiate state from society in terms of articulating what community is and does, where state ends (for instance, in terms of responsibilities) as opposed to other forms of authority such as community associations, and where community begins.

However, I should point out that this chapter does not intend to provide a comprehensive overview of the history of the construction of the KIWM system nor offer a critique of the normative participation theories, as this would be beyond the scope of the chapter. Rather, the goal of this chapter is to highlight some of the most important aspects of the scheme’s construction and implementation processes in order to chalk out the modalities by which state autonomy is produced. It shows the ‘instrument-effects’ (Ferguson 1994: 256) of the irrigation project in producing and maintaining the distinction between state and society (i.e. community). The central argument of this chapter is that the appearance of the state as a discrete



entity separate from society is not an outcome of the imitation or imposition of the Western form of state. Instead, the distinction between state and society arises from complex, locally grounded governance and bureaucratic practices of boundary-making and the production of difference.

I begin this chapter by offering a brief description of the Koga irrigation scheme and closely examining how the underlying assumptions that underpin the design of the community participation component of the scheme were premised upon a normative distinction between state and community. I then demonstrate how the institutional setting of the scheme, at the construction stage, rather than adopting a participatory and bottom-up structure, simply reflected the pre-existing top-down hierarchical state bureaucratic set-up, thereby effectively excluding the local population from all decision-making bodies. This will be followed by an analysis of how state training programmes devised by different state departments are anchored in a problematic divide between tradition (presumed to be the realm of the local population) and modernity (presumed to be the realm of the state). I will also highlight how the state-society boundary is institutionalised with the formation of a water user association (WUA) as a means through which the local population is induced to participate in and accept the management of the irrigation system.

In the second section I build upon the analysis presented in the preceding section to examine how state training programmes induce farmers to identify themselves as ‘underdeveloped subjects’ (Gupta 1998).<sup>65</sup> My purpose here is to demonstrate the contradictory effects of state

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<sup>65</sup> Akhil Gupta (1998: 39-40) argues that ‘underdevelopment is not merely a structural location in the global community of nations’ but ‘a form of identity, something that informs people’s sense of self. Who people think they are, how they got that way, and what they can do to alter their lives have been profoundly shaped by the institutions, ideologies, and practices of development’.

practices, particularly by examining how training programmes and development discourses intended to encourage participation informed the inferior position of the poor vis-à-vis (semi-)educated members of the local population.

In the third section, I draw on farmers' usage patterns of the irrigation system to demonstrate the consequences of state boundary-making practices on their material conditions. I will highlight how the separation of responsibilities and control of decisions and resources between state and community produce definite consequences in terms of farmers' access to water and land resources and technical assistance.

### **6.1. The KIWM scheme: the logic of the project**

The KIWM scheme is a central agricultural development project which aims to 'contribute towards poverty reduction among smallholders through improvement in food security in the Region [Amhara regional state] in particular and the country as a whole ... [and] to improve agricultural production in the catchment and command areas of the Koga River valley in a sustainable manner' (AfDB 2001: i). Construction of the irrigation system began in 2001 and was completed in 2011 following four years of delay (Marx 2011). The scheme draws water from the Koga river – one of the 50 tributaries of the upper Blue Nile (locally known as Abay) – and irrigates a total land area of 7000 ha across nine kebeles, covering 12 blocks and 11 reservoirs. It enables farmers who are limited to rain-fed cropping to produce crops and vegetables during the dry season. The number of beneficiaries at the time of my fieldwork in Degga stood at 942 households.<sup>66</sup>

The scheme was designed and implemented under the aegis of the Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR) and was funded by the African Development Bank (AfDB). The most important feature of the scheme has been the emphasis placed on the participation of farmers,

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<sup>66</sup> Interview, PMU officer#13, woreda town, October 2014.

entailing their active involvement at all stages of project implementation, planning, design and construction. The logic behind this emphasis on participation as a favoured strategy is threefold. Firstly, participation was seen by both the Ethiopian government and the donor agency as a mechanism through which to overcome the legacy of public mistrust bequeathed by previous authoritarian projects (e.g. collective farming and villagisation). In emphasising the importance of community participation, an AfDB (2011: 4-5) document summarised the problem with similar schemes in the past as follows:

Until recently, projects have been implemented through a top-down approach. Irrigation was generally associated with the compulsory formation of producer cooperatives in which farmers were reluctant to join.

The shift away from an old, authoritarian paradigm was explained by a senior project officer as follows:

So far, the farmers have been written out of the process of project design and implementation. They were simply seen as beneficiaries rather than participants of development processes ... their inputs and influence had been absent. In the new approach, we sought to build community trust and consensus between the government and the people through the process of participation.<sup>67</sup>

The new paradigm therefore represents a new form of governance which calls for the active involvement of the local population, with a view to promoting partnership between the local population and the state in order to realise the ultimate objectives of agricultural transformation and poverty reduction. In short, the fecundity of linking state and society is reflected in the

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<sup>67</sup> Interview, senior PMU officer#14, woreda town, October 2014.

shift in emphasis from a top-down approach to a ‘decentralised and participatory-based project implementation’ and ‘bottom-up mechanism of accountability’.<sup>68</sup>

Secondly, the concern and objective of participation is driven, largely as part of donor conditionality, by the desire to build local capacity, ‘a sense of ownership’ and ‘community self-management capacity’ (MMD 2005a: 4), which ultimately leads to a ceding of state management and control so that the project may be sustained solely by community effort. This is supposed to be accomplished by transforming the local population (community), which is presumed to be characterised by horizontal social networks as opposed to the verticality that the state represents, into a WUA that acts to manage its own development and address collective problems. In short, the motivation for community participation is to promote community self-management and create agency possibilities for farmers:

The farmers must be the group that moves forward with the foundation, the mobilisation of the farmers’ interest in WUA / I&D [irrigation and dam] management organisations, and the ‘movers and shakers’ of the democratic process of establishment, legal formation and then the continued development of the organisation. It is no other person’s or department’s or organisation’s responsibility; it is only the farmers, the water users, who will become the members (MMD 2005a: 27).

The project thus has a ‘transformative’ (Hickey and Mohan 2005) agenda, wherein the local population is expected to enact roles that make them active agents in influencing and, eventually, taking control of their own development. As a result, the scheme in official circles is considered a ‘landmark’<sup>69</sup>, ‘the first of its kind in Ethiopia’ and ‘unique’<sup>70</sup>, in that it

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<sup>68</sup> Interview, senior Amhara bureau of water resources official#15, Bahir Dar, October 2014.

<sup>69</sup> Interview, senior PMU officer#14, woreda town, October 2014.

<sup>70</sup> Interview, senior Amhara bureau of water resources official#15, Bahir Dar, November 2014.

underscores the dialectical relationship between farmers' empowerment and poverty reduction: empowerment through participation was seen as a means for poverty reduction, and poverty reduction, in turn, was conceived to be a necessary tool with which to encourage participation and collective responsibility for community self-development.<sup>71</sup>

Finally, the usage of the concept of participation cannot simply be seen as an isolated and exceptionally unique experiment associated with the scheme or as part of donor conditionality. In Degga, as elsewhere in Ethiopia, one cannot speak of participation without taking into account the EPRDF's revolutionary democracy ideology. Community participation is a mechanism of governance and dominant party ideal of all small- and large-scale state projects undertaken in Ethiopia. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the EPRDF uses participation as a means to mobilise community resources (financial, human and material) and also to implement plans designed by highly placed actors within the party and state apparatus. Community participation at the kebele level takes place through *lematawi buden* (development groups), which are typically made up of between 20 and 30 individuals residing in administratively defined villages. Participation in development groups (i.e. in public works and meetings) is compulsory. In all, their involuntary participation is expected to contribute labour and material resources and provide trust, solidarity, legitimacy and habits of cooperation (social capital) for the success of local projects. The question, then, is how the project engages the EPRDF's idea of participation? First, by inducing participation, the scheme aims to harness local resources such as money and land and mobilise free labour. Second, by emphasising community and participation, the scheme is presented as public as opposed to state driven, and hence legitimate.

What does the scheme's logic of participation reveal about the phenomenon of boundary-making between state and society? First, in framing the participatory agenda of the project, the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

MoWR sought to establish a strong relationship of partnership between the state and society. However, the very idea of establishing a relationship of partnership presupposes that the state and the local population are mutually exclusive objects. Although the ministry's aim was to break down the seeming boundary between state and society, it has actually re/produced the boundary and reified the two as independently existing entities.

Secondly, the whole idea of community participation and community-based organisation is premised on the assumption of the existence of 'community-as-social organisation' (Agrawal 1999), that is, separate from the state. The concept of community (*mahbereseb*) is abstract, ambiguous and, more to the point, was never before part of the everyday vernacular in Degga. Indeed, it was previously used to constitute the ideological basis of the Derg, i.e. communism, and was employed at the local level as a label for state-orchestrated meetings and work groups. With the deposition of the Derg, the concept once again resurfaced but this time in the context of a participatory development approach. In Degga, it has been widely put to use throughout the state-orchestrated awareness campaigns, capacity building programmes and in the process of the formation of the WUA and cooperative groups. Conversely, in everyday life, people use different terms to refer to a wide range of social relationships. For example, the concept of *got* (parish) or *debere* (population settled around one church) has been used to refer to socio-spatial units, and the terms *mahber* (religious feasts), *idir* (burial societies), *iqub* (informal saving schemes) and *wonfel* (neighbourhood labour self-help groups) have been used to describe social organisations, whereas the concept of *hezzeb* (population or people) or *hezebe-christian* (Christian people or community) have been employed as abstract categories to describe the whole local population.<sup>72</sup> The concept of population or Christian community is used to describe

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<sup>72</sup> Field notes, September – December 2014.

an abstract entity of social relations with common values, but it does not necessarily describe territorial space.

The key point here is that ideas of belonging to a secular and geographically localised empirical group called community, in which all members act harmoniously and collectively, represented by common public authority and enjoying the benefits of community-wide relationships of solidarity or of a representative promoting collective goals to the state, do not exist. Community, in other words, is not an organising social unit. Rather, local social life, as seen above, is dominated by wide and dispersed networks of associational relationships. The point here is not that local residents lack a sense of shared identity. On the contrary. People identify themselves as Amhara, which colloquially means Orthodox Christian. The point here is rather that community is not an ‘already existing’ empirical group that exists separate from society. Community is a product of an exclusionary (boundary-making) logic of state practices. This is clearly reflected in my informants’ responses to my question asking what community is: ‘*ye kebele tesatfo*’<sup>73</sup> (participating in kebele activities), ‘does it mean people?’<sup>74</sup>, ‘It means people’<sup>75</sup>, ‘I think it is when we gathered together for kebele meetings’<sup>76</sup>, ‘... when we come to work together in the kebele or irrigation’.<sup>77</sup> Particularly interesting regarding these answers is that the concept of ‘community’ was understood in relation to activities in and around kebele meetings or as existing only in opposition to the state.

The above discussion illustrates how the various state actors responsible for steering the scheme has reproduced and objectified an abstract idea of community which is disembodied

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<sup>73</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#16, October 2014.

<sup>74</sup> Interview, middle-aged woman#17, October 2014.

<sup>75</sup> Interview, middle-aged trader-cum-farmer#18, October 2014.

<sup>76</sup> Interview, young farmer#19, November 2014.

<sup>77</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#20, November 2014.

from local empirical contexts. In other words, state functionaries (in the MoWR) took a highly fluid and abstract concept of community and gave it the appearance of a static and essentially harmonious practical group. The notion of community is reproduced simply to conform to the national policy agenda of participation and self-management. More specifically, it is juxtaposed in relation to the state, as a counter to ‘past experience [of] ... large-scale rural development projects in Ethiopia [which] have tended to be driven by government and [whose] acceptance has been low’ (AfDB 2001:8).

### *The institutional setting*

Following in the wake of the project design, an important development in the process to begin construction of the scheme was the setting up of an institutional structure that would allow the participation of the local population. Here, the overall bottom-up approach of project construction and implementation, as noted above, meant that the local population should be included in institutional decision-making bodies and participate at every stage of the project construction and, in the process, hold government officials accountable. However, to do so, they needed to be sufficiently trained and empowered; hence, as I demonstrate below, the top-down panoply of professional and bureaucratic expertise, acting upon a series of hierarchically structured committees, all concerned with downward supervision to the point where it reaches the kebele and then the local population. Within this structure, the agency of the local population and their role as partners of the state simply disappear. Rather, their role as end-users – exterior to the state – is highlighted. This is demonstrated in the account below, which describes the organisational structure of those institutions that make up the state apparatus and were involved in the planning and implementation of the scheme.

At the federal level, the controlling agency of the scheme is the Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), located in Addis Ababa. The MoWR oversees all project activities, devises guidelines, manages project funds, communicates with the donor organisation, the construction



contractor and other federal government departments and ensures the project runs conterminous with the larger state policy frameworks. Below the federal level, the scheme was supervised by a regional Project Steering Committee (PSC) located in the regional capital city, Bahir Dar. The PSC members were drawn from the Amhara Bureau of Water Resources, the Amhara Bureau of Agricultural and Rural Development, the Amhara Region Environmental Protection, Land Use and Administration Authority (for the relocation and compensation processes of resettled households), and the Regional Women's Office and the Amhara Region Cooperatives Promotion Bureau. The steering committee prepares and provides training for the local population on a range of issues such as gender equality, agricultural productivity and ethics of work (Gebre, Getachew and McCartney 2008).

At the local level, the scheme was coordinated by a project management unit (PMU) committee, whose members include a project manager, who is a politician from the woreda administration, an agriculturalist, gender issues coordinator, a representative from the woreda Agriculture Bureau, representatives from kebele administrations, a procurement officer, an accountant and a monitoring and evaluation officer. The project unit members help to mobilise the local population for labour, facilitate and arrange meetings and training sessions and provide day-to-day construction supervision. They also arrange compensation payment for loss of livelihood at the project site.

Farmers, on the other hand, are placed within the lower ranks of the development ladder and outside the state hierarchical bounds. The formal decision-making structure does not involve either the democratic representation of farmers or any broad-based community participation forum. Instead, the kebele chairman was appointed to represent the local population and ensure that community priorities were included in important decisions. This means that, in contrast to the large number of hierarchically placed professional and bureaucratic state functionaries, the local population approached the scheme with the service of kebele officials. When asked to

comment on the lack of representation of the local population in local decision-making structures, a senior member of the PMU said:

At the project construction stage, the people were represented on the PMU committee by their kebele leaders. The kebele leaders communicated all the decisions made by the committee to the community. We organised regular meeting so that there would be opportunities for feedback.<sup>78</sup>

Another committee member explained:

The community participated in various training programmes and in different project implementation activities such as in contributing labour for constructing canals. Many of the farmers also contributed voluntarily by ceding 20% of their land for the construction of the canals.<sup>79</sup>

The above comments suggest that participation, at this stage of the project, was used more as a means to harness resources than as a tool of empowerment and, it results in strengthening of the instrumentalist view of participation which the new approach is supposed to have moved beyond. In other words, the scheme, at this stage, was driven more by the officials' ideological adherence to the EPRDF's doctrine of mass participation as a means of governance and resource mobilisation rather than by the new ideals of democratic participation, empowerment and bottom-up accountability.

Some woreda- and kebele-level officials who were part of various committees throughout the implementation process were ambivalent and sceptical about the very idea of 'active participation' and the importance of the involvement of the local population in decision-making

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<sup>78</sup> Interview, senior PMU committee member#21, woreda town, November 2014.

<sup>79</sup> Interview, PMU officer#13, woreda town, November 2014.

structures and processes. One senior civil servant, who was in charge of coordination during the initial years of the project, said that ‘involving uneducated farmers in decision-making processes could be detrimental to the effective and timely implementation of the programme’.<sup>80</sup> Because, he argued, ‘to go and sit with the community to discuss only serves to slow down the construction process’. Another woreda-level politician told me that involving farmers in the planning and implementation process would be a ‘waste of time’ because farmers ‘knew nothing about complex and contentious bureaucratic, administrative and technical issues’.<sup>81</sup> Here, the explicit scepticism expressed by my informants is not only a reaffirmation of the EPRDF’s view of participation in development processes but also an important indication of how state functionaries help to re/produce and solidify the normative distinction between state and society.

To sum up, the foregoing discussion reveals that the progressive participatory approach that appears and aims, at least in theory, to create a real possibility of active participation turns out to reify the old top-down paternalist approach which counter-poses state and society as distinct categories, by hierarchically ordering them. One thus notes a ‘path-dependent effect’ (Mayrl and Quinn 2016), a condition where the organisation of the everyday operation of the scheme simply reflects the pre-existing bureaucratic hierarchical set-up. In other words, although the project was supposed to operate in a bottom-up participatory-based fashion through active farmer participation, the sheer scale and hierarchical nature of the state system<sup>82</sup> oblige the government to rely on a top-down bureaucratic approach. Ultimately, the state has figured as a bureaucratically authoritative, pyramidally structured organisation and as an entity that

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<sup>80</sup> Interview, woreda senior civil servant#22, October 2014.

<sup>81</sup> Interview, woreda politician#23, October 2014.

<sup>82</sup> Here I wish to make clear that I don’t intend to imply a reified conception of hierarchy as a self-evident element of the state system. Following on from what I argued in the previous chapter, state hierarchy should be viewed as re/produced and installed through a regularised set of bureaucratic practices.

classifies the local population as exterior ‘outsiders’ who have to be mobilised, informed and represented by kebele leaders.

***The logic of capacity building: the modern state and traditional society***

The benefits of the Koga irrigation scheme were articulated not solely in economic terms but also in terms of social and cultural transformations that it was envisaged would eliminate the underlying social evils of poverty, such as a lack of work discipline. The social transformation agenda was facilitated by the launching of numerous training programmes which saw the participation of various sections of the local population – women, the poor and model farmers – between 2002 and 2011.<sup>83</sup> I will return later to the question of how different segments of the local population were targeted differently for training, but for now I would like to demonstrate how the training programmes were crafted on the basis of an assumption that the state is separate from the local population/society.

Close analysis of various project documents, as I demonstrate below, confirms that the training programme was rooted in a paternalistic paradigm of modernisation that sought to expose the local population to progressive ideas and new information that would change local values and attitudes, and thereby, ultimately, transform their farming practices. The project planners believed that the local cultural and religious belief system posed an obstacle to the proper implementation of the irrigation scheme and prevent the local population from improving their livelihoods. Most government publications challenge people’s religious beliefs, lack of discipline and anti-social and anti-progressive attitudes that are described as regressive attributes that undermine development efforts. A training manual entitled ‘Koga irrigation: development and social constraints’ described the local ‘work culture’ as a ‘lamentable obstacle to the economic and social progress of farmers’. It further holds that ‘it is an exercise in futility to hope for national progress with the current mind-set’ (MoWR 2005).

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<sup>83</sup> Interview, senior PMU officer#14, October 2014.

In much the same fashion, the donor agency, the (AfDB 2001: 9), noted the following in its appraisal report:

Religious and cultural holidays may take up to 150 days in a year. Efficient use of the irrigation component will require dispensation to allow irrigation to take place throughout the season. The project will work with local religious leaders and elders on this issue as this approach has worked elsewhere in Ethiopia.

It was claimed that ‘proper implementation of community self-management requires fundamental shifts in the norms and attitude of the farmers. The goal is to build social capability for using and sustaining the irrigation on a long-term basis.’ The project therefore aims to ‘transform ... beliefs and practices which are inimical to economic development and modernity’ (MoWR 2005), to eliminate what the state characterises as ‘non-productive socially unaccepted activities’ and ‘the extravagant number of Saint’s Days’ (Acres 1995).

What does this pedagogical modernisation model of development tell us about the state discourse of boundary work? In designing the training, different government departments positioned the state as a site of rationality and science and the local population as traditional, stagnant and work-shy, and, in doing so, they helped to re/produce a line of difference between state and society. In other words, on one level, characterisations such as ‘traditional’ assert both the superiority and autonomy of the state; on another level, they construct the local population not only as a separate non-state domain but also as temporally belonging to habits of the past. The result is that poverty and underdevelopment are ascribed more to tradition than to the current structure of inequality (especially in terms of access to resources) that led to growing wealth for the few (see Chapter 5). Significantly, this threatens the visibility of local class relations and the marginalisation of the poor by projecting them as victims of tradition.

Additionally, the content of the training programmes was framed around the idea that state and society are inhabited by two fundamentally different kinds of people. On the one hand were the small group of people who were considered to be committed to the ideals of progress, rationality, science and technology. On the other hand were the majority of the population who were regarded as irrational, superstitious and traditional. In practice, however, state functionaries can hardly be characterised as ‘modern’ and ‘rational’, and they cannot be neatly juxtaposed against the local population. Instead, the identity and interaction between state functionaries and the local population are inextricably shaped and marked by common normative religious and social values. In other words, traditional social and cultural values animate as much the lifeworld of state functionaries as they influence the everyday lives of the local population. For example, during the course of my fieldwork, some civil servants at both the kebele and woreda levels had a high rate of absenteeism on unofficial religious holidays. Others, in honour of personal patron saints, were in the habit of suspending field-level activities (such as agricultural demonstrations) each month and celebrating their saint’s day with traditional coffee ceremonies.

On the other hand, most of the farmers were enthusiastic about and keen to take advantage of new agricultural technologies such as chemical fertilisers and hybrid varieties of seeds. The crux of the matter is that shared normative cultural practices interpellate both state functionaries and the local population in their daily lives and hence produce subjects who perform roles that cannot be neatly categorised as either modern or traditional. Therefore, tradition as a distinct domain that belongs to society is a context created by political actors and technocrats which quite fundamentally illustrates the statist practice of boundary-making.

### *Classification of the local population for training*

In making efforts to investigate different government documents, training guidelines and manuals, one thing tended to appear to be most significant: the state development imaginary embedded in the training programmes reinforces normative social hierarchies. The different state departments (e.g. Agriculture, Land Use, Women's, etc.) that were involved in the training process designed different training programmes and targeted them at people who were positioned differently in terms of their education, power and gender. The local population were roughly classified into three categories of trainee: trainee trainers (semi-educated local elites who would in turn train larger number of trainees), trainees (the ordinary population) and women<sup>84</sup>. For instance, a government appraisal<sup>84</sup> report identifies 'lead' and 'respected' farmers:

... to implement a capacity building programme to farmers, in particular the lead farmers and respected community leaders (who are farmers), whereby irrigation construction engineers and/or technicians, masonry tradesmen, and/or irrigation workers from small-scale irrigation schemes teach the leading farmers the practical skills of constructing canals, drains, banks and structures (MMD 2005a: 45).

As such, power relations make a glaring appearance. The 'trainee trainers' were positioned as knowledgeable citizens capable of both learning and teaching other members of the community. Following on the classification of the local population, as a strategy to transform local values, prominent local priests, notable individuals and kebele representatives were given intensive training about the benefits of hard work and 'progressive social values' (MoWR 2005) and were invited to visit irrigation schemes in other parts of the country. A senior project unit coordinator explained: 'leaders that were drawn from religious and opinion leaders are made to travel to Tigray and Oromia regions and share experiences and observed practices of

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<sup>84</sup> Interview, senior Amhara bureau of water resources official#15, Bahir Dar, November 2014.

irrigation users in action.<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile, the poor and women were positioned as vulnerable and extreme victims of tradition who were unable to understand and communicate with the experts. As such, they needed their own leaders as intermediaries to help them become aware and express to them the benefits of hard work in the simple language they understood.

Yet women were also singled out for special capacity building activity. One training manual, for instance, emphasises that training for women should be ‘tailored to their need ... since they have multiple household responsibilities, training programmes need to be flexible in schedule and reach them [as they are not allowed by their husbands to travel] in villages’ (MoWR 2005). What becomes more notable upon close reading of the training manuals is that the state’s development programme was highly gendered in that it inadvertently included masculine and feminine training programmes. Masculine training included mainly agricultural (such as crop production, agronomy, animal husbandry), infrastructural (canal management, water and soil conservation) and input (fertiliser, chemicals) utilisation programmes, whereas feminine training programmes included programmes on social and household issues (gender empowerment and household management, waterborne diseases).

### ***Institutionalisation of the state-society boundary: the WUA***

In addition to providing capacity building training, the MoWR and the donor agency (AfDB) determined that the legitimacy and sustainability of the project required the formation of a farmer-driven participatory institution that would articulate ‘community interests’<sup>86</sup> and serve as an intermediary between the local people and the local institutions that constitute the state:

Another important step we took was to help the local community organise themselves into water user cooperatives. The role of the cooperatives is to represent the whole water

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<sup>85</sup> Interview, senior PMU officer#14, November 2014.

<sup>86</sup> Interview, head of the WUA#24, Degga, November 2014.



users and the interests of the local community in the implementation and management of the project.<sup>87</sup>

To this effect, in 2011, water cooperatives (WUAs) were established across the 12 kebeles served by the irrigation system and federated to form one Koga Irrigation Cooperative.<sup>88</sup> Here, the practice of producing and institutionalising the distinction between state and society finds its expression in a WUA by-law, which was prepared by the Amhara Regional Bureau of Cooperatives Promotion. The first element that the by-law established was distinctive state and non-state realms of authority. This involves division of responsibilities between the local institutions that make up the state apparatus and the local community/WUA. The by-law, for instance, states that a Project Operation Unit (POU), as a branch of government bureaucracy, operates ‘the dam and reservoir, main and secondary canals and drains and the associated road network’, whereas the WUA is responsible for the ‘O&M [Operations and Maintenance] of the tertiary and quaternary canals and drains and associated access roads and on-farm structures’ (MMD 2005b: 2). Furthermore, the WUA is charged with the optimal allocation and utilisation of the water resource, generating local resources in cash or labour for maintenance and operations, preventing erosion, ensuring the interests of the owners and users of the land plots and sanctioning violations of the rules (MMD 2005b). Thus, the local population were designated as exterior to the state and treated as discrete development actors. The WUA, in this sense, represents the institutionalisation of the two schemas, the state and the local

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<sup>87</sup> Interview, senior PMU officer#14, November 2014.

<sup>88</sup> It should be pointed out that there was nothing new or unique about this form of arrangement. On the contrary, it is a typical way of arranging an irrigation management system and is used all over the world. But the formation of the WUA, in the context of this thesis, is significant insofar as it offers insight into how the boundary between state and society is produced and reaffirmed.

community, governed by a by-law which dictates specific rules, regulations and parameters on how the two are supposed to relate to one another.

The second element introduced with the by-law was that the WUA, as a self-managed development actor, was to be run by a committee of seven community representatives who were to be elected as its members. The by-law, however, recommends that the leadership committee is composed of respected village elders, preferably those who can read and write (MMD 2005b: 2). The problem here was that the requirement for literacy and social status helped erstwhile dominant semi-educated social and political elites (model farmers) to continue their domination. At the time of my fieldwork, the leaders of the WUA in Degga were the same few elites who occupied multiple positions at various levels of the kebele administration. The chairman of the association was, for instance, the ANDM/EPRDF head. It is clear then that the formation of the WUA – as a discrete community body separate from the kebele institution – has not affected local power relations. Rather, by distinguishing the elite from ordinary inhabitants, it reproduces and reinforces local stratifications, hierarchies and thereby perpetuates erstwhile power relations. As such, the boundary between the state and the local population, as we shall see later in the chapter, simply serves as a resource of power and personal enrichment for those local elites on both sides of the dichotomy.

## **6.2. Participation and subject sensibilities**

So far, I have attempted to demonstrate the different mechanisms and processes through which state-society boundary is produced. In this section, I wish to briefly draw attention to examine how state training programmes induce farmers to identify themselves as ‘underdeveloped subjects’ (Gupta 1998). My purpose here is to demonstrate the contradictory effects of development and boundary-making practices, particularly by examining how training programmes and development discourses intended to encourage participation informed the inferior position of the poor vis-à-vis (semi-)educated members of the local population.

Before detailing the complexities of how subject positions were produced, it may be worth considering the grassroots' vernacular understanding of the concept of participation. The verb 'to participate' in common local parlance, i.e. *mesatef*, means to attend events, meetings or public works, etc. Participation, to the local population, therefore simply implies attending meetings to receive information and listen to the eloquent and witty speeches and technical and forceful words given by state functionaries and public leaders. Many of my informants were surprised when I informed them that participation entails the idea that participants are in charge of discourses, that they have the right to vote and be elected and that all local inhabitants should have an equal voice in decision-making processes. They would then be confounded by any difference this might make. 'Regardless, it is not our place. A farmer toils with dirt and dust. We are not people of paper and pen,'<sup>89</sup> said a middle-aged farmer. Similarly, another middle-aged farmer expressed: 'We [ordinary farmers] must accept whatever comes. A donkey and a farmer should consent to take orders.'<sup>90</sup> Another elderly man said, 'Who would listen to a farmer? We are looked down upon by everyone.'<sup>91</sup> It is tempting to interpret these responses as a reflection of the dynamics of the Amhara authoritarian political tradition and the culture of obeisance to authority. Such an approach, however, fails to account for the ongoing complex contemporary practices that re/produce structural positions and the norms governing the participation of the local people in decision making processes.

Despite the scheme was initiated with the aim of transforming local inhabitants into empowered subjects, I argue that a constantly re/produced set of discourses and governance practices that constitute social classes and underdeveloped subjects continue to animate the norms governing the participation of the local people. In particular, as will be discussed in

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<sup>89</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#25, Degga, October 2014.

<sup>90</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#16, Degga, October 2014.

<sup>91</sup> Interview, elderly man#26, Degga, October 2014.

greater detail below, development and participation discourses were used by local inhabitants as points of reference against which they constituted not only ideas of state but also ‘underdeveloped’ subjectivities. That is to say, state capacity building programmes, as seen in the first section, set the terms by which – and are key mediums through which – subject positions are managed. Many of the people I interacted with expressed that it is impossible to be active participants because, as one middle-aged farmer expressed, ‘participation requires the ability to read and write’ and he is an ‘uneducated peasant’.<sup>92</sup> Here, an awareness of his illiteracy not only tells my informant that he cannot actively participate but also informs his sense of self as an ‘uneducated peasant’ and certainly positions him as such in the context of wider power relations. When asked to account for their lack of active participation, the majority of my informants drew on state discourses and described themselves using disparaging terms. One man remarked, ‘I cannot meaningfully participate because I am illiterate. We were told that working in the association [WUA] requires the ability to read and write. I have nothing useful to contribute to the WUA.’<sup>93</sup> Many of the ordinary farmers were conscious of and sensitive to the structural and social contexts within which participation is required. One middle-aged farmer told me, ‘It was made clear to us during the training programmes the WUA needs educated people as leaders’. He further added, ‘I am not useful for them. My role is to learn what *mengist* teaches me ... I have no one to blame but myself.’<sup>94</sup> Similarly, another middle-aged man said, ‘participation is best achieved only when educated people take the responsibility of leadership ... As to the illiterate farmers ... what we learn at meetings [training

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<sup>92</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#27, Degga, October 2014.

<sup>93</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#28, Degga, October 2014.

<sup>94</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#25, Degga, October 2014.

programmes] is sometimes difficult to comprehend. Only those who read and write can communicate better with *mengist* ... poor people attend just to make up the quorum.’<sup>95</sup>

The above comments illustrate that in the context of active participation, the training programmes and subsequent elections of WUA leaders privileged literacy and devalued the agency of those who did not read and write. This sentiment, I should point out, was also quite common among state functionaries. For instance, when asked to comment on the extent of ordinary peasants’ participation in the leadership roles, the PMU coordinator at the time of project construction, remarked:

It is important that capable people fill the positions. Most people cannot even write their own names. The farmers themselves are ill at ease to sit side by side and discuss matters that require broad understanding with the better educated and socially respected elders. Leadership in such important matters of development requires a basic level of qualification.<sup>96</sup>

The other issue that anchored the lack of active participation and self-perception of farmers was an awareness that a knowledge of state bureaucracy was required for the poor to be active participants. A middle-aged man explained:

We are ignorant regarding government procedures. When matters related to government work come up, one has to know the right procedures. Education and experience are critical to participating in government-related work.<sup>97</sup>

Another man spoke in similar terms:

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<sup>95</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#29, Degga, October 2014.

<sup>96</sup> Interview, PMU coordinator#14, woreda town, November 2014.

<sup>97</sup> Interview, elderly man#26, Degga, October 2014.

Those of us who are not educated are in a difficult position; we don't know the simple things as identifying and distinguishing government offices. When we go the woreda offices, we are unable to read office numbers or government notices ... To participate, one has to read and write and should know how to work with government officials.<sup>98</sup>

The view that representation and participation are derived from literacy and knowledge and familiarity with state bureaucracy is related to the common culture of defining development initiatives and political office in administrative terms (bureaucratic procedures, letter and report writing, etc.). This view belies the fact that an illiterate person can be as good a representative of community interests as prejudiced literate individuals.

Despite the purpose behind the training programmes being to empower farmers, they were, as the comments above demonstrate, unwittingly grounded in radical self-consciousness-raising projects, i.e. telling peasants what they are and do not have instead of how they can be. What farmers see is that they lack access, power and education and thereby any meaningful position in the participatory community management programme. By inculcating and pointing out the state-specified terms within which participation takes place, my informants constructed subordinated subjectivities.

With respect to the local leadership, many of my informants compared their lives with those who were educated, powerful and wealthy, often belittling themselves in the process. They considered themselves as 'lacking in education'<sup>99</sup> and 'knowledge of *mengist*'<sup>100</sup> that defined local elites. In most cases, people's endorsement of WUA representatives relates to the state's emphasis on education and denigration of their agency which informs their sense of self, rather

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<sup>98</sup> Interview, young man#19, Degga, October 2014.

<sup>99</sup> Interview, elderly man#30, Degga, October 2014.

<sup>100</sup> Interview, young man#31, Degga, October 2014.

than local leaders' ability to deliver economic and social benefits. In other words, individuals' self-awareness of their situated constraints allows them to visualise and imagine how community participation is expected to work and who is well positioned to fit the expectations. Yet this does not mean that peasants accept any abuse of power and resources. They in fact, as we will see in the next chapter, discursively contest the abuse of power by semi-literate community representatives and state functionaries through narratives of corruption.

Indeed, in the view of my informants, the notion of participation, in the context of attending meetings, is significant. Most of my informants spoke positively about the information and knowledge they derived from the training programmes. They also embrace the 'modernist' hope generated by state discourses. Almost all the illiterate people I spoke to were keen to send their children to school and prevent them from meeting the same fate. But they were also aware that they cannot do anything about their illiteracy and material constraints. 'I have received so many great ideas from the project people about how to use irrigation water and start an animal fattening business. But I am poor. I have no resources to put the information I gathered into practice,' explained a middle-aged farmer.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, another middle-aged man said, 'I have learned so many things ... what and when to plan, soil erosion, water and fertiliser use, etc. But, I don't have what the rich people have ... land, fertiliser and money. Learning is good for nothing: I still struggle to feed my family.'<sup>102</sup> Another man stated: 'They teach us *zemen ametash* [modern] methods ... but I have not seen training resulting in any benefit for the poor. They are good for the rich.'<sup>103</sup> In short, knowledge of farming technology and methods which underpin capacity building discourses only served to create 'underdeveloped as a subject and underdevelopment as a form of identity' (Gupta 1998: 11).

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<sup>101</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#29, Degga, October 2014.

<sup>102</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#25, Degga, October 2014.

<sup>103</sup> Interview, elderly farmer#30, Degga, October 2014.

Thus far, the discussions in this chapter have revealed how the various state actors responsible for steering the scheme helped to produce a boundary of difference between state and society based on the presumed existence of ‘community-as-social organisation’ (Agrawal 1999) that can articulate common interests, participate in project implementation processes, act to address collective problems, be represented, take responsibility for its own development, and legitimise the project. Although a harmonious and empirical community envisaged by the planners was absent in Degga, it emerged as a political/technocratic construct of what should be there in order to legitimise the scheme, a practice that made it possible to identify the difference of state from the society within a single field. This in effect solidified hierarchical relationships between the rural poor, women and the local elites. The following questions thus remain to be answered: Are the state boundary-making practices effectual? Does the distinction between state and society create concrete consequences? If so, what material implications does this have for the poor and local power relations? I turn to this now.

### **6.3. Utilisation and management of the irrigation facility**

By 2011, construction activities had been completed and the farmers began to utilise the system for production in the dry season. In the meantime, management of the canal system was handed over to the WUA. The division between management responsibilities between the local institutions that make up the state apparatus and the local community/WUA brings into sharp focus the distinction between state and society by defining who and what constitute such domains and by making legible the agencies and individuals who perform roles that are recognised as either state or community. This process has helped to make a boundary between state and society appear as an empirical reality in the eyes of both the state functionaries and the local population. As I will demonstrate below, this ‘state effect’ (Mitchell 1999) has been practically consequential in that it established an institutionalised relationship between the local institutions that make up the state apparatus and the local population based on the principles of



community self-management and limited state involvement, thereby exposing the poor and women to asymmetrical class and gender-based community relations that undermined their access to water and other resources. In this section I therefore seek to show how the effort to build community self-empowerment by treating the local population as discrete development actors separate from the state has the contradictory effect of perpetuating class divisions.

Before detailing the material consequences of the state-community division, I would like to discuss briefly the local patterns of irrigation water and land use and market constraints that have been in place ever since farmers began to utilise the irrigation system. In Degga, the lowest, most fertile and best-irrigated parts on the banks of the canals are cultivated by the rich and powerful. If the wealthy did not already own the land near the canals before they were built, they soon acquired it through long-term rent contracts or exchanges of land. The regional law permits land rent-outs by smallholders for up to 25 years.<sup>104</sup> Particularly, during the first few years in which farmers began irrigating their land, market constraints allowed local elites and wealthy urban opportunists to rent land from poor, cash-strapped farmers. In 2011, for instance, with almost all of the farmers producing similar vegetables and crops such as tomatoes and onions and marketing during the same period of time, there was excess supply in the market. This resulted in a sharp fall in price. The tomato surplus especially could not be stored because of a lack of cold storage rooms. Urban-based traders made matters worse by quoting lower prices on tomatoes, forcing farmers to sell at a price as low as 10 ETB (£0.33) per quintal. Widowed women and poor farmers ended up renting out their plots to wealthy farmers and outsiders and becoming sex workers, household and commercial farm labourers.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> The Revised Amhara National Regional State. Rural Land Administration and Use. No. 133/2006.

<sup>105</sup> Interviews with two Das (DA#5 and DA#8), Degga, November 2014; interview, middle-aged woman#32, November 2014.

Over the following years, cognisant of market constraints, the government established the Amhara Seed Enterprise to contract farmers to grow commercial quantities of onion and wheat seeds at government procurement prices, way above the market value.<sup>106</sup> At the local level, the contracting process was primarily managed through the WUA and development agents (DAs), who are under the influence of local kebele cadres that straddle the line between the state and community. The result was that the work was almost entirely contracted out to wealthier farmers.<sup>107</sup> Poor farmers are thus forced to rely on fast-yielding vegetables and tomatoes, thereby sharply reducing the demand for chemical fertiliser. However, the vegetable and tomato markets are too variable to secure an income.

This situation is exacerbated by institutional restrictions in that now the community, i.e. the WUA, is separate from public institutions, state actors are not able to interfere in the day-to-day monitoring of water distribution and management of disputes. At the same time, local elites (model farmers) dominate the leadership positions in the WUA. These wealthy and powerful farmers, in order to keep their vast areas of land under cultivation, use a great deal of water, in the process reducing and sometimes denying the amount that is allocated to the poor. Community rights to water access are simply overridden by the growing quantity of crops produced commercially for the government by model farmers. As a result, during the course of my research, I was met with persistent and extensive local complaints about exclusion from water distribution and the absence of any state help. One farmer explained his experience with his wealthier neighbour:

He blocks the water to my field and diverts it to his own fields. I needed water desperately because tomato and vegetables [that he cultivated] need regular watering. He says that I

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<sup>106</sup> Interview, DA#7, Degga, November 2014.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

only need little water because I have small plot ... and sometimes he denies my turn ...

It is WUA's responsibility. *Mengist* cannot help me.<sup>108</sup>

Some have even given up farming during the dry season. One middle-aged farmer, for instance, reflected on his experience as follows:

I have completely quit farming in dry seasons. It is costly ... it needs land preparation, pesticide and regular watering ... You have to fight with the rich to secure your right to access water .... It is an association's [WUA] thing, *mengist* can't help you ... ultimately, either your crops perish for lack of water or the market plummets and you end up selling them at a cheaper price that does not even cover your inputs and labour costs.<sup>109</sup>

Because of the multiple constraints, many household heads, especially women, entered into sharecropping arrangements with wealthier farmers:

It is easier for [widowed] women to enter into sharecropping. Farming is a man's job. I am not capable of negotiation like a man to acquire fertiliser: I am weak to participate in maintenance work, and my children are very young. Added to that, there is no support [for widows] from the government with respect to water use or fertiliser. Everything is decided by the rich people in the cooperative [WUA]; there is not government involvement at all.<sup>110</sup>

Experiences of abuse also surfaced in local complaints. A middle-aged farmer pointed out his own experience as a case in point:

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<sup>108</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#33, Degga, November 2014.

<sup>109</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#29, November 2014.

<sup>110</sup> Interview, widowed woman#34, November 2014.

I have suffered the worst abuse ... I had a problem with a rich man who has a big farm at the head. He used to block water and refuse to give me my turn. I reported it to the association [WUA], but they have done nothing. Then I reported it to a government person at the project office, and he told me it is 'the association's issue; they will deal with it'. Left with no other option, I decided to confront him. He sent his labourers to beat me. I reported it to the militia and the social court and they have done nothing. I then took the case to an elder, and the elder reprimanded his brutality towards me. I don't know if it lasts but, for now, he respects my turn.<sup>111</sup>

Notable from this case is how, in the struggle over access to water, the realms of state and society have been restricted by the parameters of institutions and the law and negotiating points have been narrowed down to internal village social relations, with no oversight or intermediation from external state functionaries. The most well-connected individuals rely on power derived from kinship networks in their clash over access to water. Others were ghettoised into a system where no immediate legal or administrative action may be brought against the powerful.

Returning to local complaints, many people expressed their frustrations related to canal maintenance. Although it is the responsibility of the WUA to mobilise labour, it is usually individual peasants who clear debris from canals. My informants cited that wealthier farmers receive special attention from the WUA while their own demands go unanswered. For instance, a middle-aged farmer said:

When damage occurs in areas which affect the rich, we all participate in the repair process. The association pays special attention to the demands of the rich. Sometimes they call government people [engineers] to clear the canals using graders. But when I and

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<sup>111</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#35, November 2014.

many other [whose land is located on heads of the watercourse] need help to carry water uphill, no one responds.<sup>112</sup>

Similarly, another young peasant complained:

When we need [technical] help from the government, we should submit an application in writing on a piece of paper to the association. The association treats an application from a rich man and myself differently. They make sure the rich get help from the government. We [whose land is uphill] are still pleading with the WUA for canal clearance.<sup>113</sup>

Here, my informants are referring to the established institutional procedure of requesting technical help from the government where technical assistance can only be requested through the WUA (which is assumed to represent the interests of the local community). However, in practice, as my informants indicated, such requests from poor members are often ignored, leaving them to their own devices.

In almost every case from the informants above and in my interviews with many other farmers, those who expressed their complaints and frustrations found that they were unfairly treated by local elites, not by *mengist*<sup>114</sup>. As one elderly man said: ‘it is our own children [local elites] who make us suffer.’ What these comments from different informants’ reveal is that the boundary-making practice has locked the poor and women into a mode of livelihood that is not empowering. Ironically, far from benefitting from the irrigation scheme, the peasants might, in fact, become worse off by ceding 20 per cent of their landholding for canal construction. Most farmers cultivate smaller plots (DHWSES 2008).

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<sup>112</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#20, November 2014.

<sup>113</sup> Interview, young farmer#19, November 2014.

<sup>114</sup> I analyse the reasons for people absolving *mengist* of blame in Chapter 7.

To summarise, the participatory aspect of the scheme that was aimed at community self-management and self-empowerment had the contradictory effect of sustaining class differences partly because of the unrealistic assumption of the existence of community as a harmonious whole that is separate from the state. The idea that the project can be equitably managed through the WUA has ‘depoliticised’ local practices of abuse and corruption, not because, as Ferguson (1994) argued in the case of Lesotho, of the technical aspects of the project but rather because it has become ghettoised and incarcerated as a community issue. Ultimately, as we have seen, the fruits of the project have failed to reach the poor.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter my purpose was to chalk out governance and discursive practices in the KIWM scheme that afford the state the appearance of being a separate structure. I did this by closely examining the scheme’s construction and implementation processes and its aim of empowering and transforming the local population. I have demonstrated that the urge to empower the local population stems from concerns over the state’s past authoritarian approach to managing development projects. As such, the state was premised by the scheme’s planners (MoWR and AfDB) as a discrete entity that assumed complete control over development processes and as a result beset by top-down attempts at development intervention, with very little success. By contrast, local communities are perceived to be as a harmonious whole and potential development partner. Success was therefore conceived to be contingent upon the inclusivity of the scheme –specifically, in its ability to bring the two together as partners. I have argued that the premise that state and society constitute two discrete entities that could enter into a relationship of partnership with one another reproduces and reaffirms the line between state and society.

Furthermore, the organisation of the project into federal, regional, woreda and kebele levels reflects the pre-existing scalar structure of the state bureaucratic set-up. Hence, participation

was interpreted and implemented in terms of the pre-existing classifications and schema (state and non-state domains) rather than in light of the radical new idea of empowerment and bottom-up accountability. Similarly, the introduction of the WUA, with its aim of empowering the local population, had the effect of reproducing an image of an autonomous state that is separate from the local population.

The participatory approach of the scheme was also spurred by the impulse to reach out and empower marginalised sections of local communities which should be allowed to have an equal say regarding their own development. However, the strategy of achieving this through training had the paradoxical effect of informing the peasants what they are (illiterate) and what they lack (knowledge of state bureaucracy, literacy and numeracy) for them to meaningfully participate. In short, instead of empowering the rural poor, the scheme had outcomes of constituting ‘underdeveloped subject’ positions and identities, generating and consolidating discourses that reify the state as a distant entity and excluding the poor from access to water and other resources. In short, rather than empowering the local population by creating a relationship of partnership, the scheme reproduced the image of the state as an autonomous and hierarchical entity that is elevated beyond the reach of the local population. This process speaks to issues I discuss in the next chapter, of how the state is popularly imagined as an idea lying beyond the venality of local politics.

## Chapter 7

### Corruption talk, livelihood security and state imagination

So far, this thesis has addressed the processes by which state verticality and discreteness are produced through the governance and development practices of kebele-level bureaucracy. Together, the previous two chapters presented the ways in which the state operates as a cohesive and authoritative apparatus that stands as ‘a part of society and apart from society’ (Migdal 2001: 263). The modalities by which the state emerges as a symbolic centre of society, however, are manifested in more than state-related political practices. The state is also discursively constructed and imagined as an authoritative centre of power in public culture (Gupta 1995). Thus, this chapter turns to an analysis of the manner in which the state comes to be constituted in people’s imaginations in the context of everyday social life. This means analysing the language of the kebele public domain. By the kebele public domain, I mean the habitual social spaces such as tea and coffee houses, *tella bet* (literally meaning beer house, see Chapter 8) and the informal roadside gatherings where local inhabitants engage with a variety of issues that shape the idea of state and moral rights and wrongs. In such spaces, the local population, as social actors, disparage and gossip about state functionaries, tell each other stories of corruption and the success and failure of local development projects and also exchange information about the distribution of agricultural inputs, weddings, funerals and other local social events.

In participating in such local public domains, I found corruption to be a favourite topic of everyday conversation. Men would meet in one of the local public domains – usually during the evening, when the day’s work was done, and during religious off-work days – to tell stories of corruption. They talked about the embezzlement of development resources, about the amount of money the kebele officials had so far diverted from development programmes or



were expected to divert, and about the cost of getting things done (*guday masfetsemya*). They also shared ideas, experiences and obtained new information about, for instance, how much civil servants would likely demand and so on. Within such talk and discourses, the actions of local leaders were argued over and eventually evaluated against local moral norms. Politicians were often described as corrupt, self-serving and unscrupulous. An often-used phrase was ‘eating up’ of state resources. Another term that was often employed to describe the perceived widespread nature of corruption was ‘stealing’. This chapter focuses on examining how such corruption idioms and discourses help people make sense of politics, imagine the state and how it confers on them specific claims of important agricultural resources that are perceived to be controlled and managed by powerful state functionaries.

The aim of this chapter, therefore, is not to explain the existence of the phenomenon of corruption in terms of whether, why and how it occurs and why people talk about it but rather to examine the implications of corruption talk in the construction of images of and the legitimacy of the state idea. Moreover, like all public discourses, corruption talk is partisan and is prone to exaggeration, but instead of investigating the veracity of such talk, this chapter focuses on the kind of local politics and imagination of the state that it produces. What truly makes the phenomenon of corruption an interesting object of study is ‘not so much the “reality” of its existence as the fact that it is widely believed to exist, the complex narratives that enfold it, and the new relationships and objects of study that those narratives create’ (Haller and Shore 2005: 6).

I begin this chapter by providing a short background introduction to the mechanisms of agricultural resources management and distribution in Ethiopia. While the main objective is to illuminate the modalities by which the state comes to be constituted as a superior centre of authority and power, a foray into the intricacies of local class relations is almost unavoidable when discussing this process. The section that follows therefore demonstrate how the

monopoly and misuse of development resources by state functionaries has contributed to class polarisation insofar as it has altered the traditional local relations of production from those based on subsistence farming to relations in which the poor are dependent on the rich through arrangements of sharecropping and land lease. In doing so, I will highlight how local class relations are intimately tied to the immediate survival needs of the poor and demonstrate their bearing on the way people talk about corruption and imagine the state. Next, I lay out discourses of corruption in a series of ethnographic vignettes to demonstrate the different meaning and function it has not only to the production of state idea but also in the lives of the rural poor.

The chapter ends by noting that corruption talk is not the only dominant arena through which the state comes to be constructed and imagined. I will highlight that people in Degga also imagine the state through their use of language replete with religious metaphors and symbolism. In so doing, I will furthermore argue that the employment of religious imagery and language by Amhara farmers – based on which a large proportion of the scholarship on Ethiopian politics explains state-society dynamics as relations of dominance and subordination – is very much about imagining and elucidating the state’s responsibilities and obligations to the people.

### **7.1. The mechanisms of agricultural resources distribution in Ethiopia**

In this section I provide a very brief description of the manner in which agricultural resources such as chemical fertilisers, credits services and improved seeds have been managed and distributed in Ethiopia since 1991 (the year in which the EPRDF took power) as a way to better contextualise the chapter. In 1993, under a foreign aid conditionality agreement, the Ethiopian government opened the fertiliser market, which had formerly been monopolised by a government agency called Agricultural Inputs Supplies Enterprise (AISE), to the private sector (Jayne et al. 2003). This had the effect of liberalising wholesale and retail prices and gave peasants the ability to purchase from a range of suppliers. However, by 1999, the ruling front

(EPRDF)-owned companies, which had been given preferential access to foreign exchange, government warehouses, vehicles and subsidies, had completely driven private suppliers and retailers out of the agricultural market (Jayne et al. 2003). Since then, the fertiliser market has been monopolised by the AISE and party-affiliated companies.

More recently, however, the share of party-affiliated companies has significantly declined and the market is being dominated by state-organised cooperative unions (Spielman 2008). These cooperative unions import agricultural inputs, mainly fertilisers, pesticides and different kinds of seeds, through the AISE and distribute them to smallholder farmers via local primary cooperatives that are explicitly controlled by *kebele* politicians. The state-owned Commercial Bank of Ethiopia provides credit to the cooperative unions under a complete credit guarantee via the regional Bureaus of Agriculture and Rural Development (BoARDs). The regional governments (BoARDs) then set fertiliser prices that include margins for the unions and primary cooperatives. The primary cooperatives sell fertiliser to farmers on cash, credit or combined cash-credit bases. In Degga, as also applies to other relatively food-sufficient parts of the country, fertiliser and seeds are provided on a cash basis, with *kebele* officials playing a leading role in the distribution process. It is within this general context that state-society encounters take place at the local level and corruption circulates as a dominant theme in public discourses in Degga.

### ***Corruption, class and the marginalisation of the poor***

Before proceeding to present the ways in which people imagine the state, it may be worth considering the intimate link between class relations and corruption discourses as a way to delimit the specific conjunctures that have shaped state imaginations in Degga. State-controlled development resources such as chemical fertiliser, credit, pesticides and land are the only important forms of capital and assets in Degga and thus represent a critical means to provide for the survival needs of the poor and enhance their life chances. Fertiliser is seen as the most

valuable of all resources because, as one farmer ruefully said, ‘The soil does not yield crops without application of fertiliser. It does not even accept the [organic] manure. It has become useless; it is simply a wasteland without fertiliser.’<sup>115</sup> Similarly, another farmer told me that ‘fertilisers are essential. If we stop applying fertilisers, the crops will fail.’<sup>116</sup> Another farmer said, ‘access to fertiliser has become equally as important as having access to land’.<sup>117</sup> In today’s changing economic circumstances, where cash has become an important means with which to obtain access to the basic necessities of life, the poor depend on access to such agricultural inputs to earn profit from the cultivation of cereal crops<sup>118</sup> so that they can buy basic goods (cooking oil, salt, cloth, etc.), pay their taxes and debts (personal or to cooperatives) and send their children to school. Overall, the implication is that access to land, fertiliser and cash has become crucial to meeting the survival needs of the poor, in contrast to former times when access to land (subsistence production) was the only factor determining the livelihood security of the poor.

Yet most of the poor people lack the social contacts or skills required to strategically negotiate with key local actors and secure sufficient amounts of fertiliser. Without fertiliser, the poor, instead of leaving their land fallow, engage in sharecropping arrangements whereby they rent out their land to wealthy farmers for the duration of one or more agricultural cycles. Under this kind of arrangement, the wealthy farmer, as a tenant, provides all the necessary agricultural inputs such as high-yielding seed, chemical fertiliser and pesticides, with the landowner bearing the responsibility for ploughing, sowing, weeding and protecting the crop from birds and encroachment by cattle. The resulting output is then divided equally between

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<sup>115</sup> Interview, elderly farmer#30, Degga, October 2014.

<sup>116</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#16, Degga, October 2014.

<sup>117</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#36, Degga, October 2014.

<sup>118</sup>The major cereal crops in Degga include grains such as *teff* (used for the making of *injera*), wheat, barley, corn, sorghum and millet.

them. The second option for farmers with no access to inputs is simply to lease out their land for cash. Most poor men supplement their income by working for wages in the fields of wealthy farmers, in traditional local timber mills, where they process timber extracted from local forests into planks for commercial purposes, as daily labourers in urban centres and by engaging in the brewing and selling of alcohol.

As I will elaborate below, the changing means of production (the fact that agricultural inputs have become as essential as land) introduced a shift in the traditional system of production from subsistence farming to the types of relations of production that are established between model farmers and the poor. In other words, the development of a system of production based upon capitalised means of production and the concomitant differential access to agricultural resources subordinated the poor to the powerful farmers (through sharecropping arrangements, land rent and lease), as the former are dependent on the latter for the inputs (fertilisers, pesticides, irrigation water credits and sometimes oxen for ploughing) necessary for their land to be productive.

Many of my informants told me that when they rented or leased out their land, it was mainly rented by the model farmers who control all local state and non-state institutions, including the kebele, cooperatives and the water user association (WUA). They depicted this trend as corruption, manipulation, a violation of their state-conferred rights to the basic resources needed for a livelihood and as greed and an unfair accumulation of wealth at the expense of the poor. One middle-aged individual, for example, described a wealthy local businessman-cum-politician who rented his land for the duration of an agricultural cycle as a ‘selfish, corrupt man [who] takes advantage of the small people like me’.<sup>119</sup> Similarly, another farmer viewed the general trend towards resource accumulation via tenancy as the ‘corruption and greed of

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<sup>119</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#29, Degga, September 2014.

officials'.<sup>120</sup> To a majority of my informants, 'greed'<sup>121</sup>, 'selfishness'<sup>122</sup> and corruption ('eating up')<sup>123</sup> were characterisations commonly associated with and which explain their struggle against everyday poverty and the violation of their state-conferred rights. In this sense, the well-off farmers' accumulation of wealth was seen as being at the expense of the poor and in violation of their perceived state-secured rights to access development resources and thereby survive.

Thus, for those at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder, corruption discourses serve to articulate the circumstances of class (model farmers') domination and provide an explanation for their being deprived of the resources critical for survival. It is in this context of class relations that the discourse of corruption has become pervasive in public spaces.

## **7.2. Everyday popular conception of the state**

### ***Corruption talk and state imagination***

Many of the people with whom I spoke in Degga drew attention to the difficulties of securing a livelihood in times when corruption is perceived to be a pervasive and widespread practice. Most people complained about model farmers diverting development resources such as chemical fertilisers and improved varieties of seeds and about the unfair access of the rich to irrigation water, credit services and state procurement prices for wheat.<sup>124</sup> However, many absolved *mengist* of blame and instead blamed local politicians for abusing and diverting development resources from the poor for private use.

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<sup>120</sup> Interview, elderly farmer#26, Degga, September 2014.

<sup>121</sup> Conversation, middle-aged farmer#37, Degga, September 2014.

<sup>122</sup> Conversation, middle-aged farmer#38, Degga, September 2014.

<sup>123</sup> Conversation, young man#39, Degga, September 2014.

<sup>124</sup> Roadside conversation with three middle-aged farmers (#16, #18, #17), and young labourer #40, Degga, September 2014; *tella bet* conversation with a four middle-aged men (# 18, #28, #29, #33), Degga, October 2014.

One day, for instance, during a fairly ordinary conversation with a group of kebele residents at a local coffee house, the topic abruptly turned to agricultural resources distribution. As usual, there was speculation as to whether the government would provide adequate fertiliser in time for the spring growing period. ‘The government is not at fault. It is the people [cooperatives] who distribute inputs who are to blame. They divert fertilisers to merchants and deliberately hold back distribution from us. I know this because there are always fertilisers on the black market,’ said one middle-aged farmer, distinguishing between the distant state and its local representatives. Everybody agreed. The general feeling among my interlocutors was that it was locally powerful individuals who were to blame for them being left bereft of state-sanctioned agricultural resources. When I asked them to describe the processes by which agricultural resources were distributed in the kebele, another middle-aged man replied, ‘Agricultural inputs are never distributed equitably in our kebele. We are normally supposed to share them equally according to our needs. But the poor never get adequate amounts of what the government sends us ... the kebele officials and cooperative managers eat up the development resources.’ Similarly, the third interlocutor commented, ‘there is no equal sharing of resources ... woreda and kebele officials eat up all the resources’. When I enquired as to why he thought the local officials ‘eat up’ agricultural resources, he replied sounding surprised, possibly by the naiveté of my question, ‘If you come back early in January, you can see a pile of fertiliser bags stacked at the front veranda of the chairman’s house’. In support of his friend and as evidence of rampant local-level state corruption, the first speaker gave the following anecdote from his own experience: ‘last summer I stood in line for three days to get one bag of fertiliser from the cooperative ... when I received it, it looked to me as if the bag had been opened and repackaged. I then went straight to the mill house to find a scale ... I discovered that it was 3 kg underweight.’ ‘So why are you not bothered about going to the woreda administrator and complaining?’ I asked. He replied that it would be of no use. ‘I know it is our right. The

government gave us the right ... they are bound by the government to respect our right. But there is no point in complaining to the woreda administration. They are all in this together – even the woreda administrator is part of this. He would not do anything.’ These comments highlight the widespread belief that state functionaries indulge in corruption and, hence, they subvert the purported impartiality and benevolence of the state.

I followed my interlocutors’ lead and began asking other people how they felt about the distribution of agricultural resources. Time and again I heard similar stories and complaints about the corruption of government officials. On another occasion, for instance, I was sitting chatting with four local farmers when one, whom I shall call Kebede, recounted the hardships he faced after half of his crop was destroyed by insects and pests. He said he struggled to support his family by working as a daily-wage labourer. He also noted that one of his four children dropped out of school to work for wealthy farmers by tending their cattle and supporting his parents. In the meantime, Kebede said a deputy of the local primary cooperative offered to help him obtain pesticides for the coming harvesting season, which he accepted. However, as he was about to receive the pesticides from the cooperative, the deputy began hounding him. ‘He wanted to keep some bottles of the pesticides for himself,’ explained Kebede. But instead of conceding, Kebede confronted the cooperative deputy, which angered him more and led to him threatening to take away all the pesticides. He reprimanded Kebede for being unwilling to reciprocate in the expected manner – that is, by showing due respect and ceding half of the pesticides. Kebede explained, ‘I thought he was sincere and wanted to help me. But, I was naive ... that was not his motive ... he wanted me to feel grateful and concede half of the pesticides as a dollop of gratitude to his favour. He had not given me anything from his own pocket. This was mine in the first place ... this came from the government.’ Kebede felt that he should not give any material gift or pay a debt of gratitude through sentimental expression, that is, through submission or cowering, because he considered the pesticides to be



from *mengist* and originally intended to reach him. In the end, however, Kebede conceded to the deputy's demand because, he said, his family relied heavily on access to such inputs for their survival.

The three other men present endorsed Kebede's view in saying that the government 'sends resources to the kebele population'<sup>125</sup> and that it is 'our right to get access to pesticides'.<sup>126</sup> Clearly, my interlocutors viewed themselves as agents who were rightfully able to lay claim to the development resources provided by the state. But they also expressed that mere awareness did not amount to much; hence, they criticised Kebede for failing to strategically negotiate with the cooperative head at an early stage. One of them commented, 'they do not act out of altruism; they are interested only in their own benefits ... you should have known that he wanted to help you to steal more resources for himself ... you could have negotiated to concede only a quarter of the bottles'. From their experiences, my interlocutors were aware that access to development resources and a successful livelihood were arrived at not by laying claim to resources but by mastering the technique of negotiating with corrupt officials. Clearly, their social position and poverty prevented them from fully asserting claims to resources they considered to be passed down to them by a benevolent state.

On another day, my acquaintance, whom I shall call Ayele, in emphasising the importance of negotiating with locally powerful people, provided me with evidence of his successful negotiation with a cooperative manager. In 2006, he was invited to join a new micro-credit cooperative that was in the process of being established. Ayele, however, rejected multiple invitations because he considered the cooperative to offer no benefit. Once the lending programme began, however, he saw members of the cooperative benefitting from it and wanted

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<sup>125</sup> Conversation, the first interlocutor, November 2014.

<sup>126</sup> Conversation, the second interlocutor, November 2014.

to join. At that point, however, the cooperative had many members and Ayele's application was rejected on the grounds that he was 'poor and incapable of paying back loans'. Ayele confided to me that he was aware that joining the cooperative at any time was his state-conferred right as a poor farmer. However, he opted to seek the assistance of a local elder, arguing that laying claim to his state-given right 'would only be seen as confrontational' and that 'it would antagonise' the head of the cooperative. The mediation was successful and Ayele, after months of waiting, was admitted to the cooperative.

Within seven months of his admission, he received loans from the cooperative and was involved in the breeding of cattle. Since that time, he has successfully increased the number of his cattle from one to three. Yet Ayele refused to view his success as an outcome of the benevolence of the local elder and the head of the cooperative. 'Mengist is like a father to us the poor people. We have its support in all things ... but the greedy people always create obstacles. They want to eat up everything alone,' he concluded.

Here, we can see that Ayele positioned himself as a knowledgeable and right-bearing individual. His passive supplication to the locally powerful actors only highlights his strategy for securing a livelihood. This reality contrasts sharply with the views of model farmers, who, as I demonstrate later in the chapter, caricature the poor as ignorant and lazy farmers. My informant, on the other hand, formed an image of a right-giver and resource provider idea of state. Clearly, Ayele's attempt to differentiate between a benevolent state idea and corrupt local officials and his use of this distinction to construct himself as right-bearing individual echoes the similar accounts provided by his friends and many of my other informants.

I should however point out that in discourses of corruption, local inhabitants make clear distinctions between different types of corruption. Different corruption practices are subject to different moral evaluations. Bribes, for instance, which are usually explicitly requested by local

politicians and civil servants or paid via intermediaries, commonly to ‘get things done’ or circumvent rules and regulations, are widely seen as unproblematic, with the amounts paid believed to be necessary to cover the costs associated with running the client’s case. Most commonly, the ability to extract bribes signifies a prerogative and possession of state power. The general perception is that corruption is part and parcel of local politics and the state structure; politicians are inherently corrupt and state authority serves as a tool for personal aggrandisement. This sentiment is popularly expressed in the saying ‘*seshom yalbela seshar yekochewal*’ (‘One who does not eat up to the full his position when he is promoted will lament when he no longer has the opportunity’). Corruption seems to become problematic when it challenges the right of the poor to their survival and livelihood, which my interlocutors, as indicated earlier, link with the benevolence of an impartial state.

### ***Metonymic conception of the state***

In extending the discussion about state imagination, I now want to draw attention to another aspect of state imagination, that of a metonymic conception of the state. By metonymic conception of the state, I mean the process by which the state is imagined and named by a national leader through relations of contiguity. In other words, the state is seen to be actualised in the personality, role and style of operation of a national leader. My intention here is to bring to the fore one of the broad range of ways through which the state comes to be constituted by people who are positioned differently.

One day, while discussing local politicians during one of many conversations with a group of middle-aged men at village *tella bet*, a villager narrated an infamous incident: a truck full of pesticide, which villagers believed was sent by *mengist* to them, got lost on the way. The villager declared that the pesticide had been stolen by one senior *woreda* official and a local cooperative manager. He explained how they spent the money: ‘He [the *woreda* official] bought a piece of land in Bahir Dar [the regional capital city] and is building a luxurious house.

He is currently taking stones from the *kebele* fields for construction ... the cooperative manager [who had since left his job] has bought a brand new commercial mini-bus.’ He proceeded to juxtapose the ostensibly upright and ‘simple’ lifestyle of late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi with the woreda official’s avaricious appetite for wealth and luxury. ‘Meles was *mengist* and he did not have a house of his own. But the woreda official already has two houses and he is building his third one. He sells our pesticides to build his houses. He uses our [kebele] building material, stones and timber.’

In my interlocutor’s narrative, Meles Zenawi, even three years after his death, continued to be seen as a powerful idealisation of the state. Such stories about the corruption of local leaders and their alleged comfortable lifestyle vis-à-vis the perceived simple lifestyle of Meles Zenawi was extensive. In discussing with me their feelings about local corruption, people invoked Meles Zenawi as *mengist* to criticise the local leaders that interacted with them on a daily basis. For example, a middle-aged man told me, ‘Leaders should not be selfish. They should govern and behave like *mengist*.’<sup>127</sup> When I asked him what he meant by *mengist*, he replied, ‘*Mengist* is Meles Zenawi’. Similarly, a young farmer told me: ‘I would like kebele leaders who act like *mengist* to everyone. When Meles was alive, he helped the people. They should do the same.’<sup>128</sup> He then accused kebele officials of quite the opposite: ‘They don’t pay attention to the problems of the people; they are interested only in collecting wealth for themselves.’ Another person added that ‘Meles Zenawi was *mengist*. He was as a parent to everyone. He showed no bias. He put the people first. But kebele leaders only try to benefit themselves. They have no zeal to develop the kebele.’<sup>129</sup> Here, my informants explicitly referenced Meles as a *mengist* who embodied their highest ideals such as benevolence, hard work, impartiality and authority.

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<sup>127</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#41, Degga, September 2014.

<sup>128</sup> Interview, young farmer#42, Degga, September 2014.

<sup>129</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#43, Degga, September 2014.

In so doing, they also positioned the kebele administrators as unscrupulous leaders who failed to follow the example of the national leader.

During my fieldwork, Meles was omnipresent in everyday conversations within the public domain. The work he was considered to have carried out, although he was seen as distant and obscured from public view, was, for most of my interlocutors, evident in the increasing amount of agricultural resources he was said to have sent to the people. The water pumps installed in several villages, the Koga irrigation dam and the upgraded local school (from elementary to junior level) acted as befitting symbols of the benevolence of the hardworking national leader and *mengist*. In everyday discourses, all the main kebele development programmes were ascribed to the ‘good will’ and *ra’ey* (vision) of Meles Zenawi. He was furthermore seen as an astute and farsighted *mengist* for carefully selecting and cultivating his successor – Hailemariam Dessalegne – to ensure the continuation of development works. Meanwhile, his death – purportedly without any personal wealth – elevated him to the status of a stable patriarchal figure who sacrificed his life for the cause of fighting poverty. The key attributes of ‘stateness’ – the quality of being a state – such as benevolence, providence and protection of the poor which the poor expect from their leaders were metonymically imputed to the work and person of Meles Zenawi. And these attributes functioned as the basis through which people conceived of the ways in which local politicians ought to relate to them.

The populist image of Meles Zenawi as an ideal leader who fought on behalf of the poor was juxtaposed against the failure of equitable distribution of development resources, attributed to the corrupt practices of the district- and kebele-level officials. In other words, while local development-related works were taken to be signs of the hard work being done by national leaders for the economic benefit of the rural people, all of the problems troubling them – corruption and the unequal distribution of agricultural resources – were seen to be as a result of the greed and corruption of the kebele and woreda officials. Such a metonymic imagination

of the state, which absolves the national leadership from responsibility by elevating them to the status of a state that lies beyond local venality, greed and vested interests, is certainly an important source of legitimacy for state authority. This is in stark contrast to the reality on the ground wherein the state maintains political hegemony through the creation of a strong alliance with model farmers.

To sum up, from the discussion of corruption talk and livelihood issues pursued so far in this chapter, two important things stand out. Firstly, as the vignettes outlined above underscore, the discourse of corruption has helped to create a clear division between an idea of a distant and transcendental state which is imagined as a moral repertoire of social justice and a neutral dispenser of the development resources vital to the livelihood needs and survival of the poor and those local institutions that are dominated by corrupt individuals. In abstract terms, following Hansen (2001: 226), state imagination in Degga can be understood as consisting of ‘sublime’ (abstract) and ‘profane’ dimensions. The sublime dimension refers to the qualities of providence, benevolence and impartiality that people see as imbuing the trans-local state. Here, the state figures as a site of power far removed from kebele life and suspended above local partial and vested class interests. Such a conception of the state has a great deal to do with anti-corruption rhetoric and discourses of development that, as indicated in Chapter 5, are periodically mobilised by the state for political purposes and the legitimisation of development projects. The ‘profane’ dimension, on the other hand, encompasses the bureaucracy and local politicians with whom the people interact on a daily basis. The everyday administration, as we have seen, is perceived to be imbued with corruption, partiality and abuses of power. In short, the ‘sublime’ dimension is constructed and imagined as the antithesis of the ‘profane’ aspect of everyday administrative problems and venality of the bureaucracy.

The discrepancy between the discourses of development and the realities of corruption bolster the legitimacy of the state and the party. Discourses of corruption enables my

interlocutors to engage in ‘counter conduct’ (Foucault 2007), they enact the right to question how they are governed; especially in relation to the mechanisms of the distribution of agricultural resources. They therefore help to construct what O’Brien and Li (2006) call ‘boundary-spanning claims’ – claims that do not challenge the state system but rather stress loyalty and submission to the state and the party.

Secondly, they construct themselves as right-bearing and deserving individuals who are exploited by locally powerful people. However, the image that they conjure of themselves as right-bearing individuals is not one based on the liberal language of legality and citizenship as found among individuals in capitalist societies (Mouffe 2005; Isin and Turner 2002) nor is it one of empowered subjects (Rose 1999) but rather is an image of poor individuals struggling against everyday poverty and seeking to secure a livelihood and the basic necessities of survival such as food and a basic income. In other words, the basis for laying claim to resources as a right is not legalistic but moral. Popular claims to livelihood are also linked to the long-standing commitment, at least rhetorically, of the EPRDF to guarantee and improve the livelihoods of the rural population.

### ***Responses of local officials***

In contrast to the local inhabitants’ narratives about corruption stand the state functionaries, who rely on strategic discourses of development to defend their positions. In response to my enquiries as to why there were numerous complaints about the ways in which agricultural and irrigation water resources were distributed, community leaders, kebele and woreda officials and development practitioners all alike had ready answers. In every instance, they referred to the concepts of productivity, developmentalism, modernity and progress, useful for the state’s promotion of national development and the creation of an antagonistic political field (see Chapter 2), in justifying the monopoly of agricultural inputs, land and water resources.

When I asked the woreda administrator to respond to the widespread perception among the local population that agricultural resources were misappropriated, he said, ‘I interact with the farmers quite a lot, many of them are diligent ... but there are also lazy, anti-development farmers who spread such false rumours and allegations of corruption. We hear people gossiping that we have fertilisers and pesticides piled up in warehouses.’ He continued, ‘it is impossible to convince most people that we distribute resources equitably because they don’t understand the mechanisms involved in the import and distribution of agricultural resources’.<sup>130</sup> These types of attitudes of the state functionaries about themselves and the farmers were both extensive and pervasive. The woreda Agriculture Bureau head, for instance, explained how the entire woreda administration could not afford to ignore the issue of agricultural resource distribution because it was central to achieving the government’s rural development and agricultural productivity agenda:

We provide agricultural resources, credit services and irrigation facilities with the aim of increasing agricultural productivity. It is crucial for the government that farmers become successful. It is also in the interests of woreda and kebele leaders to demonstrate that government investments increase smallholders’ productivity.<sup>131</sup>

He went on to attribute allegations of corruption to false rumours concocted by ‘work-shy and anti-developmental farmers’:

There are farmers who are work-shy and anti-developmental. They spread false rumours of corruption to confuse people and create tension between the people and the

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<sup>130</sup> Interview, woreda administrator, woreda town, November 2014.

<sup>131</sup> Interview, woreda Agriculture Bureau head, woreda town, November 2014.



government. What they ask is only this or that resources ... when we ask them to meetings and field demonstrations, they grumble and fail to show up.<sup>132</sup>

Similarly, when I asked a notable model farmer whether some poor people are systematically made to enter into sharecropping arrangements with wealthy farmers, he responded by saying that 'there is no such manipulation'. He then added, 'it is better for lazy farmers to enter into sharecropping than lay their land in fallow or plant [unprofitable] vegetables'.<sup>133</sup> This comment reveals the discourses used by the wealthy farmers to explain local relations of exploitation.

The Degga WUA head, on the other hand, drew on national discourses of modernity that validate 'hard work' and 'technology adaptation', which he believed allows some farmers to become more successful and wealthy than others. In so doing, he took aim at the poor:

Most people speaking badly about the successful individuals [the rich] are lazy and recalcitrant farmers. They blame *teramaj* [the progressive] model farmers for their own problems. They are not trying to do their own things. When we ask them to use modern technologies and seeds, they refuse. Yet, by the end of the day, while the progressive becomes successful, they complain about land, water shortage, the kebele.<sup>134</sup>

In the above quote, the WUA head positions the rich as productive, innovative and knowledgeable and the poor as unproductive and dependants. In taking stock of the circumstances of the poor, the officials I spoke with rarely considered the asymmetrical nature of local power distribution and other explanations for the marginalisation of the poor. Instead, they ascribed the problem of the poor to their particular ignorance and illiteracy. The woreda administrator, for instance, said:

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Interview, model farmer#3, Degga, November 2014.

<sup>134</sup> Interview, Degga WUA head-cum-party chairman, Degga, November 2014.

People in Degga need to be taught about and exposed more to their rights. They have a long way to go in order to secure their rights. We acknowledge that more capacity building work is needed to mitigate people's lack of knowledge.<sup>135</sup>

The kebele chairman remarked in similar terms: 'We have not overcome the problem of the dependency mentality. These are the people who still look for the government to do everything for them.' Here, the chairman, in stark contrast to the popular imagination of the state as a provider and caregiver, saw the responsibility of the state in terms of 'facilitating the development of the kebele and the people'. He claims the government was working towards 'enabling every household to be self-sufficient, developmental and productive'; hence, 'we need determined and hardworking farmers who fight poverty with vigour'.<sup>136</sup>

Taken together, this 'elitist' view of the local people's problems might be best captured by a local development agent's comment:

Let me tell you. Our people are very backwards. Mind you, they well know that the project belongs to them and their children and yet they steal metal from distribution canals: we caught local women washing clothes in the canal water ... they lack commitment; they don't come to meetings unless mobilised: if they come, they arrive late. They are unwilling to work in conservation works. They want everything provided for them. ... I am not saying they are not being unfairly treated by community and kebele leaders. They are. But, they have to fulfil their duties and change their mindset before they ask for their rights to be respected.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Interview, woreda administrator, woreda town, November 2014.

<sup>136</sup> Interview, kebele chairman, Degga, November 2014.

<sup>137</sup> Interview, DA#8, Degga, November 2014.

Overall, these comments from different officials reveal an underlying belief that the state is a catalyst for development, not a feeder. The last quote speaks to this and the construction of the state as a facilitator of development is at odds with the notion of a benevolent state that is constructed by the people. Whereas most people I interacted with used corruption discourses to lay claim to development resources as a right conferred by a benevolent state, state officials referred to the difference in mindset, knowledge and attitude between themselves and the people and used this to explain corruption as a product of false rumour, illiteracy and dependency syndrome, thereby positioning themselves as knowledgeable individuals and representatives of the state.

The comments of my interlocutors further highlight how the poor are discursively produced in everyday life such that their poverty, lack of development mentality and understanding and sophistication defines their life chances and their entire range of possibilities. The discussion also demonstrates how the identification of a segment of the local population as anti-developmental by local leaders neatly converges with the wider EPRDF's antagonistic political discourse (see Chapter 2) of developmental forces against anti-development elements. It is important to note, however, that this concurrence does not reflect the entrenchment of party hegemony at the kebele level; rather, it shows how local officials forcefully employ Manichean discourses (developmental vs anti-developmental) to justify the monopolisation of resources, negate corruption complaints and consolidate local class domination.

### **7.3. Righteous dominance: religious symbolism and metaphors**

In addition to corruption discourses, my ethnography in Degga revealed that religious metaphors and symbolism are central to the meaning and construction of state idea. In my conversations with a broad cross-section of individuals in Degga wherein state was referred to, my informants invariably used religious metaphors and idioms that evoked a pathos of divinely oriented relations of power and obligation. The local people live under the sway of Orthodox

Christianity which provides them with the conceptual tropes, idioms and metaphors through which they imagine the state. For example, when I asked a middle-aged acquaintance about the role of the state in the management of development resources, he explained that the government was responsible only for obtaining and sending agricultural inputs to the people. He used the following analogy to illustrate his point: ‘God sends rain on all the people to enable us to provide food to our families. He does not make it fall only on the fields of some people. Instead, He makes it fall equally on all our fields. The good farmer would make use of the rain and feed his family. But, who do the family of a lazy farmer have to blame for their lack of access to food? Is it God who sends the rain or their head of household that failed to make optimal use of the rain?’<sup>138</sup> In this analogy, my informant distinguished between *mengist* and the bureaucracy and considered the *mengist*’s responsibility – like that of God – to be the provision of the resources needed for a livelihood, with the bureaucracy’s responsibility – like that of the household head – to make efficient use of those resources, i.e. distributing them to the people. In my informant’s account, agricultural resources are always provided by the state but they remain inaccessible to the poor because of the corruption of local politicians. Here, the state is idealised as a paternalist provider and benefactor and the lower-level state functionaries are pathologised. The local people then establish their claim of entitlement to agricultural resources by invoking the notion of a benevolent, impartial and disinterested state that always fulfils its responsibility of providence to the people.

In the analogy, the state, like God, as noted above, is represented as a provider and benefactor, but it is important to point out that this does not mean my informant held the view that the state and God are the same or should be afforded the same weight. Rather, my informant was obviously drawing, to use Levi-Strauss’s (1966) concept, ‘homologous

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<sup>138</sup> Conversation, middle-aged farmer#41, Degga, October 2014.

opposition' between the state and the people on one side and God and the people on the other. That is, the relationship between the state and society metaphorically resembles the relationship between God and the people. In other words, the metaphor should be interpreted as a way of establishing ideal relationships within the temporal world (between state and society) by way of analogy with perceived relationships in the spiritual world (between God and the Christian population).

The fact that the above metaphorical analogy is not an idiosyncratic view of my interlocutor's view is evident from the comments made to me by other local inhabitants. A middle-aged farmer, in the context of discussing the state's providence in relation to agricultural resources, said: 'God is the one who can give us rain. This is the same with the government.'<sup>139</sup> In my informant's comment, the quality of being a state involves providence to the people. This means the invocation of religious analogy functions to constitute the relationship between state and society which is embedded in the local moral imaginary that entails specific rights and responsibilities on both sides.

Compare this metaphor with the regular account of Amhara farmers conceiving of state power as absolute. For example, Lefort (2007: 258) quotes Shoa peasants as saying, 'God and the *mengist* are the same'. In Lefort's account, the mandate of the Derg and EPRDF is 'perceived as coming from heaven', and therefore, 'to submit to the absolutism of the *mengist* is simply to respect divine will'. When Degga farmers, in contrast, use religious symbolism and metaphors, they do not describe relations of hierarchy but also refer to their expectations of how the state should act. Instead of submitting themselves to the 'absolutism of state power', they imagine a God-state-people relationship as a model of stateness and method for good governance.

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<sup>139</sup> Conversation, middle-aged farmer#37, Degga, November 2014.

The majority of my informants drew a homologous analogy between the state and society and expressed an understanding that the state, like God, is expected to show benevolence and providence towards the people and should generally act as a proxy God. In doing so, they clearly distinguish between good *mengist* and bad *mengist*. A good *mengist* would ‘like God ... look after the well-being of the poor’ and ‘as God ... support and protect the poor’.<sup>140</sup> Most commonly, the Derg regime constituted the central point of reference of bad and illegitimate *mengist*. One senior man, for instance, remarked:

... the Derg redistributed land at first but later it confiscated more than half of it [and also] it took away our oxen to use for producers’ cooperative. [In doing so] it prevented us from working our land and forced us to join the producers’ cooperatives. The Derg did not work for the poor people; it had no helping nature ... a government should [rather] be like God in protecting and providing to the people and to the poor who have no allies ... [but]the Derg acted like a father who doesn’t look after his children but punishes them.<sup>141</sup>

Others questioned the legitimacy of the authority of the Derg as not emanating from God because it did not act as a proper *mengist*. My acquaintance Ayele, for instance, said:

The Derg was not from God. It never looked after the people. Instead, it took away our oxen and made us work from sunrise to sunset in the producers’ cooperative. In return, they would give us 1 quintal of *teff*, 5 quintals of corn and 2 quintals of sorghum. It never sent us development ... it conscripted children into the army.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Conversations with two middle-aged farmers (#27 and #33), Degga, November 2014.

<sup>141</sup> Interview, elderly farmer#30, Degga, October 2014.

<sup>142</sup> Conversations with my acquaintance Ayele, Degga, November 2014.

Unlike Ayele, an elderly man saw the Derg as ‘the worst mengist’. He said, ‘It was against us. It never took responsibility for the needs of the people’, because ‘it was imposed upon us by God as a result of our sin’.<sup>143</sup> It is clear that while my two informants provided two different explanations as to what gave rise to the Derg government, they nevertheless held a strong patrimonial view of the state and expected it to be acting much as God would treat the people, as a father to His children. Both characterised the Derg by its lacks of paternal care which was revealed by its cruel policies of collective farms, lack of development and military conscription.

In addition, some of the local inhabitants described former president Mengistu Hailemariam as *mengist* and criticised him for failing to demonstrate care to the local people. One man explained: ‘Mengistu Hailemariam was a bad *mengist*. He had no religion; no moral character; he did not bring us development ... but misery; he has besmirched the holy country.’<sup>144</sup> Another said, ‘we don’t regard Mengistu as worthy of being mengist’.<sup>145</sup> The conception that Mengistu was ‘cruel’ and ‘uncaring’ was often expressed, and, to some of my informants, his lack of benevolence was seen as the main cause of his downfall. The common sentiment among my informants was that Mengistu lacked the legitimacy to rule because he did not embrace the locally cherished Christian values of offering help, protection and support to the downtrodden in a way similar to God. Mengistu rather demanded a commitment to his programmes without showing munificence to the poor. In this sense, the attribute of stateness, for my informants, entailed the moral duty to fulfil the needs and ensure the safety of the people.

Conversely, when I asked my interlocutors to elaborate on the current government, most of them praised it for having brought development and peace. One said, ‘the old *mengist* was not the people’s *mengist* ... the present *mengist* is a good *mengist*. It sends us development. We

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<sup>143</sup> Interview, elderly farmer#44, Degga, November 2014.

<sup>144</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#45, Degga, November 2014.

<sup>145</sup> Interview, elderly farmer#46, Degga, November 2014.

have the chance to send our children to school. We have a health post on our doorstep [kebele]. It allowed us to work on our land. There is no military conscription; there is no producers' cooperative. We can sell our grains ... it is peaceful.'<sup>146</sup> Similarly, another man said, 'This government is working for the poor .... it worries about everything. In the past women died while giving birth. Now, they are taken to hospital in ambulances. It worries about the school of our children; even about our habits of toilet use, stove use. It looks after us well and we see that it is sent to us from God'<sup>147</sup>

While my informants conceived of the state as fulfilling its obligations of care and sending development to the local population, they also alleged, as described in previous sections, that they were not benefitting from state resources because of the corruption of the local state functionaries. The following comment by a middle-aged man is fairly representative of this sentiment, 'Mengist is taking responsibility so that our kebele develops and every one of us can have everything we want. But, when resources are sent from *mengist*, they are eaten up by the woreda and kebele officials along the way before they reach us. [As a result,] we continue to live in poverty.'<sup>148</sup>

To sum up, the preceding discussion provides a valuable corrective to the problematic nature of the assumptions scholars make about the farmers' relationship with the state and their attitude towards authority and hierarchy. To be sure, my informants' accounts underscore the hierarchical logic of everyday state formation that permeates Amhara society, whereby the divine authority is imagined to encompass the temporal one and then the temporal (state) in turn comprises the various layers of state authority (bureaucracy) and society. But the use of religious metaphor also indicates the view that power and hierarchy are oriented and

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<sup>146</sup> Interview, elderly farmer#44, Degga, November 2014.

<sup>147</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#41, Degga, November 2014.

<sup>148</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#28, Degga, November 2014.



encompassed by fundamental religious values such as providence, protection, reciprocity and benevolence. In this sense, when the farmers relate governance practices and hierarchies to the realm of the divine, they not only construct relations of authority but also implicitly invoke notions of paternal and divine care to emphasise the state's responsibilities and obligations.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have illustrated how the state is popularly imagined as an idea and a person lying beyond the venality of local politics. Rather than simply providing an explanation for the perceived existence of corruption, I have sought to examine the implications of corruption stories for the everyday construction of state idea. Hence, I have argued that corruption talk is one of the ways in which local people construct an idea of a good state and also make claims for the appropriate distribution of state resources. As we have seen, corruption discourses are more fundamentally associated with the problem of local class relations. For many people, the degradation of soil fertility means that agricultural inputs (especially fertiliser) have become as crucial a means of production as access to land. When the local people are unable to hold on to fertilisers, instead of leaving their land fallow, they lease it out to wealthy farmers or engage in sharecropping arrangements. This has created a dependence of the poor on the wealthy and powerful. Corruption (i.e. the violation and deliberate denial of state-conferred rights to resources) is seen by the poor as a major factor behind their increasing dependence on the rich and powerful for survival. This is in contrast to the progressive vision of poverty reduction and development mobilised by the central government. Within this context, the state is imagined as a dual structure: sublime (as a provider, benevolent and caretaker) and profane (as corrupt, venal and filled with self-serving people). The paradox produced by these sublime and profane images of state play the crucial function of creating legitimacy for the national leadership.

Corruption discourses also demonstrate the ways in which the poor construct and position themselves as right-bearing individuals. They evoke the idea of a benevolent state and use their

experience of subordination to (rhetorically) lay claim to and argue for appropriate distribution of resources. But, in practice, in their everyday interactions with state functionaries, they have to consider their livelihood needs, the actual local power relations and master the technique of negotiating with officials.

Even though corruption discourses appeared to be central to the construction of the state idea in Degga, religious metaphors and symbolism are as important. My interlocutors spoke of the state using symbolism filled with moral imagery from the spiritual world, such as providence and care. By drawing relational analogies that explicitly entail rights and obligations between God and His people on one side and the state and its people on the other, they evoke a paternalistic image of the state.

Finally, it is important to note that the state is not homogeneously imagined. This chapter has shown that imagination of state is determined by one's social position, experiences of encounters with state officials and also one's rank in the government bureaucracy. In the next chapter, I further unravel the complexities of the relationship between the state and society.

## Chapter 8

### Demystifying the state: boundary crossing

Up to now, we have seen how the imagined unity and coherence of the state as a structure standing apart from and above society is created through everyday governance practices and also how it is shaped by public discourses of corruption. However, in this chapter, I argue that this boundary is unclear and porous in reality. This point, of course, is made at various points in the proceeding chapters. Nevertheless, the idea of such a blurred boundary deserves a more detailed empirical analysis since failing to do so would obscure the mundane subtleties, complex patterns of interactions and aspects of mutual constitution between the state and society. It also encourages a reified understanding of the normative distinctions between state and society that this thesis is supposed to move beyond. Reification refers here to the assertion of an oppositional construction, one in which the state (for instance, the local state institution, i.e. the kebele and its functionaries in Degga) and society (local communities) are viewed as two distinct and identifiable structures.

This chapter aims to illustrate the blurring<sup>149</sup> and permeability of the state-society boundary by distinguishing the ‘image’, or what Mitchell calls the state effect, from the ‘everyday operation of power’. Concretely, this means ‘demystifying the state’ (Abrams 1988) to show how it is locally embedded and socially enmeshed as a set of disaggregated practices, institutions and hierarchies inhabited by people with multiple positions (official and non-official) and social relations. To address this also means moving beyond the fields of everyday formal bureaucratic practices of governance to explore the interactions between the state, non-state actors and the local population in multiple settings. It thus examines ‘interface situations

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<sup>149</sup> These ideas of the blurring of state-society boundary build on the works of Gupta (1995), Lund (2006) and Hansen and Stepputat (2001).

where different life-worlds interact and interpenetrate' (Long 1992: 2). Much of this chapter is therefore concerned with investigating the workings of the state within and beyond its bureaucratic structures. Concisely put, this chapter explores the processes, governance practices and actors on both sides of the state-society boundary to demonstrate how state and society are in fact part of the same sociocultural and political complex.

The chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, after briefly introducing and laying out the nature of two important kebele public domains in Degga, I present a case in which an informal coalition of social and political actors (with vested interests) discuss a government directive on cooperatives and youth unemployment. In doing so, I demonstrate how these actors manipulate a formal state policy regulation and blur the distinction between *de facto* public and state authorities. This is followed by an analysis of the implications of the regulation as it was reinterpreted and seized as an opportunity by local inhabitants to obtain access to land.

In the second section, I examine specific cases of boundary crossing by focusing on the positions and roles of three local actors. Here, I treat boundary crossing as encompassing two important elements: vertical and horizontal crossings. The first concerns a case of patronage in which a local elder traversing multiple layers of state structure to help a member of local youth obtain state employment as a primary school teacher. The second case involves two prominent local individuals who occupy multiple positions of authority (with extensive horizontal social networks), namely those of traditional leader, religious figure, business guru and state representative. The focus on these two cases clarifies the fluidity of the state-society boundary and also the process of constituting state and public authority.

## 8.1. Multiple patterns of interactions

### *Intermediary spaces of governance*

Arriving at the small, dusty rural town of Degga, one is immediately confronted with the sight of rows of houses (20 or so) facing each other across the main national highway. These houses form the centre of the rural town. Most are shabby and in poor repair. Each house has a roofed veranda over its front door with benches where men drink tea during the daytime and sit to talk. At night, the houses sell traditional homebrewed beer called *tella* – hence their popular name of *tella bet*, which literally means ‘beer houses’ – and *areki* (home-distilled liquor) to ordinary residents. Single and widowed women – most of whom engage in commercial sex work to supplement their income – live in and run the *tella bet*. By contrast, two houses on the northern edge of the rural town are considerably larger than the rest and are painted in bright blue and green colours. These houses are frequented by local elites<sup>150</sup> such as priests, wealthy individuals, influential elders, local politicians and civil servants. Drinking in such places is a sign of status. Contrary to *tella bet*, which are frequented by ‘ordinary’ residents, there are no brawls, fights or loud music. They are also the only places where factory-made beer is sold in Degga.

It is worth mentioning here that neither the ordinary *tella bet* nor the elite houses are always exclusive. It was not uncommon, for example, to witness local elders and politicians in *tella bet* chatting with ordinary inhabitants. The presence of elders or officials in *tella bet* is a big driver of customers for the women who run the houses. Common people usually follow elders into *tella bet* just to listen to stories and gather important information about a range of issues including the distribution and prices of agricultural inputs, issues related to land administration

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<sup>150</sup> By local elites I mean the loose collection of state officials (kebele politicians such as the chairman and speaker of the kebele council), local party head, wealthy traders and farmers, a few elite priests and well-connected community elders.

(such as land use taxes and grazing arrangements) and the use of irrigation water. On the other hand, although the elite spaces maintain a reputation as places for the privileged, ordinary inhabitants occasionally drop into these spaces, most often during the daytime, for less expensive soft drinks.

Nevertheless, these two spaces constitute the geography of local power distribution by demarcating elite and peasant domains. The elite spaces in particular constitute specific ‘intermediary spaces of governance’ – linking state, non-state actors and local communities and thereby blurring boundaries – where micro-practices of kebele governance take place. I use the term ‘intermediary spaces of governance’ to describe the ‘beer houses’ which feature a wide range of local actors including state and party officials, civil servants, customary leaders, businessmen and traders. What especially constitutes intermediary spaces of governance is the multiple and overlapping engagements among variously positioned state and non-state actors. They represent a ‘twilight zone’ (Lund 2006) or a permeable space between the state and society that signals a blurring of the ostensibly fixed boundaries between the state and society on the one hand, and the state and public authorities on the other. Used in this way, the ‘intermediary spaces of governance’ in Degga are particularly significant in two senses: firstly, they serve as an arena in which illicit practices are negotiated<sup>151</sup> within a context that involves a complex web of personalised relationships between local non-state elites<sup>152</sup>, local

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<sup>151</sup> Some of this is illicit because, while petty corruption is socially tolerated, abuse of state resources, as we saw in the previous chapter, is widely condemned. For this reason, elders do not openly mediate between local inhabitants and various officials in distributing public resources such as agricultural inputs, loans and land. Often, local inhabitants visit these elders at their homes with their cases, which the elders and politicians will then discuss over beer.

<sup>152</sup> On visits to these spaces, I consistently came across community elders who mediated between individuals, the local community and various state officials. They would also discuss and participate in local political decision-making processes with state actors, but they did not hold any official position of their own. This was intriguing because in Degga, as in most other parts of Ethiopia, there is no formal state-sanctioned traditional authority. Within this context, community elders in Degga draw the legitimacy for their ‘*de facto* public authority’ (Lund

communities and representatives of various institutions that constitute the state at the kebele level. Moreover, they constitute spaces in which local political alliances are forged and patronage networks are crafted through both relations of friendship and marriage.<sup>153</sup>

Secondly, these spaces serve as local sites where state policies are negotiated, reproduced, reinterpreted, contested and manipulated. Often, the everyday business of governance is discussed and decisions are passed in such spaces and then merely rubber-stamped during official kebele meetings. The following account demonstrates how this takes place.

### *Merger of actors and transgressions*

One evening, I accompanied a prominent local elder and the kebele chairman to one of the relatively cosy local beer (elite) houses. When we walked in, we found two other local elders, a prominent local businessman, two traders, the kebele land use and administration head and the chairman of the local ANDM/EPRDF party. We were soon joined by the speaker of the kebele council. It seemed odd as there were no other ‘ordinary’ people present in the beer house. As we entered the building and greeted these powerful local elites, I caught their questioning glances which clearly indicated their bafflement and curiosity regarding my presence at the late hour in their elite, male-dominated ‘clubhouse’. With nearly everyone’s eyes fixed upon me, they began asking lots of questions about my education and family background. Having satisfied their curiosity and perhaps dispelled their suspicion regarding my background and what I was doing, they seemed to become comfortable with my presence.

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2006) primarily from their relationships and networks with powerful and wealthy individuals, their own economic wealth or the traditionally and religiously rooted custom of respect for elders. Their power, however, as I will show in the ensuing sections, is primarily underwritten by kinship connections.

<sup>153</sup> According to my local informants, the families of six elders and state officials are closely related through the marriages of their own children and other kin members.

As the conversation eventually veered away from me, I realised that we (the new arrivals) had entered into an ongoing conversation about youth unemployment which seemed at first glance to be casual in nature. However, I gradually came to understand that it was a rather serious and much more complex conversation. The main reason for the discussion was a directive sent down from the federal and regional governments regarding youth unemployment. The purpose of the directive<sup>154</sup> was to tackle the problem of rising rural youth unemployment through the active promotion of cooperative groups. However, the directive, like many other government regulations, was unclear as placed much greater emphasis on the rationale for the local landless youth to be organised into cooperative groups than it did on any relevant procedural aspect. Although it outlined economic activities such as bee keeping, trading, farming and animal fattening, it listed neither any priority areas of engagement nor any rules and recommendations for specific local situations. This is because, the woreda cooperatives coordination head later told me, the regulation was crafted with the aim of encouraging the use of locally available resources to solve the problem of rural youth unemployment.<sup>155</sup> Nonetheless, the lack of clarity presented a particular problem for the kebele in Degga due to both the lack of local resources such as land<sup>156</sup> and, as we will see, conflicting elite interests. The directive was ultimately up to the kebele's own interpretation. Concretely, this meant that local state officials had to find viable ways of curbing rising unemployment and supporting their youth.

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<sup>154</sup> Directive from the Federal Cooperative Agency that was held by the Degga kebele administrative office.

<sup>155</sup> Interview, woreda cooperatives coordination head, woreda town, November 2014.

<sup>156</sup> There is an extreme scarcity and fragmentation of agricultural land in the highlands of Ethiopia due partly to population pressure and the ambilineal descent system which confers equal property rights to all of the children in a family (McCann 1995). In the Degga area, for instance, the average household land size has fallen from 3.3 ha in the 1990s to 2.1 ha in 2007 (Marx 2011).



The main focus of discussion among the local elites in the beer house was therefore around finding ways to organise the youth into cooperative groups without harming their particularistic economic interests. This involved the identification and evaluation of different options. The first theme during the discussion concerned timber forests. Kassa (fictionalised name),<sup>157</sup> one of the richest men in Degga, who is reputed to have accumulated his wealth through extracting timber concessions from the kebele and smallholders, was one of the first speakers to raise concerns about the possibility of the kebele's timber forests being set aside for the purpose of a cooperative. He asked, 'What is this that I hear about the cooperatives office [a district-level government agency responsible for the organisation and oversight of cooperatives] giving away kebele forests?' One trader and a community elder also expressed their bewilderment about the cooperatives office approach. In response, the kebele chairman said, '... the forests will continue to be managed by the kebele to secure environmental protection through regular re-plantation and patrolling. They [the youth] wouldn't care for reforestation, and they may even eventually convert them into farms ... we are working with the agriculture bureau's environment protection office on this matter.' The chairman's comment underscores the contradictions in the goals of the two different state agencies, a situation which he was able to translate into an opportunity to exploit. When talking about the kebele forest, he frequently positioned the environmental bureau as being in opposition to the cooperatives coordinating bureau and accused the latter of promoting business at the expense of the environment. The chairman's invocation of the lack of coordination between different state institutions around a similar goal highlights the multi-faceted, fragmented and disaggregated picture of the state.

Kassa was obviously actively managing and selling timber from these forests, and the impetus of his anxiety became clearer when he expressed concern about the possibility that

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<sup>157</sup> I am using a personal (fictionalised) name here because this particular individual is one of two persons also introduced in a case study later in this chapter.

timber concessions would be given to the cooperatives. He said, ‘having built a road [he had built a rudimentary gravel road providing access to the kebele’s timber forests] and invested a large amount of money, our [his] concessions shouldn’t be revoked’. The speaker of the kebele council added, ‘We cannot establish cooperatives in a way that harms investors ... it is improper that while encouraging investment, to discourage investors’. The speaker’s comment indicated the use of abstract language by local officials to obscure particular interests.

The kebele chairman, however, attempted to dispel the anxiety by expressing that ‘not everyone [the youth] would be interested in engaging in timber trading’. His statement was especially true of the majority of the local unemployed youth who, due to their lack of essential skills such as literacy and numeracy, had been reluctant to engage in alternative economic activities. According to figures I obtained from the kebele, at the time of my fieldwork, there were 57 landless and unemployed youth in Degga, of which only 12 could read and write. For that reason, the majority of those whom I interviewed<sup>158</sup> expressed a lack of interest in engaging in occupations beyond farming. The chairman was therefore clearly tapping into the youth’s lack of interest in trade to clear up concerns about what would happen to the forests.

After a few minutes of joke telling, the conversation reverted to more serious discussion about the case of cooperatives. The party chairman expressed how he perceived little benefit in maintaining an area of land which was set aside by the *woreda* investment desk for urban-based construction companies who wanted to invest in the extraction of stone for building. However, the idea of giving away building stone sites was also dropped when one of the elders, sitting leisurely in the corner of the room, suggested that the *woreda* administrator was already

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<sup>158</sup> One young man#40, for instance, expressed that he had no desire to do anything other than farming because he was ‘uneducated’. Others expressed a fear of being dominated and manipulated by a few educated young men. For instance, one of them said, ‘... I can’t read or write. If I join a trading cooperative, my role will be to work as a labourer being controlled by others [educated members]. They will control the money and management.’

in touch with a construction company in Bahir Dar with a view to leasing part of the land. It was obvious that local state representatives were in receipt of briefings on official business from a customary leader. Surprisingly, without any further comments or questions being raised on the issue, the topic of conversation changed. It appeared to have been the case that the elder had a good network of contacts with highly placed individuals in the woreda.

The party chairman's comment, however, raises an important question about the meaning of investment. It is unclear whether the exploitation of a natural resource such as stone would be considered investment in Degga, or even investment as such. Woreda officials I spoke to alleged that the benefit of any 'investment' in the extraction of stone for building purposes would lie in its potential contributions to the local economy and especially in providing local people with jobs.<sup>159</sup> The local people, on the other hand, contended that the benefits of 'investments' in the extraction of stone didn't reach them.<sup>160</sup> For example, with the exception of two people employed as security guards, no local person was employed by a Chinese road construction firm that extracted stone from the fields of Degga. Similarly, another Chinese firm which contracted the Koga irrigation and watershed management project (see Chapter 5) and extracted stone from the same fields also failed to generate many local jobs. Furthermore, taxes and licence fees associated with the stone extraction were paid to either the regional or federal governments rather than to the local community/kebele.

The third area concerns the distribution of communal grazing lands. One of the traders opened the discussion with a proposal that they give up part of the kebele's communal reserve grazing land for the purpose of organising youth into cooperative group farms. While sipping

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<sup>159</sup> Interview, woreda investment promotion desk official, woreda town, November 2014.

<sup>160</sup> Interviews with local trader, Degga, October, 2014; two unemployed young men (#47 and #48), Degga, October 2014; middle-aged farmer#20, Degga, November 2014.

their beer, *kes* (Priest) Hailu (fictionalised),<sup>161</sup> the kebele land use and administration unit head, gave an account of recommendations made by the kebele land use and administration expert, who is a civil servant directly accountable to the district administration. He said that the expert expressed her concern over the diminishing availability of communal grazing lands. He continued by asserting that the advice of the expert was the kebele should abide by the law. It is noteworthy that the regional land proclamation permits land redistribution only if there is agreement from 80 per cent of the local population.<sup>162</sup> *Kes* Hailu, citing the land expert, concluded that it would be *hege-wet* (illegal) to redistribute communal land. There then ensued a lot of confusion regarding the legal aspect of distributing communal land to the jobless youth.

From the point of view of the local elites, the term *hege-wet* (illegal) presented a problem of meaning. It in fact sparked furious reactions from many of the elite, which led to confusion in the hitherto calm discussion. One of the elders, who had been lingering over a single bottle of beer, eventually regained control by speaking loudly to bring everyone to attention, saying: ‘It is our own land. Why should this be illegal? This should not be a problem. If needs be, we will explain our decision to the *woreda* [authorities].’ The party chairman added, ‘I see no illegality in this’. Another elder questioned the purpose of the law, ‘for whom is the law? Isn’t it for us all? ... We should stop wasting our time bickering over the question of legality. ... If we can reach a consensus which benefits everyone, nothing is illegal.’ Almost everyone nodded in agreement and two elders made concurring speeches. After this the speaker of the local council suggested that as crop cultivation may no longer be an option for those with a formal

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<sup>161</sup> I am using a personal (fictionalised) name here because this particular individual is one of two persons introduced in a case study later in this chapter.

<sup>162</sup> *Amhara Rural Land Administration and Use Proclamation* No 133 (2006).

education (but are lacking the level and quality of education needed for urban labour), cattle fattening farms should also be considered.

Finally, the chairman, summarising and incorporating aspects of what other participants had said, urged everyone to reach a consensus on the distribution of communal land for crop and cattle fattening farms, and all then agreed on the proposal in response.

The discussion at the beer house provides an example of the permeability and blurring of the state-society boundary. State agents working at the kebele levels are enmeshed in the 'larger social matrix'; their interest and stakes seem to be different from national politicians. As local agents responsible for implementing national policies and programmes, they do not simply translate policy agendas but reinterpret, manipulate and transform them by venturing into relationships with non-state forms of authorities. In so doing, they follow local demands and interests even if these are at odds with national policies and interests. In this context, one can regard the local as a 'semi-autonomous social field' (Moore 1978) which generates its own localised rules. However, as we will see below, this do not necessarily imply that the state becomes completely absorbed by informal politics.

### ***Bureaucratic rationality vs local practices***

While the informal agreement at the beer house was crucial, it should however be noted that different procedures are involved in attaining formal approval for the agreement. The implementation of the locally agreed plan would have to be approved and facilitated by the woreda cooperatives coordination desk with the help of its technical expertise. This involves obtaining agreement from 80 per cent of the local population to distribute communal land. However, the local elites were engaged in attempts to comply with the formal procedural requirements, but not with its spirit. They employed a number of tactics to this end, including

convincing the local population that the only viable way in which to organise the local youth into cooperatives is through a redistribution of some of the communal grazing lands.

When the woreda cooperatives coordination desk convened a community meeting just two weeks after my encounter with the local elites at the beer house, for example, these same local elites and their protégés were the first to speak and they suggested the distribution of communal land. This was clearly a strategic move aimed at galvanising participants around particular ideas. Nearly every subsequent speaker repeated *ad nauseam* those ideas expressed by the initial few speakers.

The dominant view, to which all of the speakers subscribed, is best captured by the following statement made by one of the community elders who had led the beer house discussion two weeks earlier:

Most of these young men have no skills and education to engage in commerce or other economic activities. This is a fact which the young men themselves expressed to you [cooperatives office]. What options are we then left with? People here believe that land is the only resource we have. People are willing and ready to give up their right of grazing on communal land in order to support their children. People do not want to see their children turn into burglars or urban pickpockets or die as [migrant] labourers in malaria-infested desert farms in Humera [a district in Southern Tigray dominated by large-scale commercial farms]. We give up our lands. We suggest some of them to be organised into farming [crop cultivation] groups and others [with literacy skills] into animal fattening groups.

After about two hours of discussion, with multiple perspectives expressed but no potential alternative options forthcoming, the elites' plan was unanimously approved by consensus. The organisers concluded the meeting by declaring that they would report the agreement back to

high-level woreda officials. Thus, the meeting took place in an elite dominated context, where decision making was done using the elites' code of deliberation that prevented the ordinary people from expressing their ideas and opinions. It is almost impossible for the local people to question the modes of deliberation employed by the local elites to circumvent formal procedural requirements. As indicated in the previous chapters, the local elites could make life unpleasant for any kebele resident by denying them access to state resources over which they have control and discretion.

Indeed, not only the mode of deliberation but the entire process of the meeting was at odds with the procedural requirements of the rational law. The meeting organisers, for example, rarely followed the terms of prescribed legal and official procedures. Most notable was the incongruity exhibited by the meeting organisers in applying the strict regional proclamation that required the approval of 80 per cent of the local landholding inhabitants. The meeting was attended by only somewhere between 150 and 200 people. When compared to the total size of the local population (9,688) and the total number of households (1,320), these figures correspond to only between 1.5 and 2 per cent and 11 and 15 per cent, respectively, thus falling far short of the approval of 80 per cent of the local landholding (households) population. Moreover, with no single woman participant, an important section of society was left out altogether, raising questions about the role of the state in excluding women from critical decision-making processes and thereby perpetuating gender inequality. However, none of these issues was noticed or raised by the meeting organisers. It was difficult to establish whether this was due to the officials' lack of knowledge or their habitual disregard for the law.

What transpires from this example is that the everyday practices of state agents run counter to, and also undermine, the ideas of the rule of law and bureaucratic and administrative rationality that the institutions that constitute the state system claim to stand for. This process through which state functionaries operate with habitual disregard for the law, or even in

ignorance of it, fuses with forms of governance that are defined as informal and which shape and is an integral part of the state system.

Nonetheless, in the weeks that followed, the decision eventually led to disputation between district state departments when the cooperatives coordination office announced that the organising of cooperatives should be carried out in accordance with the law, citing a regional order which indefinitely barred any form of redistribution of land. In response to the announcement, a local elder told me that they had the support of the district administrator and that their idea would eventually be accepted.<sup>163</sup> It is interesting to note here that the executive order by the regional administration barring the redistribution of communal land was in violation of the regional land administration and use proclamation (passed by the regional council/parliament) that permitted land redistribution. Yet, at the local level, no one appeared to challenge the order on the basis that it contradicted the proclamation. While the district cooperative's office took the order as a law in and of itself, the kebele officials, rather than making their case on the basis that the law was violated, challenged this position by soliciting the patronage and paternalism of the district administrator. However, by the time I left Degga, having completed my fieldwork, the issue had yet to be resolved. Yet the endless dispute could be seen as having been productive since the forests – which were the main concern of most of the participants – had been left alone.

The discussion so far reveals that the modes of operation of politics in Degga do not fit neatly into the dichotomised categories of formal and informal or state and society. It is rather characterised by a constant mutation of actors and an oscillation between the informal, conducting state business in the intermediary spaces of governance, and the formal, acting with

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<sup>163</sup> Conversation, local elder#49, Degga, November 2014.



reference to the procedural requirements of the rational bureaucracy, as well as between kebele and woreda hierarchies.

Finally, subsequent to these events, further reinterpretations occurred when the decisions entered into discursive social fields already perfused with the material (land) demands, social, religious and legal norms and relations of patronage. It is to this area that I now turn in the following section.

### **The embedded state: petty corruption and the sociocultural character of the state**

With the result of the meeting circulated in social spaces and informal networks such as *tella bet* and monthly religious festivals (in honour of personal patron saints), it came to be reinterpreted and understood to mean different things to different people. Reinterpretations were subjective and anchored in personal needs and experiences. For example, among the rural poor who sought land redistribution, a rumour went round that the decision was the first step towards the introduction of a large-scale national redistribution of land. For some opportunist local inhabitants, the communal decision was just an opportunity to reinforce, reclaim or legitimise encroachments on communal land. Significantly, this precipitated practices of petty corruption. One day, for example, I was sitting, as I often did, with a group of young peasants at a roadside *tella bet*, participating in a conversation about land problems, when one of the group told us how he had managed to obtain some community land. He began his account by referring to the recent decision to redistribute communal land for cooperative groups, something which he had initially understood to include all young inhabitants. He said:

... I was disappointed when I later learned that it excludes people like me who had only fractions of lands ... I contacted an important distant kin of mine to help me convince the official [in charge] that I should be part of the cooperatives [yet to be established]. This did not work. He [his kin] told me the woreda would ultimately disqualify me [on

the basis that he owns farmland albeit a small plot] ... I thought there was no better opportunity than this to lay claim to the small grazing land adjustment to my farm. ... I described to my kin that with the small fraction land I have, I manage to eke out only a few quintals of maize which is barely enough even to feed my family ... then after a few days, he advised me to go to the official's house early the next morning with 200 birr [£6] in an envelope and repeat my story to him. I went to the official's house at dawn the following morning, explained my ordeal to him and handed over the envelope as *ejj mensha* [gratitude]. The official sympathised with my suffering and promised to do his bit to help me – especially for the sake of my young children. On the same day, he visited the field and gave me a verbal confirmation that he would put my name in the land register.

What impresses one, in this case is how the process through which the regulation designed to establish cooperative groups exclusively for the landless was first subjected to elite re/interpretations and manipulation before then used by my informant as an opportunity to exploit.

Having demonstrated how the state regulation was ultimately adopted by local inhabitants and then mediated through practices and discourses of corruption, I now extend the discussion on this case by focusing on the ways in which the morality of the story told by my informant was evaluated by residents in Degga. My intention here is to demonstrate how popular conceptions of petty corruption blur the boundaries between state and society. Some commentators may find as corrupt the extra length to which the narrator went to access a scarce 'state resource'. However, the morality of the story was judged by his friends and later by villagers based on the wider context of social values. Even though his friends were aware that the transaction involved illegal activity, i.e. the taking of money by the official, the material transaction was held as secondary in their reactions. As the young man ended his story, for

instance, his friends lauded him a ‘hero’ for his audacity and management of the whole process and his ability to putatively sell his story to the official.

Interestingly, no one either assumed/expressed that the transaction circumvented official ways of doing business or accused the official of being corrupt. When I asked the young men if they considered the official to be corrupt, one of them said, ‘helping the poor is not corruption’<sup>164</sup>. Another young man, describing the transaction as a favour, distinguished between *musena* (corruption) and *aji mensha* (gratitude money/gift): ‘It is not corruption. It is customary to give *aji mensha* [gratitude money] for such favours.’<sup>165</sup> Similarly, several weeks later, when I asked a middle-aged farmer, who had heard about the story, whether he regarded the transaction as corrupt, he said the following: ‘It is admirable to help the poor and landless youth amongst us. If you don’t give them this land, they would be a burden on *mengist* and *hezab* ... they will become robbers and burglars.’<sup>166</sup> Another young farmer said, ‘I don’t see any wrong in it. The official should do more to help other landless young people.’<sup>167</sup> Bribery in this context didn’t violate the villagers’ view that local state functionaries should be impartial, rule-bound and ‘uncorrupt’. While it is widely accepted, as we saw in the previous chapter, that state functionaries ought to act impartially, it is also accepted that the institutions that constitute the state (the kebele administration, cooperatives etc.) are, after all, made up of real people who have not only legal but also social and ‘familial’ responsibilities. My informants rather saw the official not only as a state representative but also as a social actor i.e. an individual with social relationships and obligations of mutual help.

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<sup>164</sup> Conversation, young resident#51, Degga, October 2014.

<sup>165</sup> Conversation, young resident#52, Degga, October 2014.

<sup>166</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#45, Degga, November 2014.

<sup>167</sup> Interview, young farmer#19, Degga, November 2014.

What all of the comments from different interlocutors make clear is that while practices which involve appropriation of state resources by private interests were widely condemned as illegal, the abuse of state resources (such as land) for the benefit of the poor was not condemned by the inhabitants for its illegality. In fact, localised moral discourses about communal responsibility to the poor legitimised both the illegal allocation of communal land and the bribery involved. This complex pattern of ‘reasoning’ about corrupt practices and moral values clearly dissipates the ostensible distinction between the state and society that is produced by political imaginations (see Chapter 6).

The reactions of the young men listening to the story further indicate that bribery is not just a mere economic exchange, as in dealing with state bureaucracy, but requires local people to develop certain manners, contacts, tact and etiquette for initiating and undertaking transactions and negotiations with the local authorities. There are ‘unwritten’ rules which govern the interaction of citizens with state representatives. The narrator, for example, advised his friends by saying, ‘You should create rapport with one of his [official’s] close friends or ask community elders who would talk to him first for you and arrange the amount of money and manner of approaching him’. The conversation provided the young and inexperienced men with the kind of information they needed to deal with the local state functionaries. The whole process involving acts of petty corruption, like other forms of legitimate state service transaction, can thus be viewed as one of ‘the first acts of citizenship; the tie that binds political subjects to the state whilst making the state visible to its citizens’ (Haller and Shore 2005: 7).

Finally, by way of conclusion, I suggest that petty corruption in this context should not be taken as a symptom of weakness of the state, as if it were unable to establish a firm grip in Degga kebele, or as a symptom of patronage politics, but rather as an integral part of a complex socio-political system. To comprehend this (social character of the state), it is essential to relate petty corruption back to the issue of governance. Governance, as I alluded to earlier, is not an

exclusive category which can be readily associated with state power. Rather, it is a social process produced and practised by a broad coalition of state and non-state actors who meet in intermediary spaces of governance and whose identities and interests are shaped by social relations, norms and discourses. Patterns of norms that inform governance practices thus arise at ‘interface situations’ (Long 1992) and as ‘contingent products of diverse actions and political struggles informed by the varied beliefs of situated agents’ (Bevir and Rhodes 2010: 16). Within this context, what is socially accepted as governance involves petty corruption. This is captured by statements such as: ‘they [officials] should help friends and family’, ‘it is normal to ask favour’, ‘whether legal or illegal, there is no harm in helping the poor’ or ‘it is a tradition to give or receive gratitude gifts’.<sup>168</sup> These comments point to an understanding of governance where officials are not expected to separate their personal agency from the state. From the point of view of my informants, what was legal or official was not necessarily the only legitimate form of governance. These statements, I would argue, can therefore be seen as a recognition and bolstering of the de facto patterns of governance in the local power structure. More precisely, petty corruption in this sense is a constitutive element of the local governance system which falls neither under the purview of state authority nor the realm of the traditional/social. Instead, blurring the line of distinction, it gives the state and society the quality of being part and parcel of a single socio-political complex. In other words, petty corruption, as one constitutive element in the local governance system, serves as an integral part of the functioning of the local state.

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<sup>168</sup> Interviews with middle-aged farmer#33, Degga, November 2014; middle-aged farmer#45, Degga, November 2014; young woman#50, Degga, November 2014; and elderly resident#44, Degga, November 2014. It is important to note here that this was a widely shared sentiment among almost all of my informants. The exceptions were a few petty traders and elementary school teachers. One school teacher, for instance, condemned petty corruption as illegal and described local inhabitants as ‘backward’.

## **8.2. Patterns of boundary crossing**

This section deals at some length with specific cases of three individuals marked by multiple identities in order to further reveal the ways in which the state-society boundary is crossed. Firstly, I look into the particular case of a prominent local elder communicating with individuals occupying a higher echelon of the state hierarchy. Although this type of case may be ‘uncommon’ because only a handful people can traverse multiple layers of hierarchies, it does shed light on the multiple aspects of state construction and boundary crossing that are at work more generally. Secondly, I present two individuals who, with their multiple positions and vast horizontal networks, efface the state-society boundary.

### ***Crossing of multiple hierarchical layers of authority***

In September 2014, I visited one of the most influential and well-known local elders at his home. On the third day of my visit, when I arrived at his house, I found him on his veranda surrounded by fawning individuals. Within a few minutes of my arrival, the elder received an old man who was accompanied by his son. After the extended exchange of greeting that is common when individuals meet in Degga, the old man began to explain that despite having graduated from a private college about a year ago, his son had found it extremely difficult to obtain a job as a primary school teacher. The young man, in an effort to bolster his father’s account, interjected to explain that this year, as in the previous year, the number of teaching applicants at the district education bureau far exceeded the number of available positions. He put the number of applicants at 132 and the number of vacant positions at 20. Regardless of the large number of applicants and the inevitable cut-throat competition, what was frustrating to the old man and his son was rather their lack of important social contacts at urban centres. The old man repeatedly said a very popular phrase in Degga, ‘*hulum neger bezemed new*’ (which can be literally translated as ‘everything works through kin relations’), in order to stress that one needs networks to obtain state employment in urban centres.

As they finished explaining their case, the elder, instead of answering them directly, turned to myself and dramatically declared: ‘You see, I am helping this kind of helpless and poor people.’ He then promised the old man that he would try and talk to his ‘people’ at the zone education bureau. The old man then pulled the elder over to one side and tried to inconspicuously hand him a wad of cash. The elder was clearly embarrassed by the incident and reacted furiously: ‘these peasants are manner-less and uneducated. I am trying to help him, and you see what he does?’ Clearly, it was my presence which influenced the transaction. The elder told the old man off for trying to bribe him but nonetheless promised to help the young man in getting the job.

Later, in October, when I met the young man in the district town, he gleefully told me that he had already been given the job. The process did not, however, run smoothly. He said: ‘After that encounter, the elder was so offended by my father’s attempt to bribe him in front of you that he refused to help me get the job.’ The young man added that the elder even refused to talk to his father, so they had to send an apology through one of his friends [another elder] who several days later came back with the recommendation of offering a rather steep sum of ‘gratitude money’ (1000 ETB or £30), the reason being that the elder had to make several calls. When he explained why he and his father had solicited the help of the elder, the young man mentioned a well-known fact that the elder had a brother who was exceedingly well placed in the Ethiopian national defence force. He said: ‘He is a well-connected individual. He can even get you a job in Addis Ababa, let alone in here [district level].’ This exemplifies how a particular local case can traverse multiple layers of state hierarchy as well as go between different types of authorities, thus blurring the line between public and state officials.

The most interesting aspect of this case was not only the capacity of a local elder to thwart the bureaucratic mechanisms of public service employment but also his ability to reach to a higher zonal official, bypassing the kebele and district hierarchies. What constituted the core

of the relationship between the local elder and his trans-local state patron was not the potential mutual economic benefits that may have been derived from it but rather kinship obligations. However, at the local level, the elder accrued financial benefit and also the reputation of being a community patron for ‘helping’ the son of a poor and powerless farmer. Such strong connections between local elites and trans-local state agents are commonly highly valued in Degga. Most commonly the effective exercise of power and influence by local elders requires the constant reassertion and demonstration of links to, and successful engagement with, the outside world (important people at multiple layers of the state).

Finally, I should point out that a change in authority at one or many levels of the state hierarchy, whether induced by corruption allegations or a demotion, transfer or retirement, is always a potential threat to those community elders who have established their legitimacy based on vertical relations of patronage. When personal power bases shift at the district and sometimes regional and national levels, so the influence of non-state actors waxes and wanes. For example, during many of my conversations, local informants frequently referred to an elderly man, now an ordinary peasant, who used to be one of the local patrons and enjoyed a great deal of influence because he had kinship ties with a former senior woreda official, to indicate shifting local power relations. When the senior woreda official was replaced by another person, the elderly man completely lost his political influence in Degga. For such reasons, patronage in Degga is to a significant extent a politics of shifting alliances and changing constellations of power relations. This ever-shifting engagement – in such vertical informal symbiosis – between state and non-state authorities contributes to the continuous making and remaking of the state. This also denoted that local non-state elites are neither indicators of state dysfunction nor antitheses to state formation but are instead an integral part of everyday state construction and reproduction.



### *Crossing of horizontal boundaries: multiple positions and horizontal transgressions*

In the following, I introduce two prominent local elites who hold multiple positions as religious and traditional leaders and state representatives, thereby blurring state/society and public/state authority distinctions.

#### *Kes (priest) Hailu*

*Kes* Hailu is a middle-aged man in his late fifties. He is an interesting local figure due to the multiple positions of authority he occupies as the kebele land use and administration unit head, as a high priest of one of the five parish churches and as a customary leader. As head of the kebele land use and administration unit, his responsibilities include encouraging and mediating with people to resolve their land disputes, demarcating boundaries in line with agreements reached through arbitration processes and authorising land rent contracts, etc. His clout as the land use and administration head is significant because decisions taken at his office/local unit cannot be appealed in court. As a priest, he functions as *yenfes abat* (literally meaning ‘father of the soul’) for a large number of households. His responsibilities as *yenfes abat* include periodically visiting and blessing each family, mediating in marital conflicts, hearing confessions, providing spiritual and moral support during times of stress and grief and giving absolution to the dying. More importantly, he has the power to excommunicate members of the community who choose to disobey him. In short, he enters the hearth and home of households. As one astute farmer exaggeratedly said about the power the priest wields, ‘He knows every secret of each household he visits’.<sup>169</sup> He is also rumoured to have knowledge of traditional herbal medicine, an allegation which he discounts for fear of being labelled as *debtera* (*debtera* are priests who lose their ordination for practising medicine, fortune-telling and astrology). However, on one occasion, I myself overheard him recommending a local herb to one of his clients. Nevertheless, aside from any medical skills, *kes* Hailu claims to draw his authority as

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<sup>169</sup> Conversation, middle-aged farmer#20, Degga, November 2014.

a priest, customary leader and land administrator from God, the people and the state. During one of my many long conversations with him, he said: ‘I consider myself lucky and blessed to be entrusted with responsibilities by *mengist*, the Almighty and the people. Everyone treats me with respect.’

*Kes* Hailu always arrived at the kebele premises wearing his distinctive turban and white cloak and carrying a fly-whisk and a wooden cross and small books from the Gospels held in a piece of cloth. He was available in the kebele only twice per week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, but this did not include days when he came to attend official meetings. When residents, who had come to the kebele for various reasons, saw him arrive, they would approach him in a certain order and one by one bend from the knee and lower their waist to kiss his hand-held wooden cross and his knee and receive blessings.<sup>170</sup> This would continue as he sat in his office with the land administration expert to review land-related petitions. Barely half an hour would pass without yet another group of farmers coming to receive blessings. Clearly, when people come forward to receive blessings in state spaces, they are blurring the line between religious and impersonal state norms. This doesn’t, however, mean that people misunderstand the workings and administrative procedures of modern bureaucracy. As illustrated in the previous chapters, local inhabitants are aware that the bureaucracy ought to be run according to formal rules and regulations. This blurring of religious and impersonal state norms is rather indicative of the fact that the everyday state is embedded in social contexts.

The ambiguous status of *kes* Hailu and the fluidity of the state-society boundary are even more apparent in the different types and purpose of his visitors and the ways in which he relates to them at his office. People would sometimes come to his office seeking his advice and counsel on a range of personal matters such as marital spats, spiritual problems and quarrels with

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<sup>170</sup> Special value is attached to crosses in Orthodox Ethiopia.

neighbours. Instead of focusing on official business, he would instead spend hours chatting with his visitors, sometimes with gusto, about all sorts of spiritual and personal issues. The best illustration came from a chat I witnessed between *kes* Hailu and one of his friends. One day, as I sat with *kes* Hailu and the land use administration expert (the civil servant in charge of the office), his friend strode past visitors and pushed his way into the office. After warm greetings, the friend began telling a story about a certain monk in the neighbouring kebele who claimed to cast out evil spirits and cure illness through holy water. The story led to a warm conversation about pilgrimage between *kes* Hailu, his friend and, surprisingly, the land use administration expert, which went on for some 40 minutes. In the meantime, visitors were told by the land use administration expert to wait their turn outside. Similarly, on a separate occasion, I witnessed another friend of *kes* Hailu dropping in to chat during working hours owing to the fact that they had not seen each other for a long time. At *kes* Hailu's office, the distinction between a client and a friend and official and social life was unclear. On another occasion, I witnessed a young boy, who had been sent by his parents, delivering an invitation to the priest to bless the celebration of Gabriel *mahber* (*Mahber* is a traditional association where families, usually 12, who have the same patron saint or angel, honour and feast on a day assigned to their particular saint or angel in the liturgical calendar). What is clear from these anecdotes is that *kes* Hailu's role as a priest and *yenef* *abat* was not secondary to or distinguishable from his role as a state representative in a 'state space'. *Kes* Hailu effectively collapses the distinction between public (religious) and state authority not only through his priestly attire but also in his style of operation and communication with his clients in a state space by acting as a traditional authority and religious figure as opposed to as a public servant.

Furthermore, *kes* Hailu occupies an ambivalent position not only between the state and society and traditional and modern authority but also in people's imaginations. On the one hand, he enjoys respect as a high priest and as an elder who can solve local disputes; on the

other hand, his position as the kebele land use administrator renders him a suspect. Many of my informants accused him of taking material advantage of his position as a state representative. By local standards, he does well financially and has managed to invest in a property in an urban centre and send his young children to a private school in the regional town. Such corruption allegations by local state functionaries, as we have seen in the previous chapter, enable local people to construct an impartial idea of the state. Nevertheless, the multiple positions of *kes* Hailu and his style of conducting official business reveal the social embeddedness of the state.

### ***Kassa***

Kassa is another prominent local leader who occupies multiple positions as a customary local elder, successful businessman and state representative. Unlike the majority of local inhabitants, he completed elementary education. Kassa runs a successful timber trading business. He owns a truck, the only two shops in Degga and two grinding mills. According to local informants, his business success is largely based on logging concessions he has recurrently obtained from smallholder producers since the mid-1990s, from which he supplies timber to richer urban-based traders with whom he has established close associations through his kinship networks. Kassa is also a member of the EPRDF/ANDM party and deputy speaker of the kebele council. Kassa is reputed and is very proud to be the only person whose home was visited by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in 2009 as part of showcasing the success of state health extension programmes.

Unlike most local politicians, he is a popular figure among the majority of local inhabitants. His popularity is due to his ability to provide jobs to the local poor in his timber business and his generosity in donating money to local projects. For instance, at the time of my fieldwork, he contributed 100,000 ETB (£ 3, 370) for the renovation of St. Giogris (St. George) Church, with the amount presented by the kebele chairman. Kassa has also constructed a rudimentary

gravel road which connects timber-producing villages to the main asphalt national road. While locals are aware that the road along the logging tracks was constructed to facilitate access to the outside market, they still hold him in respect for the benefit they receive from it, namely the ease with which they can transport their produce. Most often, local inhabitants describe him as a pious patron with business acumen who is willing to share his hard-earned money with noble communal causes.

Kassa, as both a local politician and community elder, is horizontally connected to and supported by local authorities and inhabitants. Thus, his multiple positions, popularity and extensive networks enable him to enjoy power and influence within the kebele power structure. One example that confirms his influence involved an incident that took place when a few wealthy Muslim traders agreed to buy two houses from local farmers in order to open shops in Degga. Kassa, as the owner of the only two existing shops, was outraged by the news. In his position as deputy speaker and community elder, Kassa used his connections within the kebele and local churches to organise a community-wide meeting where all adult male community members swore an oath of allegiance to their Christian faith and to defend their community against infiltration by Muslim traders. During the meeting, it was alleged that the traders practised witchcraft to attract business and accumulate wealth. According to local informants, the local priests threatened to excommunicate individuals who granted business concessions or sold properties to the Muslims. This was supported by a passionate speech given by the kebele chairman. The incident, being cast in religious terms, stirred strong local emotions against the Muslim traders, even at the time of my fieldwork. When I talked to him, Kassa acknowledged his leadership in orchestrating the meeting but denied that the motivation behind it was to secure his own local business interest. He said: 'Yes, I have brought together the kebele, church and the people in defence of the only true faith. We have always been a 100 per cent Christian

kebele. We oppose infiltrators ... but I didn't say they [Muslim traders] practise witchcraft ... and it has nothing to do with business.'

Being accepted as a benign community patron, he dominates the economic and political life of Degga by monopolising its 'territory', resources and businesses. It is no exaggeration to state that he acts as a 'gatekeeper' who controls access to Degga. However, Kassa is cognisant of the fact that he operates in the twilight of legality and illegality, something which makes his local business interest vulnerable to state anti-corruption measures. During one of my interviews with him, he made allusion to the fact that his ability to operate freely was protected by higher-level authorities. He said: 'I stand by my willingness to defend my faith. I have been told by people from both woreda and zone administrations that I am doing the right thing. I work with full support from everyone.' Operating under such conditions requires one to rely on 'vertical' networks of patronage. Of course, Kassa would never have been able to exercise such tremendous influence without the backing and protection of trans-local elites.

What the cases involving these two seemingly different individuals show is not so much how local actors capture the local state per se as how the state and society constitute one another. By collapsing the distinction between their official role as public servants and as religious/public figures, these actors render the state-society dichotomy ambiguous in nature. They represent the case that the state is profoundly shaped by powerful local actors who straddle the fluid line between state and society.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, my purpose has been to tease out the ways in which the state is locally embedded and socially enmeshed through an analysis of the interactions between the state, non-state actors and the local population in multiple settings. Having first explored patterns of local elite interaction in intermediary spaces of governance, I proceeded to demonstrate the

relational ambiguity between public and state authorities. Intermediary spaces of governance as permeable spaces bring together the agents of two supposedly distinct entities, the state and society, including politicians and party officials, civil servants, customary leaders, businessmen and traders. They serve as local sites in which state policies are negotiated and the everyday business of governance and political decisions are exercised. This reveals how outcomes of state regulatory practices depend very much on the manner in which they are accepted, reinterpreted, negotiated and implemented by local elites.

We have also seen the social character of state-making by focusing on important dimensions of state-society boundary crossings: vertical and horizontal. There was firstly a case of patronage in which a local elder traversed multiple layers of state structure (bypassing kebele and district hierarchies) and different types of authority (public and state authorities). The appearance of a clear-cut state-society boundary was also collapsed, as we saw, by two individuals occupying multiple positions of authority, namely those of traditional leader, religious figure, business guru and state representative, within both state and non-state domains. This shows us that even within the kebele bureaucracy, state work is conducted by people who occupy multiple positions and operate in the twilight between state and society. In other words, the social character of governance in Degga conditions the working of the state.

In sum, this chapter has shown how patterns of local governance are locally enmeshed with social relations and how state autonomy can be compromised by individuals who occupy multiple positions of authority in both state and non-state domains. While governance is often thought of as a category which falls under the state administrative domain, in practice, as we have seen, it involves a large number of social processes. Local governance practices are anchored in the everyday reality of social and economic life, social norms, familial obligations and power interests. An understanding of the state based on constitutive oppositions between formal and informal, modern and traditional, state and society categories does not therefore

capture the intricacy of the everyday process of state formation. In the chapter that follows, I further unravel the complexities of state-making by focusing on the intersection of national policies and local interests.



## **Chapter 9**

### **State formation in Borana:**

#### **Sedentarisation, territorialisation and the making of subjects**

The Borana Zone was nearly always described to me as a ‘remote’ and ‘state-less’ area. Given its distance from the country’s capital, Addis Ababa, and its location on the border with Kenya, its poor transportation infrastructure and marginality in both national politics and economy, I did not find the characterisation of ‘remote’ and ‘marginal’ altogether surprising. However, when I first arrived in Odda, I began to question the discourse of ‘state scarcity’. On my first day, I went with my research assistant to the kebele office to request permission to undertake my fieldwork. The administration office is located in what appeared to be the centre of the kebele. Like many other kebeles in highland Ethiopia, the rural centre is a cluttered and lacklustre place. There were gangs of youth roaming the dirt road, children running to and fro, three-wheel vehicles setting down passengers and several groups of men standing together, talking. The dilapidated kebele administration office, which was first installed by the Derg in 1974, is pretty much at the centre of the kebele and is surrounded by an assortment of government buildings. Directly in front of the kebele office are the development agent (DA)’s office, a soap production cooperative’s office and a grain store. To the far left are a teacher’s residence and a hostel for female students. To the right is a health post. At the southern edge of the kebele office building, a large wooden fence surrounds the kebele’s elementary school compound.

As we entered the compound, we noticed two Land Rovers bearing NGO licence plates and the EU (European Union) and USAID (United States Agency for International Development) logos, which were parked adjacent to the wood-and-mud kebele office building. The inside of the compound was full of people. We walked over to a group of men sitting under the shade of

a tree to ask them where we could find the kebele manager. They informed us that he was in a meeting and respectfully motioned for us to sit down with them and wait – out of the scorching sun – whilst he was busy. As we sat down, one middle-aged man from the group, who perceived us to be government representatives, asked us why there had been a delay in safety-net food stamps and complained about the lack of medicine at the local health post. By mistakenly associating us with the state, the man rhetorically yet effectively held us responsible for the local problems. We nevertheless explained to him that we were not from the government, at which they all laughed.

We now turned to the others and enquired as to the nature of the business that had brought them to the kebele. One said he was there to appeal against fines levied upon him by his village head for grazing cattle in an area of land prohibited for conservation. He said, ‘there is no place for the cattle to graze. The grazing pastures that we have used in the past are being settled by people and reserved by NGOs and the government for conservation. There is nowhere to go.’ Everyone commented on the growing grievance concerning the shortage of grazing land and the growth in population. The conversation continued for a few more minutes, after which one of the group spotted the kebele manager and his guests emerging from the meeting, at which point the gathering broke up.

After seeing his guests off, the kebele manager greeted us in impeccable Amharic and ushered us into his office, offering us a share of a bench with two other clients. His office walls – just like the offices in Degga– were decorated with graphs detailing successful past government projects, tables of statistics and charts. Two old metal cabinets were positioned against the left-hand wall, but much of the space in the office space, however, was dominated by one wooden bench and a medium-size wooden laminate desk piled with files, notebooks and papers. As we sat down, I introduced myself, my assistant, my research project and produced an official letter of introduction issued by the woreda. He glanced through the content

of the letter and said, 'We will provide you with any assistance you need'. He then spoke passionately about the overall status of the development and changes underway in his kebele: 'This area has really been developing fast. We are witnessing improved life conditions and many people are flocking in for habitation.' He then put on his glasses and looked at me with a smile, saying: 'I am happy you chose to do your fieldwork here. There is so much going on. We need someone to write about the development in Borana.' Overall, his speech was one-sided and appeared to betray a touch of government propaganda. Following this encounter and throughout my subsequent stay in Odda, my interactions with him continued to be marked by his expectation of me to write about the success of government projects and the improvements made to the living conditions of the local inhabitants.

My first-day conversations with the manager and local inhabitants, in addition to my personal observations, encapsulate the themes I explore in this and the following chapters. I came away from these encounters and observations with the distinct impression that changes of some sort were underway in Odda. It was also blatantly clear to me that the interpretation of these changes was a matter of contention between my two interlocutors – the kebele manager and his clients. But they do, after all, share the common theme of change. In this and the following chapters, I therefore ask what these stories of change are, how they came about and, more importantly, what they tell us about the everyday aspect of state formation.

In my attempt to answer these questions and as a way of studying the processes of state formation, I take the concepts of sedentarisation and territorialisation as my analytical points of entry. Territorialisation, in this context, implies the process through which 'all modern states divide their territories into complex and overlapping political and economic zones, rearrange people and resources within these units, and create regulations delineating how and by whom these areas can be used' (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995: 387). By focusing on sedentarisation and territorialisation processes, this chapter explores the ways in which state formation takes

place through the intersection of national policies and local processes. As such, the core argument of this chapter is that the local everyday forms of state-making (Chapters 5–8) are not necessarily opposed to central state policies but occur at the intersection of interests between national policies, state and non-state forms of authority (community leaders), NGO activities and the local population. The chapter therefore aims to widen our understanding of state formation by demonstrating how it takes place through triadic interactions and negotiations between the state (central state policies), NGOs and local population groups (ordinary people and local elites). I shall reserve for Chapter 10 the implications of these processes in terms of promoting a variegated public understanding of the state.

I begin this chapter by examining the historical dynamics and long-term processes of state territorialisation efforts in Borana in order to better contextualise our discussion of state formation. I then consider the factors that impelled pastoralists into sedentarisation. This is followed by a discussion of the state's strategies for extending its power through various territoriality tactics and their consequences. Lastly, I examine individual personal experiences and representations to explore how state programmes and governance practices re/produce 'subject positions'<sup>171</sup> and shed light on the making and workings of the state.

### **9.1. Understanding the context: the state in Borana**

Before entering into a detailed analysis of the everyday aspects of state-making, I wish to provide a very brief background of the historical processes of territorialisation in Borana as a

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<sup>171</sup> According to theorists Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffé, a subject position refers to 'the ensemble of beliefs through which an individual interprets and responds to her structural positions within a social formation ... an individual becomes a social agent insofar as she lives her structural positions through an ensemble of subject positions' (cited in Smith 1998: 58). In this sense, subject positions are constrained by hegemonic structures of domination.

way of better contextualising the contemporary attempts to extend spatial and administrative powers.

State territorialisation in Borana can be said to have begun with its incorporation into the Ethiopian state in 1897 (Markakis 2011; Helland 1999). The initial attempt at territorialisation was prompted by a need to establish territorial sovereignty and a desire to extract revenue. At the turn of the century, a series of border agreements and demarcations between British East Africa and Imperial Ethiopia divided Borana society into two parts (Oba 2013; Bahru 1991), thereby making the two groups Ethiopian and British subjects. The border demarcation, along with the creation of *Ketemas* (garrison towns), had the function of instituting a predatory regime of revenue extraction in the zone. That is, while the external border defined citizenship for the purposes of taxation, the garrison towns served as important launching pads for periodic raids to collect taxes from the pastoralists (Oba 2013).

However, contrary to the imposition of so-called *gabbar-malkagna* (an institution of land tenure and taxation system)<sup>172</sup>, as was the case in the ‘highland peripheries’ (Markakis 2011; Bahru 1991; Donham 1986),<sup>173</sup> the imperial government did not make any attempt to control the relationship between pastoralists, their land and other natural resources. Broadly speaking, there was no territorially organised state system in the Borana Zone. But this does not mean that Borana was an ungoverned periphery, or that its people, as Markakis (2011: 134) argues, were ‘left to their own devices’. On the contrary, the Borana have always been interconnected with the centre/Addis Ababa through the enmeshment of hierarchical and personalised power

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<sup>172</sup> For an excellent account of the Ethiopian land tenure system, see Crummey (2000).

<sup>173</sup> Markakis (2011) distinguishes between highland and lowland peripheries based on ‘the material foundation that determines the ways humankind makes a living’ (15).

relations and practices of tax extraction.<sup>174</sup> At first, settler administrators and soldiers, aided by local protégés, controlled the area and thereby stood at the interface between the Borana and the Imperial state. But over time, the *Qallus* (ritual leaders) of the two Borana moieties – the *Saabbo* and the *Gonna* – were awarded the Abyssinian military title of *Fetawrari* (commanders of the vanguard), and, assisted by soldier-settlers and *qoros* (local protégés) (Oba 2013; Halland 1999), helped to connect the Borana to the centre and extend the reach of the state in its effort to extract taxes.

The territorially organised system of rule, an attempt to control both land and population (Li 1999), began under the Derg regime. The Derg territorialisation initiative was a product of centralised socialist planning that sought to organise pastoralists (and peasants) into territorially bounded units, that is, *kebeles*, for effective development interventions (Clapham 1988). The Derg promoted settlements and crop cultivation in Borana. However, settlement was generally cursory and farmland was randomly spread across *kebeles*.<sup>175</sup> As a result, the newly created territorial form of administration had not effectively bounded people to kebele settlements.

Beginning in the 2000s, territorialisation arose as a consequence of transformations in the political economy at the national level and with the self-reinvigoration of the legitimacy and identity of the state in relation to its ability to deliver development services. In this respect, the overarching tool of pastoralist government development policy was sedentarisation. Government rural development strategies such as the Agricultural Development-Led

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<sup>174</sup> The taxation of the Borana was extensive and severe, and was equated to robbery by British officials in North Kenya at the time (Oba 2013). But given the history of border disputes and rivalry between the two forces, their comments should be taken with a pinch of salt.

<sup>175</sup> Interviews with *Abba Gadaa* of Borana, woreda town, January 2015; *Abba Reera#1*, Odda, Odda, December 2014.

Industrialisation (ADLI) strategy and the current strategy of ‘commercial agricultural investment’ (Lavers 2012) encourage settled agriculture (MoFED 2003). Pastoralism is seen as unsustainable,<sup>176</sup> and settlement as a key development tool is concurrently implemented with other government programmes. This is revealed quite clearly in the influential national Growth and Transformation Plan (GTPI) which stipulates that ‘household asset building, safety net, and settlement programs, as well as off-farm income generating activities’ in pastoralist areas are to be ‘jointly implemented’ (MoFED 2010). Sedentarisation, and then territorialisation, as I demonstrate below, are thus effected along with a systematic convergence and implementation of various other development programmes.<sup>177</sup>

## **9.2. The allure of NGOs: Sedentarisation**

The Borana Zone is densely populated with both domestic and transnational NGOs. Borana has 44 registered NGOs (26 international and 18 domestic) with 65 different project titles.<sup>178</sup> Unlike the severe famine periods of 1973–74 and 1984–85, the years in which they started to

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<sup>176</sup> Aberra Deresa, State Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development, told the BBC, ‘We are not really appreciating pastoralists remaining as they are. We have to improve their livelihood by creating job opportunities. Pastoralism, as it is, is not sustainable. We want to change the environment’ (Butler 2010).

<sup>177</sup> Here, it is instructive to point out the regional variations by which the practice of state territorialisation takes effect. In some parts of lowland Ethiopia, in the Gambella region, for instance, state territorialisation was prompted by the federal government’s desire to release significant amounts of land for commercial agricultural purposes. As a consequence, the state’s territorial tactics included officially designating millions of hectares of land as wasteland and subsequently transferring it to direct central state control (Kelly and Peluso 2015), in addition to the settlement of scattered villages into properly administered clustered units. Through this process, sedentarisation and the provision of development services almost always followed territorialisation and were undertaken through coercive mechanisms. As a result, state power is bitterly contested by the displaced population (see Rawlence 2016). In Borana, however, as I demonstrate in greater detail below, sedentarisation preceded territorialisation and is being undertaken systematically and relatively peacefully with the willing participation of pastoralists and the very active involvement of NGOs. In this regard, one interesting aspect of everyday state-making in Borana is that the sedentarisation and territorialisation projects are, perhaps unwittingly, aided by the NGO programmes.

<sup>178</sup> Borana Zone NGO profile, the Borana Zone finance bureau, 2014.

function in the area, their goals are now not simply relief and humanitarian intervention but development and empowerment. Out of the 65 project titles, 60 focus on livelihood diversification, infrastructure development, health, women's empowerment and school promotion activities. Only about five projects funded by USAID, CARE UK and the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), although large in scale, focus on food aid, nutrition and emergency relief.<sup>179</sup> One NGO director explained:

The old relief-based model is proven unsustainable. The best strategy is to enable communities to engage in development activities and to encourage them to take responsibility for their own development.<sup>180</sup>

The fact that NGOs largely operate community-based development projects with an emphasis on participation and sustainability means that only settled populations are classified and targeted for welfare and livelihood diversification programmes. In other words, as I demonstrate below, the ability of drought-prone pastoralists to extract basic amenities and other benefits from NGOs crucially lies in their willingness to associate themselves with participatory-based income-generating cooperatives and *lematawi buden* and cell groups that are recognised, facilitated and controlled by state authorities. The head of one international NGO summarised how income-generating cooperatives are organised:

When we work community projects, there are several stages we go through. First, we enter into a partnership agreement with the woreda cooperatives office. Pastoralists are required to be registered as a cooperative under the woreda. We are not allowed to initiate the formation of any type of association. This is because the government wants to control everything and keep track of people and associations. But because the government lacks

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Interview, director of an international NGO#7, woreda town, January 2015.



the capacity to do everything and it is disorganised and out of touch, when we see needs for alternative means of income among people, we give them the nudges that bring them to the attention of the woreda officials. Once they are organised, we give them training and provide them with seed money.<sup>181</sup>

The process of organising most cooperatives begins with the settlement of pastoralists and their registration with the local authorities. The kebele must first validate the residence status of individuals who wish to join a cooperative. Newly established cooperatives are then granted access to NGO seed funds (usually 25,000 ETB or about £800) and training schemes.<sup>182</sup> This process underscores how development practices extend the reach of the state and augment its grip on non-state spheres. Through the registration and organisation of cooperatives, the woreda and zone administrations affirm and reproduce their authority over local residents and also regulates the penetration of NGOs.

It is important to point out that NGO activities and support are not limited solely to settled communities. They also provide extensive support to pastoralists that includes cattle restocking and destocking, animal health, water development, saving and credit cooperatives and famine relief, etc. But these services and projects, as we shall see below, are perceived by pastoralists as sporadic, and in any case are typically wiped out by fluctuating weather conditions. On the other hand, pastoralists who wish to secure a relatively sustainable source of income from one of the many cooperatives are required to settle as cultivators. The establishment of a permanent settlement as a precondition of joining one of the many cooperatives is justified on the basis that membership requires regular and ‘active participation ... which is unbecoming to a pastoral way of life’.<sup>183</sup> Sedentarisation can therefore be seen as a condition enjoined upon those who

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<sup>181</sup> Interview, head of international NGO#8, woreda town, January 2015.

<sup>182</sup> Interview, senior woreda official#9, woreda town, January 2015.

<sup>183</sup> Interview, senior woreda official#10, woreda town, January 2015.

depend upon a fragile mode of subsistence to secure the basic amenities of life. One middle-aged man's expectations, for instance, contributed to his settlement decision:

I had large livestock until the 2005 drought, due to which I lost all but a few. With the support of NGOs, I began recuperating ... they [NGOs under drought-recovery programme] gave me a mix of 25 goats and sheep. But before establishing myself, I lost half of the cattle to disease. After that, I came to learn that NGOs provide continuous help only for those who are settled. In 2008, I left pastoralism altogether and came to settle in Odda. Since then I have started farming and also I keep some cattle, goats and sheep ... the income I get from the saving and credit cooperative [which he is a member], is, however, very small ... it is not as I expected it first.<sup>184</sup>

Others were exhorted to associate themselves with a cooperative in order to secure access to credit, markets, seed money and education and health services. One elderly man shared his experience:

I was a member of a pastoralists' microcredit cooperative. It was just useless. They wouldn't even give us small loans because they feared we could lose our cattle to drought and fail to pay them back. The NGOs and the government really look after settlers well. Whenever we asked the NGO people for the same provisions, they would tell us that there was not much they could do for people who moved every six months or so ... it became clearer to us that we had no other better option than settlement ... some of us came to Odda in 2009, and have associated ourselves into a saving and credit cooperative, after which we received 25,000 birr [about £800] from SOS. We now buy cattle from the residents and sell them in big markets.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Interview, middle-aged man#11, Odda, December 2014.

<sup>185</sup> Interview, elderly man#12, Odda, December 2014.

Similarly, another middle-aged herder, who did not want to abandon the profession of his ancestors, said the following:

Settlers can get loans very easily; they get free money up to 100 birr [about £ 4] for just attending a meeting. Some of them even get free grain from the government. However, a herder must sell animals to buy food. A herder must pay for everything. When we ask for the same kind of treatment, we get told we must regularly participate in meetings ... I then brought my wife from another woreda to live in Odda while I keep on the herding profession. She is a member of the soap production cooperative. She was once given 180 birr just for participating in an NGO training and 100 birr twice as dividends. But they nag her day in and day out to send our child – who helps me in herding – to school. ... I thought about settling to become a farmer and send him to school, but I just don't want to leave the profession of my father.<sup>186</sup>

Complementing the initial assistance provided by the NGOs, newly settled pastoralists helped to encourage their kin's entry into agriculture and permanent settlement. This was the experience of a middle-aged resident:

When I was moving [in search of pasture and water] my cattle started to die. My relative who recently started farming in Odda told me about the benefits of settlement. He said I could start an easy life by being a member of one of the NGO's associations. He said 'if you lose your cattle, and the crops fail, you wouldn't lose your income from the cooperatives'. I was persuaded and sold the little that remained and came here to start a new life.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Interview, middle-aged herder#13, Odda, December 2014.

<sup>187</sup> Interview, middle-aged resident#14, Odda, December 2014.

In direct contrast, a number of others who had already been settled for a while began to contemplate abandoning agriculture and moving back to pastoralism. Many explained to me how once settled they realised the income-generating cooperatives had nothing substantial to offer in terms of material gain. One middle-aged man, for instance, who was a member of the local cattle fattening cooperative, said:

In the beginning, we thought that we would make a lot of money. The training by AFD [Action for Development] was good. They gave us allowances. But over time, AFD withdrew and the management began to ask more money from us, let alone distribute to us ... Farming is also bad; rain rarely comes. I then thought about going back to herding but I had no capital to buy cattle, and my children were at school. The longer you put off herding, the harder it becomes to revert.<sup>188</sup>

By using the criteria of permanent residence and a compulsory commitment to regular participation in the cooperative as conditions of membership, there is immediately a drawing of individuals into a permanent settlement without any deployment of coercion. In Odda, the result was that between 2009 and 2014, with its growing number of settlers, 14 new income-generating cooperatives were formed in the areas of aloe soap making, saving and credit services, gum and incense extraction, animal fattening and the extraction of stone for construction.<sup>189</sup> Some of these were federated into zone-level unions with similar cooperatives in other kebeles and woredas.

What emerges from the expansion of cooperatives, then, is a much wider engagement of state institutions with local inhabitants. All of the cooperatives were set up using donor finances and are officially reported as being member-managed, but in practice, it was alluded to me by

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<sup>188</sup> Interview, middle-aged man#15, Odda, December 2014.

<sup>189</sup> Interview, kebele manager, Odda, December 2014.

multiple cooperative leaders and members that they are in fact governed by the woreda cooperatives promotion office. They serve as sources of mobilisation and finance to support public infrastructure projects such as road construction.<sup>190</sup> Members of the various cooperatives – the biggest being a saving and credit cooperative with 250 members – regularly receive visits from state representatives and are expected to participate in weekly or monthly meetings to discuss applications for loans, their general performance and sometimes even village and personal issues such as alcoholism. Moreover, all of the cooperatives maintain contact with state institutions such as the woreda finance bureau through modern bureaucratic procedures such as paperwork and auditing.<sup>191</sup>

But I should point out here that, at the time of my fieldwork, several of the cooperatives, such as the animal fattening cooperative, existed in little more than name. Many of my informants, having being required to pay membership fees and without receiving dividends, described the cooperative as a steady drain on their purse. There is a high drop-out rate from such cooperatives. In this respect, the expansion of cooperatives might be viewed cynically as a tactic of the state's strategy to settle people and assert control over them.

To sum up, NGOs have accelerated the process of sedentarisation by way of engaging people in community-based income-generating activities that have eventually turned Odda into a site of governance. The fact that cooperatives are established by and for people in a geographically and administratively bounded territory has been instrumental in bringing about the preconditions for territorialisation, as I demonstrate in the next section.

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<sup>190</sup> Many members of different cooperatives told me that they are often asked to contribute a small portion of their dividends for roads and the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

<sup>191</sup> Interviews with middle-aged cooperative head#16, Odda, December 2014; middle-aged cooperative head#17, Odda, January 2015; young cooperative head#18, Odda, January 2015.

### **9.3. Territorialisation and state-making**

This section explores the ways in which the state, in many cases with and through customary local institutions and customary leaders, has reworked the local spatial configuration and, as a result, extended its control over local social and property relations. My intention here is to explain how state formation is accomplished through localised state practices, non-state actors' development interventions and through the willing cooperation of local actors and the population. In the following, I discuss two main components of state territorialisation in Odda: the individualisation of grazing lands and the recognition of the customary and their consequences on state–society relations.

#### ***Individualisation of grazing lands***

The individualisation of common land has its origins in the 1975 land proclamation which conferred common land user rights to pastoral lands to the individual residents of newly created kebeles, such as Odda. At the time, however, agricultural holdings were small and unregulated. A person who first cleared a non-grazing land could simply claim usufructuary rights to the land.<sup>192</sup> But as people gradually settled into cooperatives, as shown in the previous section, the woreda administration began to turn itself to the task of extensive territorialisation through the mundane practice of the registration of land to private titles. In 2009, the government established a new woreda-level land department called Land Use Administration and Environment Protection (LUAEP), which was mandated, among other things, to delineate, register and administer agricultural land. The department began the practice of the systematisation and formalisation of land use through cadastral surveying and registration on

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<sup>192</sup> Interviews with *Abba Reera#2*, Odda, December 2014; *Abba Olla#3*, Odda, December 2014; *Abba Olla#4*, Odda, December 2014.

the grounds of avoiding land-related disputes and overlapping claims. As a senior woreda land administration expert explained:

A growing number of pastoralists are shifting towards crop cultivation. As a consequence, land-related disputes and overlapping claims are arising. There are also cases of feuds because of the alleged destruction of crops by animals. What we do is introduce an organised system of management to help the people manage their own resources.<sup>193</sup>

There are two levels at which individualisation of land is carried out. First, it is worked out in a long-drawn-out process of registration, allocation and plot demarcation. This principally involved the participation of traditional leaders extant at the juncture between woreda agents and the local population. The particular impetus to involve customary leaders in local-level land management processes came from the Ministry of Agriculture's desire to counter the erstwhile top-down approach to natural resource management and address local discontent towards state policies. The broader parameters that call for negotiations with the local population and the collaboration of customary leaders are laid down in the national Land Use Planning Guideline (LUPG) and Local Level Participatory Land Use Planning Manual (LLPLUP). These guidelines and manuals define the limits of engagement and provide frameworks through which territorialisation initiatives can be mediated by the customary structure. The LUPG, for instance, outlines a nine-step approach to establishing 'participatory and negotiated' land tenure arrangements at the local level, including how to use legitimate pre-existing customary channels rather than ad-hoc committees (MoARD n.d).

Consistent with these broad national frameworks, land registration and individualisation in Odda is carried out as follows. With the help of customary local leaders, the woreda LUAEP

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<sup>193</sup> Interview, senior woreda land administration expert#19, woreda town, January 2015.

bureau carries out regular and sometimes spontaneous cadastral surveys in and around Odda. The first-time registration of pre-existing land users takes place as part of this process, and spontaneous settlers are persuaded to relocate to agricultural zones. The main idioms used to secure residents' compliance are 'participation', 'consultation' and 'engagement'.<sup>194</sup> Since 2009, new applications have been submitted directly to the woreda administration, but permission is only granted in consultation with the *Abba Reera* (sub-kebele leader), *Abba Olla* (village leader) and the council of elders in cases where there is any dispute among the villagers. In other words, for new settlers to be able to acquire agricultural land, the woreda land administration, in conjunction with the kebele and the *Abba Olla*, have to first ensure there is land available in the village agricultural zones. The applicant should then obtain the permission of other customary leaders.<sup>195</sup>

Second, within each territorialised village agricultural zone, instead of there being direct kebele oversight, everyday regulation<sup>196</sup> is handed over to and carried out through traditional authorities. The *Abba Olla* and village council of elders are charged with arbitrating in land-related conflicts within the limits of the national legal set of rules. That is to say, they cannot approve illegal land transactions and should refer serious cases of land disputes to the local

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<sup>194</sup> Interviews with kebele chairman, Odda, January 2015; *Abba Reera#1*, Odda, December 2014; senior woreda official#10, woreda town, January 2015.

<sup>195</sup> Interviews with *Abba Reera#2*, Odda, December 2014; *Abba Olla#3*, Odda, December 2014; *Abba Olla#5*, Odda, January 2015.

<sup>196</sup> The origin of this is to be found in the Rural Land Administration and Land Use Proclamation (FDRE, 2005) which states: 'Where dispute arises over rural landholding right, effort shall be made to resolve the dispute through discussion and agreement of the concerned parties. Where the dispute cannot be resolved through agreement, it shall be decided by an arbitral body to be elected by the parties or be decided in accordance with the rural land administration laws of the region.' See also *Oromia Rural Land Use and Administration Proclamation No. 130/2007*.



authorities or formal channels of conflict resolution.<sup>197</sup> In some villages, the *Abba Olla* can levy fines of as much as five head of cattle on spontaneous settlers and cultivators. Customary leaders therefore function as partners, agents and local edifices in state-facilitated agricultural management and control.

In sum, since 2009, all of the agricultural land owned by the 1142 households in Odda is registered, with records stored in the woreda and kebele archives.<sup>198</sup> Today, the holders of individual titles, recognised and sanctioned by the regional and national laws, can pass down or lease their land. This has resulted in the stricter collection of tax revenue. One woreda official noted that prior to the system of registration, only about 40 per cent of the residents paid agricultural land tax.<sup>199</sup> By virtue of land registration, all land owners are now required to pay land-use taxes and agricultural income tax. This also implies that the permanent inheritable usufructuary rights of individuals are valid for as long as they pay their taxes, thereby establishing a subject-and-sovereign relationship between households and the state.

### ***Recognition of customary rights***

In the meantime, in Odda, the woreda administration has not harboured the idea of incorporating all of the common land under its direct control. In fact, it rather conceded the idea of extensive control by recognising ‘what already exists’<sup>200</sup> – customary use rights – and carved out autonomous niches as common grazing land. This common grazing land is divided into three zones: *warra* (areas set off for lactating and weak animals), *forra* (areas designated for non-lactating animals and bulls) and *kalo* (calf enclosures). All three categories are

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<sup>197</sup> Interviews with senior woreda land administration expert#19, woreda town, January 2015; *Abba Olla*#3, Odda, December 2014; *Abba Reera*#1, Odda, December 2014.

<sup>198</sup> Interviews with kebele manager, Odda, December 2014; woreda finance bureau official, woreda town, January 2015.

<sup>199</sup> Interview, senior woreda official, woreda town, January 2015.

<sup>200</sup> Interview, senior woreda official#19, woreda town, January 2015.

regulated by the village council of elders with no interference from the kebele. One senior woreda official explained:

The people have a strong tradition and rich experience of collective management of natural resources. All the knowledge for managing grazing land is within the communities ... resources are properly tapped, utilised and conserved by the community members themselves. We don't interfere in their jurisdiction.<sup>201</sup>

The state's recognition of the customary jurisdiction has the effect of enabling the customary recognition of state jurisdictions and authority. In my conversations with many local inhabitants and local leaders, all of them invariably referred to agricultural (individual) land and conservation areas as 'government land' and the common areas as common land governed by *Aaadda-Seera* Borana (Borana custom). This implies the mutual constitution of the state and customary authorities on the one hand and the state and society on the other. But the flip side of this is that the recognition of customary land renders customary rights to be contingent upon state sanctions, that the very idea of 'recognition' enables the woreda administration to monopolise the authority to determine who controls which plot of land. More broadly, while local people are able to secure customary rights to resources, although in a much diminished and spatially restricted way, there is ultimately a continuation of the wider trend towards an extension of the power and reach of the state.

The end result is that every plot of land becomes an object of state regulation – surveyed, classified, parcelled up and with ownership 'rights' attached to it. Significantly, the kebele have now been classified into *Olla* (village) or settlement areas, farmland, community, government and cooperative enclosures. Even very limited unoccupied parcels and abandoned farmland are designated as areas for future agriculture and placed under the control of the woreda

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

administration. The overall impact of this territorialisation, as I demonstrate below, is far-reaching.

#### **9.4. Emerging structures**

In what follows, I attempt to present the composite effects of the territorialisation process in turning the pastoralists into a ‘territorial community’, their settlements into stable sites of state intervention and in the reconfiguring of their property and social relations. My overall aim is to show how localised development practices contributed to the re/constitution of the state in terms of creating institutions of governance and modes of governing and organising social relations of the local population.

The territorialisation process discussed above lead to the growth and expansion of the state apparatus and transformed Odda in three important ways. Firstly, as a result of clearly defined boundaries and the classification of areas into discrete zones of enclosures, the customary rights of individuals, namely that of free access to natural resources anywhere in the Borana Zone, have become drastically restricted and increasingly tied to status as a permanent resident. One sub-kebele representative/customary leader explained:

We don't wish to prevent flocks of other kebeles or woredas from coming into our areas. But our *forra* land has considerably reduced ... we don't even have enough land for our own cattle. As a result, we are forced to prohibit entry of non-residents' flocks. If anyone wishes to graze over here, they should be permanent residents or hold a special permit from their own kebele.<sup>202</sup>

This means that the Borana can only legitimately graze their flocks in fixed areas with a state permit. Concurrently, the category of ‘agro-pastoral’ was formed as a unit of self-identification

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<sup>202</sup> Interview, *Abba Reera#2*, Odda, December 2014.

and communal identity. The majority of my informants, who were almost entirely dissociated from pastoralism, described themselves to me as agro-pastoralists and farmers.

Secondly, the transformation of a significant portion of community land into personal property has led to significant changes in social relations. Social relations have now been reconfigured and reconstituted around personal property rights. Land has become a central economic resource, along which sharecropping arrangements, in which the owner demands a portion of the crop in return for use of his land, and land-lease arrangements emerged.<sup>203</sup> One local elder spoke about the changes in meaning and perceptions ascribed to land:

We believed we would always continue to be herders. We were never bothered about land. We didn't see land as an asset. What we saw was what it provided to us – the water and the pasture. Now, all of a sudden, it has become very important, and everyone is fighting to get access to a plot.<sup>204</sup>

This comment sums up the views expressed by every other community leader and local resident I talked to at the time of my fieldwork. Nearly all of my informants pointed out that land had become the central focus of family and community disputes, with individuals vying for inheritance and access to a plot of common land. Significantly, this has to do with the fact that the new individual usufructuary rights and the accompanying property-based social relations are not guaranteed or regulated by custom and tradition. When I talked to the customary leaders they explained that, under *Aaadda-Seera Borana* (Borana custom), 'land cannot be claimed, owned' or 'left as an inheritance' by an individual and, therefore, there are 'no established

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<sup>203</sup> Interviews *Abba Reera#1*, Odda, December, 2014; *Abba Reera#2*, Odda, December 2014; *Abba Olla#1*, Odda, December, 2014; *Abba Gadaa* of Borana, woreda town, January 2015.

<sup>204</sup> Interview, *Abba Olla#4*, Odda, December 2014.

customary rules available' to regulate individuals competing over access to land.<sup>205</sup> As a result, state legal norms – usufruct, inheritance, succession and contract – are increasingly taking precedence over custom and traditions in governing social relations. The woreda court is usually the body whose arbitration is solicited in land related disputes. One woreda court official, speaking in the context of the increasing problem of court overcrowding, noted:

There is a dramatic surge in the number of divorces and land-related cases. It is very worrying that the traditional system is falling apart. We try and encourage people to resolve their differences at the local level in traditional ways.<sup>206</sup>

As a way of discouraging people, the overcrowded woreda court has also posted a sign at its gate advising people to use the traditional conflict resolution system. Notwithstanding the worries of court officials, what we see is an interlocking of property, proprietor and the state – the latter assuming the role of a guarantor of the former's usufructuary rights.

Thirdly, as alluded to above, the permanent settlement of pastoralists into villages familiarised local residents with the idea of 'legality' and the ways of bureaucratic procedures. For example, Huka, a middle-aged resident whom I met at the kebele premises and who, as a pastoralist, never comes into direct contact with state bureaucracy, recounted his first experience. He told me that the issue that brought him to the woreda was the shortage of land. 'I have too little land to cover my household needs,' explained Huka.<sup>207</sup> In the hope of appropriating more land, Huka approached the *Abba Olla* (village head), who had initially

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<sup>205</sup> Interview, *Abba Reera*, Odda, Odda, December 2014; Interview, *Abba Reera*, Odda, Odda, December 2014; Interview, *Abba Gadaa* of Borana, woreda town, January 2015.

<sup>206</sup> Interview, woreda court official, Odda, December 2014.

<sup>207</sup> Conversation, Huka, Odda, December 2014.

granted him half a hectare of land in 2006, to explain his case. The *Abba Olla*, however, informed him that new applications should be submitted to the *woreda* in writing:

I submitted my application to the *woreda*, and they referred it to the *kebele*. The *kebele* with the *Abba Olla* and *Abba Reera* heard my case and asked me to identify any of my neighbours who had more land than me. I could not instantly identify anyone. Then they told me all people have the same problem of land shortage and that I should learn to live with it. The next day, I appealed to the *woreda* office ... after they read the appeal, they expressed their sympathy, but they said they didn't want to reverse the decision made by the community elders and the *kebele*. The whole process took two months and cost me a lot of money. I had to pay for transportation, and twice for scribes to compose my letters.

Huka's experience highlights how the outcome of the territorialisation process enabled an institutionalised and formalised relationship between the local people and the state. Huka's case can also be read as an affirmation that the state<sup>208</sup> did not merely extend its presence territorially but also through multiple institutional points of contact and engagements.

Finally, the settled landscape of the Borana required more than a mere redefining of the pastoralists in territorial terms in order for it to be effectively governed. New roles like those of model farmers/pastoralists were introduced into the socio-political landscape, bringing with them significant changes to the configuration of the local authority and people's relationship with it. Local notable individuals, as model farmers, now constitute a coterie of influential men and occupy non-bureaucratic positions such as the *kebele* leadership, local party leadership role, seats on the land administration committee, in the social court and so on. This has created

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<sup>208</sup> As noted in the introductory chapter, I am aware that my use of state as a subject/political actor reify the very concept I wish to interrogate. I choose to retain it in this and the next chapter only for the sake of clarity of my argument.

a particular opportunity for the local elite to exert an influence both formally and informally. It was often pointed out to me by several people, for example, that the local model pastoralists/farmers, as facilitators of the land allocation processes, used their connections, new-found political positions and insider knowledge to acquire large parcels of land. Several influential local politicians and customary leaders are said to have acquired large areas of land for hay production in the name of crop production. Their land is usually fertile and lies near water sources and major roads, ensuring accessibility to markets. Moreover, some notable individuals have fenced off agricultural land for private ranches. One prominent politician, for instance, has not only established a private ranch on common land but is also rumoured to have diverted two special breed bulls allocated by a government research centre to the cattle fattening cooperative to his own ranch. Local people are afraid to complain as some depend on the model pastoralists/farmers for work and loans, while others are dependent on food aid, over which the model pastoralists/farmers also have control. Being members of the Oromo People Democratic Organization (OPDO), the Oromo wing of the EPRDF, the local rich are politically protected by the woreda officials. I will introduce two of these individuals in the next section.

By contrast, the ordinary people – including non-resident pastoralist Boranas who used to rely on the common land – lost their customary rights to freely graze their cattle as the lands became territorialised, enclosed, fragmented and individualised. They depend on the fragmented land to feed themselves and their family. At the time of my fieldwork, some of the settled inhabitants, in an effort to supplement their income and overcome the effects of fluctuating rainfall, were engaged in selling firewood, wage labour and were also hired as herdsmen by wealthy cattle owners/model pastoralists. The more numerate, socially active, young and streetwise would engage in shop businesses and trade in contraband goods across the Ethiopia-Kenya border. Those at the very bottom of the social hierarchy, as I will discuss in greater detail in the next section, are variously ranked on the basis of their level of poverty,

labour capacity, gender, etc. and become subjected to various state and NGO provisions such as the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) and nutrition programmes.

The discussion up to now has underscored how state formation is an outcome of an ongoing and interconnected set of practices, mutual adjustments and negotiations between national policies and local interests. It involves a wide range of social and non-state actors and is mediated through multiple day-to-day practices – participation, negotiation, consultation and discussions – by multiple agencies – NGOs, individuals, customary institutions – and multiple micro-instruments of power – registration, recognition and certification.

### **9.5. Getting closer to the state: developed and underdeveloped subjects**

In this section, I examine the many ways through which the state comes into being in everyday life and how the local people make use of selective categories of identities and development discourses in order to increase benefit opportunities. I will also examine the context of the transformation of the Borana's subjectivity that is derived from and is related to their relationship with the state. In so doing, I demonstrate how state development discourses and empowerment programmes not only target different classes of individuals but also produce them.

In order to provide a detailed analysis, I present the experiences of two members of the local elite, both of whom hold important political positions, and three ordinary citizens who look upon the state to meet their daily basic survival needs. My overall purpose is to demonstrate how the process of sedentarisation and expansion of state territorial control re/produces different 'subject positions'. The experiences presented below must therefore be viewed as structural products of the sedentarisation and territorialisation process and as 'negotiated outcomes' between the state, NGOs and the local population.



### *The developed subjects*

In December 2014, I was introduced to a wealthy man and elected member of the kebele council, whom I shall call Jarso, and I had the opportunity to converse with him on several occasions during the course of my fieldwork. Jarso owns a small restaurant in a nearby market town. I went to his restaurant one Saturday afternoon and found him sitting on the veranda and talking with two other men. As we sat together, I began the interview by asking Jarso about the changing situation of pastoralism. Jarso replied, ‘Why should our life be backwards? Who says the Borana should be herders in the traditional way? The government and NGOs are providing us with credits, modern animal and human medications. We have schools for our children. We can be settled ranchers with the benefit of the ease brought to us by our government. We can eliminate the hardships of our transhumance lives. That is what I see as the future of the Borana.’

When I asked him what this vision meant for the poor, Jarso used the following example to illustrate his point. ‘Take milk production, for example. If you go and visit the market, you will find many women sitting for hours trying to sell milk. Their problem is that firstly they are trying to sell milk to the Borana [i.e. a place where most people produce their own milk]. Secondly, there are too many [of them]. If one woman starts selling milk from a certain village, all start doing it and the market becomes oversaturated. The solutions for this will be to expand milk cooperatives so that they can sell to Addis Ababa. You can benefit the poor this way.’ From this, he moved on to draw a parallel between the Borana’s traditional values and modern cooperatives: ‘I talked to many woreda- and even zone-level politicians ... this is the plan of the government. It is a wonderful plan because the idea of cooperatives resembles our traditional ways of working together and helping one another.’ On the other hand, being one of the very few Borana to own a business such as a restaurant in a market town, he believes that it is important that ‘the government should encourage and reward entrepreneurs’ like

himself. Jarso's vision, in short, involves the collectivisation of the poor into cooperatives and the freeing up of economic space and support for the better off.

Jarso was not alone in harbouring such a vision of development. The kebele chairman also spoke in similar terms. The chairman, a bespectacled man, first introduced himself to me as a model pastoralist and model merchant. He loved to talk about himself and his achievements. He spoke of the pride he felt at being awarded certificates of recognition and medals, once by the Oromia regional state government and twice by the federal government, for being an entrepreneurial model pastoralist and merchant. 'I have more than eight hectares of land and a sizeable flock,' he explained. I asked him if he could tell me the number of his cattle, which he declined to do. I asked him why and he said it was not because he did not know the exact number but rather that 'we don't traditionally tell the number of our livestock'. I then asked him about his land. He replied that he had acquired three hectares from his father but did not explain about the remainder of the 'more than' five hectares. He then added, for clarification: 'Being a model pastoralist and a model merchant are not, however, all about being wealthy. You have to be exemplary in every other respect. For instance, twelve of my fifteen children are at school. I have a house in town, and at all of my houses I have built toilets, and we dispose of household waste properly.' The chairman lives in his townhouse in the woreda town and travels to Odda to check on his cattle, farm and to fulfil his political responsibility as a kebele chairman.

The chairman told me that he wishes to shift his concern and concentrate fully on his business. 'I have been kebele chairman for the last ten years. Now, my business is expanding and has already reached a point where I cannot run it alongside my kebele responsibility. I have therefore submitted my resignation to the woreda and they are looking for another model pastoralist to replace me.' 'Why should another model wealthy farmer/pastoralist replace you?' I asked. He said, 'a leader should have a developmental mindset and should be a model and

inspiration to others'. When I asked him about his business plan, he said, 'I want to invest in dairy and meat production. But the people are inimical of the idea that land has to be provided for investors. For now, I don't want to be antagonistic with the people. I will wait ... the future generation is not interested in pastoralism because it is not what they see as modern. They want to be as NGO and government workers that they see every day at villages and in school. In the future, the land will be free. It will be available to large-scale ranches.'

Taken together, it is obvious that these two men were not simply pandering to government propaganda. Rather, they were part of the national political class in that such utopian views were as much in their own interest as they were relevant to those of national-level politicians. They invoke the modernist role that the national leadership has adopted for itself and abide by it in order to assert their business interests. They see pastoralism becoming more and more obsolete in its older forms. Their self-identify comes less from their association with pastoralism than from their adoption of the language of development. They take pride in identifying themselves as 'model pastoralists', 'model farmers' and 'model traders'. They define themselves by their capacity to utilise the instrumental rationality of modern knowledge – education, modern health and investment. Moreover, in the realm of everyday social and political life, they live in towns and ride their motorcycles between their homes, the kebele office, the cattle market and their ranches. They spend more time with woreda politicians than with the local people. These changes constitute their class and subject positions.

### ***The underdeveloped subjects***

In the meantime, Jarsso's and the chairman's utopian vision of pastoralism sits in stark contrast to the experiences of the poor who are structurally forced to invoke and adopt 'underdeveloped subjectivities' (Gupta 1998) in order to extract material benefit from the state and NGOs. In discussing this issue with a cross-section of household heads, they usually began by talking about the strategies and subject positions they adopt to negotiate with politicians for the basic

amenities of everyday life. Elima, a middle-aged widow whom I met at the woreda office, recounted her story to me. She struggled to support herself and her two children by selling stacks of firewood.

One day, in 2009, the woreda and kebele representatives came to her village to recruit poor people for a public works programme – which was part of the PSNP – and she made an application. During the selection process, however, she was rejected. ‘They said I am not eligible because I had four goats and land. They did not take into account that my land is too small and I do not have the labour or ox to plough it. I rented it out only for 300 birr [about £ 10] a year for a wealthy man,’ explained Elima. ‘The following year I sold three of the goats and made myself poorer.’ She was eventually accepted onto the programme. Once she began participating, she learnt about another scheme called direct support. Under this scheme, eligible candidates, usually those who cannot supply labour, receive direct cash/food aid. She needed the kebele’s approval in order to transfer to the direct support scheme. Kebele officials, however, determined her fit to work. In her narrative she spoke of her pain at the kebele’s refusal to classify her as a person eligible for direct support:

The kebele is against me. I am not poor, weak or old enough for them. We sometimes are required to clear bushes and plant trees the whole day. It is heavy for men, let alone a weak woman like myself ... One of the kebele people said to me ‘you walk long distance to collect firewood and carry them to the market and you dare to tell me you are weak to clear few bushes’ ... Now, I am telling ‘I have stopped collecting firewood because of a backache’ ... the backache is not a real ... but I still collect firewood. How else would I feed my children?

She further told me about the breaking down of the traditional clan-based system of mutual help called *Bussa Gonoffa*. ‘Earlier the clan would take care of widows. Now, no one is cooperating,’ she explained. With the disintegration of *Bussa Gonoffa*, people like Elima look

to the state to provide the basic amenities of life. This points to one of two dimensions of state formation processes, which involves the state working by dissolving old social networks and replacing them with its own programmes. The other dimension involves the state seeking, through formalisation, to turn these old networks to its own ends, as we have seen in the case of the recognition of common land.

Warrio, a greying man in his fifties with six children, used similar tactics. He said he started farming after receiving one hectare of land from the village council of elders in 1998. During the 2005 drought, however, he lost ten cattle, and the dry spells that followed the drought affected his crop production. Following this loss, he was given one cow and six goats by CARE International as part of the livestock recovery programme. However, despite his best efforts to fully recover from the devastation, he struggled to feed his family. He informed me that he had sought the kebele's help in getting food aid. The kebele, however, refused to class his family as eligible, stating that he already possessed sufficient assets in the form of his one cow, six goats and two sheep. He emphasised how badly he had been treated by officials. He was, for example, perceived as and called 'lazy' and 'greedy' for seeking to be registered on the public works programme. He wished that officials would not be so fastidious with regard to food aid. 'No self-respecting Borana would declare himself as needy if it was not real. It is tough to be a farmer here. Rain is erratic and there is no water for irrigation. And even when we get enough rain, our crops get ravaged by pests and eaten up by insects,' Warrio explained. He then went on to talk about the constraints that prevented him from pursuing alternative livelihood strategies:

If I had business skills and the capital, I would have become a cattle merchant. It is a profitable business for those who know how to do it ... or if I had several wives, I could still manage to be self-sufficient. If I had three wives, one would sell milk, another would

join women's cooperatives and another would take care of the fields and I would take care of the cattle.

Warrio saw himself as being caught in a vicious circle in which he is unable to improve his livelihood because he is not polygamous, yet he cannot be polygamous because he is too poor to have more wives. Warrio, with a palpable sense of despair, told me how, as the plight of his family worsened, he had sold three goats to buy food and sent a further two to his cousin in another woreda. 'I then declared to the kebele and the woreda that I had sold eight goats to buy food for my family ... I was included.' He now receives 65 kg of wheat, 8kg of pulses and 1 litre of cooking oil and farming tools. 'When I joined we used to receive the food aid every two months but now they made it every six months. It lasts for just a month,' Warrio complained.

These stories from Elima and Warrio illustrate how the disfranchised come to form a direct relation with the institutions that constitute the state. Unlike Jarsso and the chairman, who willingly assume and strategically deploy state discourses of development to advance their interests, Elima and Warrio have to perform and improvise as vulnerable and destitute subjects in order to make themselves 'visible' to the state officials and thereby meet their basic survival needs.

Itana, on the other hand, a middle-aged man working as a daily labourer, had to both act as a subject of five years' empowerment and at the same time demonstrate his neediness in order to make continued claims as part of the safety net programme:

I have been a safety net programme beneficiary for the last six years ... by the end of the fifth year, one DA and some people [woreda officials] came and chided me for lack of visible improvements in my life. They said they would exclude me altogether from their list because there are other needy people who [with the same opportunity provided to me]

could make improvements in their lives and buy sheep and goats. Then, the next year I have bought one goat. This way I avoided being deleted from the list on the grounds of laziness. At the same time, [the fact that] I only own a total of three goats keeps me from being excluded [on the basis of self-sufficiency].

In his struggle to secure the basic amenities of life, Itana must avoid being categorised by the *woreda* as an undignified recipient of state handouts and equally as a completely transformed and self-sufficient man. He therefore slips away from the destitute category as the moment requires and assumes the identity of an individual undergoing a transformation. In my many interactions with a cross-section of food aid recipients, I noticed a majority of them struggled to define themselves according to variable state standards which do not flow smoothly one into another. It is important to note here that this fluctuating subject self-positioning is generated by the problematic and contradictory logic of the programme which, on the one hand, is a kind of welfare programme that provides food aid for the destitute, while on the other is a kind of empowerment programme which requires the beneficiary households – ironically through welfare – to become food secure over time and hence transform and graduate from the programme. Moreover, it is also, at least theoretically, an entitlement programme which guarantees five days' paid work per month.

In conclusion, the state prominently figured as a relevant entity in the shaping of livelihood possibilities and thereby subject positions. In other words, through its various development discourses and empowerment projects, the state has provided local people with vectors for self-representation. On the one hand, local elites position themselves through national discourses of development and articulate such discourses to assert their interests and identities. On the other hand, however, the poor have to subscribe to a set of scripted development roles that have already been outlined to them by state actors, self-positioning themselves as the moment demands. By shifting the ways in which they identify themselves from 'poor' to 'destitute' and

from ‘destitute’ to ‘transforming subjects’, they establish a working, albeit difficult, relationship with the state.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, my purpose was to demonstrate how the process of state formation takes place through the intersection of a wide range of political, social and development actors. I have done this by focusing on the changes that have transpired over roughly the past two decades as a result of sedentarisation and territorialisation activities aimed at controlling the movement and livelihood of the Borana. I demonstrated that the government’s attempts to order spaces and control the local people have been aided locally by NGOs. The NGOs’ engagement of local people, in particular through community-based income-generating activities, has been instrumental in bringing about the precondition (settlement) of territorialisation and in eventually transforming Odda into a site of governance.

I have also demonstrated how the state reworked the local spatial configuration, predominantly with and through customary local institutions and local elites, and as a result extended its control over local social and property relations. This dynamics of territorialisation involved the individualisation of grazing land and the recognition of elements of customary use rights by carving out autonomous niches as community grazing land. This process has brought about vast changes to the social, political and economic landscape which have included crystallising the agro-pastoral category as a form of communal identity, reconfiguring social relations around personal property rights and a reworking of local class relations.

I have furthermore argued that the increasing engagement of the state in the Borana – particularly through sedentarisation and territorialisation activities – has created opportunities for the local elite to exercise their authority, accumulate wealth and influence local decisions on both a formal and informal basis. The new roles of notable local individuals as model



farmers and politicians in the institution of the kebele complicate the distinction between the state and society through the entry of government institutions. This in effect constitutes the kebele as a site where national policies and local interests converge. In other words, the local (kebele) serves not only as an implementing agency of government policies (sedentarisation and territorialisation) and as a target of development interventions but also as a site where local interests are articulated and top-down national regulations are reshaped. This underscores the multifaced nature of state formation.

I have also demonstrated how state activities and programmes reconfigure identities and contribute to the production of subject sensibilities by introducing different modes of identification. On the one hand, we have seen the rise of property-owning local elites who take pride in identifying themselves as ‘model’ farmers/pastoralists, while on the other hand we see the ‘docile bodies’ that are subject to humanitarian intervention and look to the state for their basic survival needs and who identify themselves by shifting categories of underdeveloped identities.

Overall, the discussion in this chapter demonstrates that state formation is an ongoing process that involves a wide range of non-state actors – NGOs, customary institutions and individuals – and the use of micro-instruments of power and administrative strategies such as the registration and formalisation of land holdings and the recognition of customary rights. The discussions reveal the problematic nature of the distinction Ethiopianist scholars make between the central (core) and the local (periphery) and the emphasis they place on the ‘top-down’ approach to state formation. We have seen that, rather than operating through a matrix of centre-periphery, state formation appears to function along a complex and shifting axis of power relations among state actors/policies, non-state actors (NGOs) and diverse local population groups (wealthy politicians, ordinary people and welfare dependents). Rather than viewing it as a homogenous whole, the local, and especially the periphery, should therefore be

understood as being marked by differences in power, class, gender, etc. In the next chapter, I investigate how the changing conditions we have seen in this chapter promote a new and variegated understanding of the state.

## Chapter 10

### Development talks, practices and state imagination

In the previous chapter, we saw how the state, through its territorialisation process, brought pastoralists into a new spatial and bureaucratic order while at the same time increasingly dissociating them from a pastoral livelihood, the erstwhile clan-based social order and traditional territorial references. We also saw cases of individuals' efforts to enmesh themselves with the state system and abide by national discourses of development in order to claim their place as model citizens and clients of the state programmes. In this chapter, I turn to explore how the creation of new social categories, territorial spaces and actors promotes a new and variegated understanding of the state. I do this by drawing on the experiences of differently positioned individuals that include not only the local population (state development clients) but also state employees and NGO workers. This more specifically entails exploring the dynamics of 'interfaces' (Long 2001) between state employees and NGO workers, the local population and state employees and the local population and NGO workers. My intention in this juxtaposing of differently located individuals is to sketch a spectrum of discourses and a broader range of ways through which the state comes to be imagined in Odda.

In this chapter, I argue that the state is imagined and makes its appearance in people's lives in multiple and divergent ways as a dysfunctional and failed institution, authoritative and bureaucratic organisation, etc. depending on how individuals are situated and placed within a complex social setting. More specifically, I argue that one cannot experience the state as a unified whole. Rather, individuals engage with it fragmentarily in different domains of everyday life, and, as a result, differently positioned people develop different understandings of a unitary state idea.<sup>209</sup> The chapter therefore demonstrates how these constructions of the

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<sup>209</sup> This line of argument builds on the work of Gupta (2012).

state in Odda follow the practices and talk of development promoted by NGOs and the state. The overall aim of the chapter is to show how localised and fragmented development practices create a unified state idea at ‘the periphery’, and also how ‘the periphery’ is hierarchically interconnected, rather than geographically disconnected, to the centre.

I begin the chapter by demonstrating how the daily work and lives of NGO staff shape their understandings of the state. Here, I explore the ways in which NGO staff juxtapose themselves with the state, presupposing and positing the state as a dysfunctional organisation. I then show how the state workforce at the lowest rungs of the bureaucracy perceive the state development programmes they are part of, and thereby how they imagine the state. Finally, I turn to the various ways through which popular state imaginations are formed.

### **10.1. NGO staff: pathological state**

NGOs in the Borana are largely staffed by natives who hold at least an undergraduate degree. After work and at weekends, they gather to socialise, often with members of international visiting donor institutions, in high-quality restaurants and bars. The sight of a fleet of NGO licence-plated Jeeps and Land Rovers lined up on the front lawns of such places usually signals an after-work gathering. Such gathering and mingling of junior and senior staff forms the basis of the symbolic assertion of the social and professional position of non-state development workers and provides a stark contrast to the hierarchy of interaction among state employees which persists in the realm of social relations. Many of the NGO workers, as I demonstrate below, are self-consciously modern in terms of their belief in meritocracy and, hence, they take special pride in distinguishing themselves from state employees. For example, during one of my many conversations, a young domestic member of NGO staff commented, ‘Government attracts incompetent people. The majority of people work for the government because they have no other options. With their poor skills and education, they have no chance to be considered for NGO work. The salaries they earn are barely enough for survival [therefore]

they lack motivation.’<sup>210</sup> Similarly, another, middle-aged, member of NGO staff described government workers as self-interested apparatchiks who were ‘only loyal to the party and their superiors’.<sup>211</sup> Many of my informants also expressed their contempt for state officials who are, with their limited educational background, able to move at ease in the upper echelons of state power to become their bosses. ‘It is an open secret that officials get promoted to higher positions more for their party loyalty than based on merit. Most of them are undereducated, suspicious and closed-minded. We face great difficulties trying to convince them of our projects,’ explained one senior member of NGO staff.<sup>212</sup> In such discourses, my informants produced an image of a state that is filled with incompetent and inept people, who see their job only as a means of survival.

Another member of NGO staff considered state employees to be time-wasters who spend the entire day in meaningless meetings, thereby distracting themselves from important development works. ‘If you go to the woreda or zone office, you will be told officials are in meetings. They waste so much time in meetings. If they did their jobs properly, we would no longer be necessary. We are doing what the government should be doing.’<sup>213</sup> My informant perceived the rationale for the NGOs’ operations to be the weakness and failure of the state in undertaking development works. Similarly, another member of NGO staff scoffed, ‘they spend their office and field visit time sipping coffee, playing cards or sitting idle and yawning at their desk’.<sup>214</sup> In contrast, the same person made the following comment about NGOs: ‘We spend our time in the field with the local people. We work hard and interact with the local people.’<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Interview, young domestic NGO worker#21, woreda town, December 2014.

<sup>211</sup> Interview, middle-aged domestic NGO worker#22, woreda town, December 2014.

<sup>212</sup> Interview, senior member of NGO staff#23, woreda town, December 2014.

<sup>213</sup> Interview, middle-aged international NGO worker#24, woreda town, December, 2014.

<sup>214</sup> Interview, young domestic NGO worker#25, woreda town, December 2014.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

These responses were typical of many of my informants who wanted to draw attention to the inefficiency of the state vis-à-vis the efficiency of the NGOs. In doing so, they represent the state as a vacuous and patrimonial institution shot through with fatigue, lethargy and party politics. At the same time, they construct the non-state sphere as being filled with enthusiasm, efficiency and hard work. Most of my informants saw themselves as the real development agents. In so doing, they locate themselves outside of the state, standing instead with the people and providing them with the basic everyday requirements of survival.

Others demonstrated a pragmatic understanding of the state as a failed development actor. A field visit to a children's nutrition centre, on which I tagged along with a junior member of NGO staff whom I shall call Gutema, provides a case in point. On the way, Gutema told me that his NGO established the children's nutrition centre but that the woreda health office runs it. The inspection is 'part of a comprehensive assessment of the performance of the nutrition programme .. which is to be included in donor reports'. When we arrived, there was no one there. The nutrition centre – a small mud-and-wood-built house – was locked. In front of the centre, we could only see a large hoarding announcing the project and outlining the main points of the programme, the name and logo of its donors and the implementing local NGO. With a sigh of resignation, Gutema moved in the direction of the nearby village and asked the residents whether the nutrition centre was operating. The villagers we met were not sure whether or not the centre was still operational. 'There was a health visitor who used to come once a week. I haven't seen her for a long time,' one old man explained. Gutema turned towards me and said, 'this is typical of what we face every day. This place is becoming derelict. The government does not follow up and monitor whether our projects are running well. We are caught in a vicious circle in every direction. Years of hard work gets wiped out by a spell of drought and government neglect. There is not much progress in this area. I don't remember a time where there was no emergency in the last 10 years. It is impossible to bring about change while

working with the government.’ Gutema conjectured that the inefficiency and negligence of the government had caused their projects to fail. From his comments, it was clear that he was keen to stress and draw on his understanding of the state as a dysfunctional institution to criticise the absence of the health worker at the time of our visit. In reality, however, the closure of the centre was related to the low priority accorded by the woreda health bureau to services initiated by NGOs. The cost of running the centre was simply putting a strain on an already resource-constrained and understaffed local health department.<sup>216</sup> It was therefore more the presupposed identification of the state as a dysfunctional entity that enabled Gutema to describe the project as a failure than the actual incapacity of the woreda health bureau. This is not to say that the state institutions do not lack capacity; instead, it is possible, in this particular case, to see that the closure involved a clear and conscious decision by the woreda health office.

Returning to the visit, Gutema then asked the villagers, largely for my benefit, about the general development-related situation of the village. In response, the villagers complained about the lack of drinking water and a shortage of grazing space in their village, that their current grazing space was too small to accommodate their animals. Gutema advised the villagers to persist in their demands to the kebele for development services.

Overall, my field visit with Gutema provided an example of the self-representation of NGO workers as true development agents who listen to the woes of the poor, in contrast to the state

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<sup>216</sup> Interviews with kebele health extension worker#26, Odda, December 2014; woreda health bureau official, woreda town, December, 2014. According to the health extension worker, ‘we are understaffed, we have to run our own government programmes such as the health extension programme. If the NGOs want us to work on joint programmes, they can help the government in hiring staff ... that would be a greater help to us than complaining.’ Similarly, woreda health affairs expert said, ‘they [NGOs] have established and still want to establish many services and hand over the responsibility of running them to us. We do not have the budget to run their services ... what they seem to be intent on doing is producing good stories to their donors at our expense.’

which leaves its people high and dry. Gutema's comments furthermore illustrated an understanding of the state as a failed and inefficient entity.

Gallo, another junior member of NGO staff, expressed a similar understanding of the state as an inefficient and failed development actor. He said, 'people say the problem with the state development programmes is how they are handled at the local level. In my view, the problem is at all levels, both at the higher and lower echelons.' He evidenced his assertion by narrating the following case.

Last year, the kebele and our NGO divided a community land to undertake bush clearing through community participation. We then completed the clearing of our ground within a month. On the kebele side of the ground, work had barely started, but the DA in charge reported to the woreda that he had already cleared the ground. The zone administration then immediately arranged an experience-sharing field visit for Somali region pastoralist bureau land administration experts to the kebele ground. Shaken by the urgency of the visit by senior officials, the kebele decided to showcase a field cleared by our NGO and put up a sign announcing that the ground had been cleared under the government Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP). We came to know about this only after the visit had been completed. We were outraged by this and reported it to the very senior zone officials ... they promised they would pursue the case and discipline the kebele and the DA in charge. But so far, no measure has been taken against them. The system simply doesn't work.

It is such experiences and encounters that play a critical role in shaping NGO staff members' ideas about a dysfunctional state. When narrating his experience, Gallo is implicitly alluding to the notion that an ideal state should discipline its employees. However, in reality, for Gallo,



the state is fraught with slow decision-making and a lack of proper inspection and supervision. Gallo, therefore, like other NGO staff, represents the state as dysfunctional.

To sum up, from the discussion so far, we can identify two ways through which the state comes to be constituted. The first is that it is juxtaposed with NGOs in that state development activities and the quality of its employees are measured against the streamlined NGOs and their development activities. As such, NGOs are constructed as possessing the essential qualities of development such as a self-motivated and qualified workforce, whereas the state is represented as lacking the qualities essential for development and as being imbued with lethargic and low-skilled workers. The second is that, as a corollary from the juxtaposition, the state is presupposed (Koddenbrock 2013) as dysfunctional, and the anecdotal everyday bureaucratic or development hurdles, for many of my informants, automatically prove its dysfunctionality. For instance, the absence of state functionaries at fieldwork sites, and their presence in their offices during field visit hours (contrary to the implicit understanding that they should be at field sites), proves for my informants the state's presupposed pathological and dysfunctional characteristics. State work is largely taken at face value, that is, as we have seen in the case of the closure of the nutrition centre, there is little link between NGO staff members' assertions of state failure and what actually happens in the messiness of the everyday routines of implementing development projects. Nevertheless, the constitution of the state as dysfunctional legitimises the NGOs' interventions and helps them make sense of their own work, thereby serving to uphold their self-importance.

### ***The state as an all-powerful and patrimonial organisation***

Contrary to the idea of a dysfunctional state that my informants invoked in the previous section, a cross-section of the NGO staff to whom I talked, including the individuals mentioned above, represented the state as omnipotent and its authority as inescapable. Many of my informants expressed frustration with the zone's efforts to brand them as supporters of opposition parties

and with its attempts to hamper field operations, threaten their existence through national legislation<sup>217</sup> and invasive surveillance and with its attempts to deny them services. The field coordinator of one domestic NGO said: ‘we are seen as a threatening presence ... always met with suspicion and unjustifiably accused of being agents of OLF [the Oromo Liberation Front] and other opposition political organisations. During election seasons, we get instructions to suspend our field operations ... even at one occasion our NGO was forced by the party [OPDM/EPRDF] to fire a member of our staff who was perceived to be critical of the government.’<sup>218</sup> Another senior member of NGO staff said, ‘They accuse us in meetings and vilify us in the open in media as ‘rent-seekers’, ‘opportunists’, ‘squanderers’ that waste resources that come in the name of the poor people’. Similarly, a prominent domestic NGO field coordinator commented:

There is an all-out attack on the NGO community in Ethiopia. It is not a one-off thing. Whenever we have meetings, officials would not fail to brand us as ‘resource wasters’, ‘irresponsible’, ‘jungles of opposition parties’ and ‘anti-development elements’. They even call us ‘neo-liberal Trojan horses’ ...I don’t think they even know what neo-liberal means. To be honest with you, neither do I know exactly what it means ...whenever they [party leaders and officials] go to Addis Ababa for training or meetings, we wait and wonder ourselves what other new phrases they would pick up from their bosses.<sup>219</sup>

Certainly, such rhetorical performances of power are displayed on a regular basis and constitute a key aspect in projecting and maintaining the image of a strong and all-powerful state. It is

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<sup>217</sup> One of the major topics which frequently cropped up in my discussions with NGO staff was the impact of the Charities and Societies Proclamation (2011), which places restrictions on their funding and areas of operation. The proclamation prohibits foreign-funded NGOs from working on gender, conflict resolution, human rights, governance and policy-related issues. It also requires the allocation of administrative and operational costs on a 30:70 percentage ratio.

<sup>218</sup> Interview, field coordinator of domestic NGO#29, woreda town, December 2014.

<sup>219</sup> Interview, field coordinator of domestic NGO#30, woreda town, December 2014.

how the state projects its cohesiveness and sovereignty, attempting to intimidate, coerce and persuade people who consider themselves to belong to the ‘non-state sphere’. On the other hand, such a rhetorical tactic underscores attempts by political actors to assert that the state is the only legitimate driver of development, unwilling to roll back from or relinquish its image and function as an entity which brings development to the rural population. The rhetoric promotes the centrality of that state in the development of its citizens. It can therefore be seen as a reaction to the increasing challenge NGOs present to the legitimacy of the state.

Some NGO staff – particularly junior members – expressed the idea of an all-pervasive state. ‘The government is everywhere. All NGOs are infiltrated by party members. ... They report everything that is going on inside NGOs, all the petty talks, rumours and discussions both at the workplace and outside to the party. We are afraid to talk about anything related to the government even in our friendship circles,’ explained a young domestic NGO staff member.<sup>220</sup> Another NGO staff member commented that government is trying to bring NGOs into its fold: ‘The government wants to control NGOs. There is a widely known case in one domestic NGO where the party fired the director of a local NGO and replaced him with a hardliner EPRDF member.’<sup>221</sup> It is obvious here that my informants not only treat and speak of the state as a concrete entity, but that they have also developed what appears to be a fetishised relationship with it, perceiving it be found everywhere. In other words, the state, as a concept, looms in every aspect of their social relations, friendship circles and personal lives, shaping their everyday interactions in terms of whom they talk to, where they meet and what they talk about.

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<sup>220</sup> Interview, young international NGO staff member#21, woreda town, December 2014.

<sup>221</sup> Interview, middle-aged domestic NGO staff member#24, woreda town, December 2014.

### *Professional NGOs vs a patrimonial state*

While adherence to formal regulatory procedures and political necessities is a critically important prerequisite for operating as an institution, personal connections are also of paramount significance to the day-to-day operation of NGOs at the local level. The head of one international NGO explained that they needed to accommodate the personal interests of government officials: ‘We have to cater to the personal interest of officials. They have bad habits in their house [state], and they want to drag us into that. For example, if we fail to invite an official to a training programme as a speaker, guest of honour or participant, he would punish us by refusing approval to programmes or creating delays by keeping files circulating between offices and up and down the bureaucracy.’<sup>222</sup> Another NGO director said, ‘personal connection is very important to the success of many NGOs. That is how the state works.’<sup>223</sup> While my informant drew attention to the importance of personal and political connections to the success of other NGOs, he denied having such connections because, he said, his ‘organisation believes in integrity’, and his programmes should only be ‘sanctioned and run on the basis of the law and their potential benefits to the people’. Others also expressed that a speeding-up of approval for their programmes and bypassing unnecessary bureaucratic and personal hurdles required them to call upon national NGO directors to contact ‘high-up’ party and government officials to call on zone officials to instruct them to provide the NGOs with the assistance they required. These remarks and practices highlight attempts by the leaders of NGOs to claim the moral high ground and thus draw a line of distinction between the NGOs and the state. In so doing, my informants construct and juxtapose an image of professional NGOs and a patrimonial state.

Taken together, many of my informants represented the state as an authoritative and patrimonial organisation, but they also ordered state and non-state spheres hierarchically. More

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<sup>222</sup> Interview, head of international NGO#8, woreda town, January 2015.

<sup>223</sup> Interview, domestic NGO director#31, woreda town, December 2014.

specifically, they described the state in terms of its authoritarian, restrictive and larger scale of authority and NGOs by their position of subjugation. In doing so, they invoked the state's greater dominance over the non-state sphere or, in other words, reiterated the verticality of the state (Ferguson and Gupta 2002). But, it is important to note here that the environment and the manner in which NGOs operate in Borana call into question the characterisation of NGOs as agents to a 'new modality of government' in Africa which Ferguson and Gupta (2002) refer to as 'transnational governmentality'. NGOs, they argue, with their transnational links, challenge state authority by shaping the local and creating global and local partnerships. NGOs, as we will see later, do indeed have special appeal among the local people, but their activities are both spatially and temporally limited (i.e. they lack permanence and systematic and universal reach) in terms of their ability to influence the everyday behaviour and thus the subjectivity of citizens; in other words, to regulate or direct their 'conduct' (Foucault 1991). There is no evidence to argue that NGOs create, alter, fashion or regulate subjects in a way that is comparable to the state. Even if we assume that their activities exert a real impact on the conduct of the local people, there are reasons to challenge the assertion that NGOs represent a transnational neo-liberal ideology and, as a result, create self-interested, entrepreneurial and market friendly personhoods. For one thing, NGOs are largely engaged in works that support state local development programmes and function conterminous with the national state development agenda (as in the case of sedentarisation outlined in the previous chapter) and does not implement independent global programmes. For another, as we have seen above, the scope and activities of NGOs at both the local and national levels are controlled by state legal and administrative frameworks, insofar as their staff are handpicked by the party<sup>224</sup> and all their

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<sup>224</sup> See also Allison 2016.

programmes are liable to be revoked by shifting political necessities. This suggests that NGOs simply function within an authoritarian political hegemony of the state.

## **10.2. State employees**

In Odda, the government controls the population through cadres of development workers trained in local government and private educational institutions. These include three health extension workers, three nurses, four DAs, a veterinary practitioner and fourteen teachers. They organise local inhabitants to development works, and, as such, mediate between the government and local inhabitants and represent the scale and reach of the state everywhere and in every aspect of citizens' lives. They, in short, are important instruments that the state uses to claim ties to the grass roots. The positions they occupy (and their work) at state institutions, as I demonstrate below, determine how they give meaning to their subjectivities but also their understanding of the state. In what follows, I present their 'worm's-eye view' of the state and how it operates.

Nearly all of the local-level civil servants with whom I interacted described their role in the state system as agents of development. But they also insinuated that they were not as proud and satisfied with their work as the NGO staff. Most saw themselves as working more and earning less in comparison to NGO staff, whom they describe as working less and earning more. On the other hand, many of my informants described NGO work as 'dependency-inducing' for the people and counterproductive. A young DA said the following: 'NGOs spoiled the people. They pay them for everything ... meetings, bush clearing, water well maintenance, etc. What people ask is that 'what do you have to give to us?' If you don't have any tangible thing to give, you are not important to them. Your programme is not taken seriously ... we have to use local militia or exact fines on people who fail to turn up for community work.'<sup>225</sup> Similarly, another

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<sup>225</sup> Interview, young DA#32, Odda, December 2014.

DA commented, ‘they [NGOs] see money as a solution to everything ... you cannot pay somebody to participate in his own empowerment programme. The moment you start to pay local people, you start to kill your programme.’<sup>226</sup> He contended that sustainable livelihoods cannot be derived through cash handouts. For my informants, the NGOs, as the first informant mentioned, are seen as ‘cash dispensers’<sup>227</sup>, while the state is represented as the exact opposite.

However, almost all of the state employees with whom I spoke were critical of how the government ran its development programmes. They described state works as goal-oriented and target-driven as opposed to process-oriented, and they complained that development goals were used as instruments of career performance management. A young DA, for instance, told me, ‘our job is to hit targets set by the high-ups [high officials] ... the main problem with the government is that it is rigid. If it says that all of the PSNP beneficiaries should be graduated in five years, we should enable them to graduate in the time frame no matter what the circumstances are ... If the government says Productive Safety Net Programme [PSNP] beneficiaries should demonstrate improvements in their lives in a year, then we should push beneficiaries to save and buy animals and report that farmer X bought a goat or chickens.’<sup>228</sup> The key impetus behind the PSNP, to which my informant referred, is for beneficiary households to become food secure in time and hence graduate. The highest priority for the DAs in this regard is therefore to hit targets and increase the number of graduating households. All of the DAs said that they were always under pressure from their bosses and were therefore always concerned about the consequences of having only a low number of graduates. In a moment of apparent frankness, the above-mentioned DA remarked:

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<sup>226</sup> Interview, DA#33, Odda, December 2014.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Interview, young DA#34, Odda, December 2014.

To be honest, to have a poor person who is unlikely to be graduated is to run a career risk. We are evaluated on the basis of the number of people who are graduated under each of us. We are competing with one another. The one who has the highest number of graduates [among other criteria] is the most likely to have promotions and transfer to the woreda bureau.<sup>229</sup>

In addition to the goal-oriented nature of the state's work, my informants pointed out the authoritarian nature of the state as both a fundamental problem and its defining feature. One DA commented that 'the one thing the government [woreda and zone administrations] doesn't want is someone at the bottom to question the attainability of development targets. It would easily be taken as a sign of weakness or insubordination.'<sup>230</sup> Similarly, another said, 'there is no room to question or try to explain failures or problems in government programmes. They want success stories, and we report to them success stories.'<sup>231</sup> According to my informants, the most important thing while dealing with the state is not to meet targets but rather to learn how to subvert the bureaucracy. In this regard, the informants were quite honest about 'fudging numbers' and 'exaggerating reports'. The second informant mentioned above said, 'it is not our fault. This is how the system works.'<sup>232</sup> The state, from the everyday point of view of my informants, is therefore an organisation that is both separated from the dynamics of the everyday grassroots reality and authoritarian. As a result, its authority has to be subverted and avoided.

The kebele health extension workers also expressed a similar perspective regarding the state. The extension workers are state employees devoted to implementing the national health

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Interview, DA#32, Odda, December 2014.

<sup>231</sup> Interview, DA#33, Odda, December 2014.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.



extension programme which aims at improving primary health services through a community-based approach, with an emphasis on healthy living, preventive and basic-cure care. The head of the extension programme described their work to me as follows:

We [health extension workers] are three. Each one of us is assigned to the three different sub-kebeles ... one health worker serves a total of 333 households. Each of us makes between six and eight household visits every day except on Fridays [during which they complete paperwork and write reports]. Our goal is to train all households [in a package of] 16 preventive and basic curative services in a few years. So far, 120 households have graduated and received a certificate as model families [in recognition of successful implementation of the health package].<sup>233</sup>

The extension workers saw the programme not only as a development project but also as part of a system that the state uses to evaluate their performance and determine their place in the state bureaucratic hierarchy. One extension worker commented:

Our career fate depends on the success of the programme. Therefore, we work very hard. We walk an average of 5 km every day ... There is a strict supervision ... the woreda health bureau undertakes reconnaissance inspections every time, moving from house to house. They check the number of households with new toilets and villages with waste disposal areas .... If we perform well, we can get promotions and education opportunities. ... It puts stress on us.<sup>234</sup>

In addition to the performance-related issue, the extension workers, in my discussion with them, expressed an understanding of a state that is vertically authoritative and which operates in a top-down manner. One extension worker said, 'We get the blame for everything that goes

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<sup>233</sup> Interview, head of health extension programme#26, Odda, January 2015.

<sup>234</sup> Interview, health extension worker#28, Odda, December 2014.

wrong in the programme. They simply photocopy and pass on instructions from above with an asterisk ‘for appropriate action’ or ‘for investigation’.<sup>235</sup> She wished that there was some structure below them to which they could pass down the barrage of instructions and letters. Another extension worker, using the following infamous mosquito net case, told me how orders ‘from the state pit us against the local population’. She said, ‘once, the woreda administration called the residents to a malaria eradication campaign meeting and announced that they would distribute free mosquito nets to each and every household. After a month, they had sent out only 800 nets to distribute to 1142 households. We refused to distribute the nets and requested to have 342 more nets or for the officials themselves to come and explain to the people. In their response, they threatened us with disciplinary action and forced to distribute the 800 nets to poorer households. This created discontent and was rumoured to be corrupt, biased and impartial. Some even refused to welcome us in their houses.’<sup>236</sup> This case involving mosquito nets was mentioned to me by a number of local inhabitants as a case through which to illustrate the problems of partiality and corruption within the state. Overall, the case exemplifies how unexplained state practices contribute to the making of the state as a corrupt institution and constitute state authority in negative terms which, in turn, shapes the administration of development programmes.

Taken together, local state employees see themselves as instruments of development intervention rather than as agents participating in how development should be administered. In other words, they see themselves as the subjects of a hierarchical bureaucratic dominance and as tokens of, as opposed to part of, the state. Moreover, almost all of the kebele development workers expressed frustration at the government for being out of touch and detached from grass-roots realities. In doing so, they attempt to distance themselves from the state while also,

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<sup>235</sup> Interview, health extension worker#27, Odda, December 2014.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

ironically, occupying positions in the state hierarchy and being perceived by the local population as state functionaries and administrators of state programmes. For their part, almost all of the state employees with whom I talked referred to their marginality in the state system to dissociate themselves from the state. Overall, my informants saw the state more as a top-down, rule-bound, rigid and internally heterogeneous entity than as a coherent organisation.

### **10.3. Popular imaginations**

#### ***State vs NGOs: the failed development***

A cross-section of the individuals I met during the course of my fieldwork in Odda talked about the state and development failure in the same breath. Many people saw development in terms of the provision of basic services such as drinking water, electricity, medicine in the local health centre, paved roads and agricultural inputs such as fertiliser and pesticides. Very often, many of these government-initiated and financed projects are either incomplete, never get off the ground or are dysfunctional. As a result, people expressed their frustration largely about their health post being without basic drugs, water pumps falling apart, a school with no books and not enough classrooms and promises of electrification and road clearance that were never fulfilled. To emphasise their point, many people compared the government's failed projects to successful NGO projects. 'The government has installed a faulty water pump in our village,' explained one middle-aged man. He continued, 'It took them two years to complete it, and yet it has broken down within a week of its installation. In a neighbouring village, their water pump was built by an NGO three years ago, and it is still functional.'<sup>237</sup> Another person complained, 'the government people always come here to ask about our needs; they promise to bring us development and then nothing happens. The NGOs don't talk, they come and build water walls and clear bushes. The government doesn't give us anything for our participation in

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<sup>237</sup> Interview, middle-aged man#14, Odda, December 2014.

development activities, but NGOs pay us not only when we clear bushes but also when we participate in meetings.’<sup>238</sup> Others compared the extractive nature of the state to the charity of NGOs. ‘The NGOs give, but the government takes from us much more than it gives [in the form of development]. We pay tax, contribute to road construction, for the dam [the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam],’ said a middle-aged man.<sup>239</sup> Similarly, another man said, ‘the government gave us the right to express our needs in meetings, and when we do express our needs, they tell us they would resolve all of our problems. When we then ask about the promised water pumps or electric supply, they get angry. They are only good at collecting our money.’<sup>240</sup> For many of my informants, the state gives rights, but paradoxically it does not allow people to push their demands to it. The state talks and promises, but it does not deliver or give anything substantial. And worse, unlike NGOs, it requires material contributions from the people. For many, it is simply an extractive institution.

To give one more example, one day, as I always did, I was sitting at my acquaintance Halake’s shop participating in a conversation – through my research assistant – that included Halake and three other local men. When I asked them about the development situation in Odda, all of them unanimously said, ‘there is no development by the government’. Halake then pointed to the cluster of government buildings, just about twenty-five feet from his shop. ‘Even those government houses were built by NGOs,’ he declared wryly. Gallo, one of Halake’s three friends, chimed in: ‘DAs office, the veterinary clinic, the teachers’ residence, cooperatives, all were built by AFD, and the health centre by SOS.’ At this point, Warrio, the other participant, interrupted Gallo to say ‘the health centre was also built by AFD’. As usual, the conversation turned into a heated debate about which NGO built which government office. Everyone was

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<sup>238</sup> Interview, young man#35, Odda, December 2014.

<sup>239</sup> Interview, middle-aged man#15, Odda, December 2014.

<sup>240</sup> Interview, elderly man#36, Odda, December 2014.

speaking at once and there was no unanimous agreement in sight. The impasse, however, was broken when Halake mocked a regular visit of an OPDO/ERDF senior official to Borana as something motivated by his putatively ‘insatiable appetite and craving for the freshly grilled Borana breed of goat meat’.

Usually, the main topics of conversation at Halake’s shop revolved more around discourses of state neglect than remoteness. The usual participants in conversations were aware not only of hierarchies but also, as their favourite conversation pastime, would mock and satirise the authorities who filled the state hierarchies. In such practices and talks, they demonstrated awareness of the kebele’s hierarchical connection to the trans-local through a chain of command, but this relationship of power did not bring them any of the benefits of development and modernity. On the other hand, while there was a clear understanding among my informants that development constitutes the function of the state, there was, at the same time, an articulate realisation and construction of the state as a resource-constrained entity dependent on foreign aid, and that they therefore expect development to come from NGOs.

Taken together, the public imagination of the state portrays it as possessing a set of characteristics counterposed to those of NGOs. Whereas the state is represented as inefficient, resource-constrained, coercive and untrustworthy, NGOs are described as resourceful, democratic, charitable and trustworthy. In this sense, the state is constructed by way of comparison to the development practices of NGOs.

### ***The state as aid collector***

On the other hand, many other people considered the state’s main goal to be the canvassing of aid and the granting of permission for NGOs to undertake development work and distribute food so that the Borana do not suffer a famine. One farmer said, ‘The job of Meles was to ask

for money from the *ferenji*.<sup>241</sup> We were very concerned when he died ... we thought NGOs would be closed and we would no longer get any development.’<sup>242</sup> Similarly, a PSNP beneficiary said, ‘before the death of Meles we used to get food aid every two months but shortly after his death we get it only once in six months. I think the new state is not asking for donations from the *ferenji*.’<sup>243</sup> Another middle-aged inhabitant commented: ‘In the Derg period there was no development because the government didn’t allow NGOs. Only it is this government that allows NGOs to operate in Borana and bring us development and aid.’<sup>244</sup> For my informants, it was only due to the state’s higher-level connection with the *ferenji* that the people at the local level received development benefits and food aid through NGOs. The NGOs’ involvement was thus a privilege bestowed by the state. However, while many people saw NGOs as repositories and dispensers of development, they also looked upon the state for critical functions such as obtaining land, processing paperwork and permission to join cooperatives.

### ***The state, participation and rumours***

One of the development-related concerns during the course of my fieldwork in Odda was a shortage of school classrooms. The members of the parent-teacher committee<sup>245</sup> and Odda elementary school governing body whom I interviewed told me that the school classrooms were full beyond capacity because of sedentarisation. ‘More and more people are coming to Odda and are willing to send their children to school. As a result, the school is overcrowded, children sitting on the floor,’ explained the committee chairperson.<sup>246</sup> By the end of the 2013

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<sup>241</sup> This was the ‘traditional Ge’ez and Amharic word for Roman Catholics’, but in contemporary Ethiopia it is widely used for most Europeans, or ‘whites’ (Pankhurst 2014).

<sup>242</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#11, Odda, December 2014.

<sup>243</sup> Interview, PSNP beneficiary, Odda#37, December 2014.

<sup>244</sup> Interview, middle-aged farmer#38, Odda, December 2014.

<sup>245</sup> The parent-teacher committee comprises two teachers and five parents, one of whom is the chairperson. The committee functions to mobilise parents’ contributions to the development of the school and assist the school in other issues such as discipline and student absenteeism.

<sup>246</sup> Interview, parent-teacher committee chairperson#39, Odda, January 2015.

academic year, the parent-teacher committee included the issue of the lack of classrooms in their annual plan submitted to the woreda finance bureau and the woreda Council. Their plan involved a proposal to construct four new classrooms, two new toilets (for girls and boys) and maintenance work to the school fence. However, the plan was rejected by the finance bureau and council. One woreda finance bureau official explained:

We have no money to approve their plan. The block grant<sup>247</sup> that we get from the regional government is small [therefore, it is used] largely as a recurrent expenditure to meet administrative costs such as teachers' salary and textbooks. Capital fund [from the block grant] constitutes less than 10 per cent ... There is a high level of demand for public services. Discretionary capital expenditures are [therefore] carefully used towards the development of underprivileged kebeles. There are worse places than Odda.<sup>248</sup>

The parent-teacher committee chair rejected this explanation claiming that the woreda, as per the rule, promised to cover 50 per cent of the construction costs of the new classrooms. He said, 'after they had promised to cover half of the cost in this year, we raised the annual community contributions from 10 [about £0.40] birr to 30 [about £0.60] birr per pupil, and so far have collected 38,000 birr [about £1,200]. Our aim is to collect 45,000 birr [about £1,450] [from parents' contributions and the sale of school grass/fodder]. The parents also promised to contribute wood and in labour. But, they [the woreda administration] broke their promise.'<sup>249</sup> I should point out here that the involvement of the parents in the planning process was an instance of a bottom-up participatory development administration, which is a crucial part of the Ethiopian state's decentralisation agenda (see Taye and Tegegne 2007). However, the

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<sup>247</sup> The block grant is a means by which the regional councils allocate a lump sum to the woreda. The woreda administrative councils are responsible for allocating the budgets of all sectors, including education.

<sup>248</sup> Interview, woreda finance bureau official, Odda, January 2015.

<sup>249</sup> Interview, parent-teacher committee chairperson#39, Odda, January 2015.

committee members expressed their frustration over their lack of power to implement new school development activities. The parent-teacher committee chair, for instance, complained: ‘What is the point of submitting an annual school plan? The woreda almost always rejects our plan ....’<sup>250</sup> The committee chair refers here to the usual practice whereby the woreda Council and finance bureau send back local plans for revision on the basis of allocated funds. From my informant’s point of view, the state’s action of encouraging the school committee to engage in annual school planning without any actual transfer of decision-making power is a waste of time. Even though the committee had the stated function of planning and administrating the school, their actual dependence on money earmarked by the central government belied their power, influence and the idea of community empowerment.

Nevertheless, the committee members continued to look for other means of financing their project and, by the beginning of the academic year, the committee had, for example, sought help from NGOs but received none. After exhausting other options, the parent-teacher committee then decided to use half of their annual school grant to finance the construction of the additional classrooms. A school grant is a lump sum which can only be spent on expenses related to enhancing the quality of education. School grants, unlike block grants, reach the school directly in the form of cash and are managed by the parent-teacher committee. The school is not, however, allowed to spend the money on the construction of new classrooms or buildings. The woreda explained to the committee that the school grant comes as a ‘tied fund’ or an ‘earmarked fund’ that cannot be redirected to other purposes. If the school does not fully exhaust the grant during the current fiscal year, it then has to be returned to the woreda finance bureau.<sup>251</sup> This, according to my informants, raised widespread discontent among the parents.

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Interviews, school director Odda#40, January 2015; parent-teacher committee chairperson#39, Odda, January 2015.



The woreda education and finance bureaus, as a response to the growing discontent, called a general meeting of all the parents and explained the rules and difficulties involved in redirecting earmarked funds. According to my informants who were present at the meeting,<sup>252</sup> the parents were not convinced and insisted that the woreda and the Borana Zone administrators reverse the rule. The representatives explained to the parents that the state rule establishes that the earmarked funds cannot be used for any purposes other than those for which they are earmarked and that the woreda and zone administrators and the regional president have no discretionary power to repeal or bend the rule or make an exception for Odda.

For many of my informants, the official response that government rules and regulations limit the woreda and zone administrators and the regional president – and that the state restricts them – was not convincing. The most popular and widespread explanation was rather corruption. During my fieldwork, many rumours circulated in Odda that the woreda officials had embezzled the school money. ‘Why would the government send money to our school and make the woreda command us not to spend it on building classrooms? It does not make sense at all. In my opinion, they [woreda officials] want to eat the money,’ explained one middle-aged man.<sup>253</sup> Similarly, Halake, the shopkeeper, commented, ‘the woreda is part of the mengist, but they say the state restricts them. This makes no sense. The government cannot be against itself. They are trying to fool us. I heard from one source it is what they [woreda officials] say when they want to eat the government money.’<sup>254</sup> Another middle-aged man commented: ‘It is the money sent to our school from the government. But the woreda is putting obstacles. They don’t want our kebele to develop. They only want to enrich themselves.’<sup>255</sup> The fact that the state

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<sup>252</sup> Conversation with my acquaintance Halake, the shopkeeper, and his friends, Odda, January 2015.

<sup>253</sup> Interview, middle-aged man#13, Odda, January 2015.

<sup>254</sup> Conversation, Halake, the shopkeeper, Odda, January 2015

<sup>255</sup> Interview, middle-aged man#38, Odda, January 2015.

restricted the *woreda* was illogical for my informants. One middle-aged man drew the following analogy to explain his point: ‘Any person who put aside 100 birr to buy a chicken and made a rule to himself not to use the money for other purposes would never be bound by [the self-imposed] rule if he ran out of food or became ill. If what they say is true, the state can change its own rule. But the rumour is that they ate the money.’<sup>256</sup> Clearly, for my informants, the state cannot bring limits on itself and its own authority. The local residents therefore demonstrated an understanding of a state that is not only a caring provider but also a seamless, non-contradictory unitary entity and not bound by its own rules.

Some of the local residents, however, as part of the school parent-teacher committee, were given access to information about the government and enhanced their knowledge and experience of the state bureaucracy. In many of my interactions with the committee members, they demonstrated awareness of state hierarchies and criticised the messiness and contradictions of bureaucratic rationality. This gave them a unique position from which to imagine the state as a contradictory and rule-bound organisation.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, my purpose was to explore how localised and dispersed development practices promote an image of a unified state idea and also to demonstrate the ways in which the local is hierarchically interconnected to the centre. To this end, I have sketched a broad range of perspectives and discourses about government and NGO works that help different local actors to constitute different ideas of a unified state. On the one hand, NGO employees distinguish themselves from state functionaries, whom they describe as inept and undereducated, thus constructing an idea of a state rife with inefficiency and development failure. In the eyes of NGO workers, the work of state employees is driven by political and personal interests,

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<sup>256</sup> Conversation, middle-aged man at Halake’s shop, Odda, January 2015.

whereas NGOs are seen as self-motivated and genuine development actors. NGO workers' imagination of the state is also shaped by government discourses of suspicion regarding the role of NGOs in what is considered to be an area that promotes the legitimacy of the state, namely that of development. On the other hand, state employees, by drawing attention to the target-driven and top-down approach to development work, reiterate the rule-bound, authoritative and hierarchical dimensions of the state. Furthermore, the views expressed by both state and NGO functionaries underscore how the local is imagined to be administratively linked to the centre.

By contrast, in popular imaginations the state was portrayed as possessing a set of characteristics that are counterposed to those of NGOs. My informants described the state as an inefficient, coercive and untrustworthy institution and NGOs as resourceful, charitable and trustworthy.

Overall, the discussion in this chapter demonstrates that differently positioned people develop different understandings of a unitary state idea. This tells us that the state manifests itself differently to differently positioned individuals in different contexts. As a result, people experience the state fragmentarily based on how they are placed in the government bureaucracy, the development sector (such as working in NGOs) and the wider social setting. And yet, paradoxically, it is through such experiences that perceptions of the coherence of state power and the idea of the state as a superior and transcendental entity are established.

## **Chapter 11**

### **Conclusion**

This thesis has concerned itself with the construction of the state as an idea and everyday governance practices in Africa through the case of Ethiopia. It has done so based on an understanding of the state that differs from the view that is widely found in the study of the state in Africa. As outlined in the introduction of this thesis, in most of the literature on the state in Africa there has been a profound tendency to focus on precolonial traditions, colonial legacies and postcolonial forms of global domination while omitting the working of the state as it is practised and experienced at the local level. The result, on the one hand, is that the state is represented as a discrete political actor, both separate from and elevated above the population it governs. On the other hand, it is traduced for being shaped by a pathological ‘political culture’. In combination, these views have led to the reification of both the state in Africa and African political culture as homogenous, timeless and fixed entities. In departing from the existing studies, this thesis has avoided conceptualising the state in Africa as a fixed entity and instead sought to explore the mechanisms and processes by which it – through the case of Ethiopia – comes to be constructed by the people who inhabit it.

At the centre of this study has been the reorientation of the source of legitimacy of the Ethiopian state by the EPRDF into a national project of state-directed development. As described in Chapter 2, the Ethiopian state has unusually intervened in people’s livelihood strategies through a national economic transformation agenda which includes the promotion of basic services such as the provision of universal primary health care, access to education and a focus on the agricultural productivity of smallholders. This is unusual since claims to political legitimacy were never traditionally established based on the rhetoric of economic transformation and development. As described in Chapter 4, the state has rather been built and

maintained in the name of religion, a monarchy and so on. For imperial Ethiopia, for instance, ‘so essential was the defence of Ethiopian Christianity that the state had no secular goal of its own’ (Mesay 2008: 11). Similarly, during the Derg regime, the main *raison d’être* of the state was territorial integrity and national unity. By contrast, I have argued that the contemporary development-driven politics and the resultant enormous expansion in the development role and function of the state, especially at the kebele level, have helped to represent the state to its rural population and provided multiple sites and possibilities of state-society encounter. Hence, the thesis has argued that the kebele offers an especially good site from which to examine the everyday forms of state formation.

Changes in the orientation of state legitimacy to economic transformation provided the thesis with a broader context and background while simultaneously focusing on the implications of such national development and political projects which are translated and interpreted variously through local governance practices, development activities and discourses, bureaucratic representations and the cultural values of local people. The thesis conceived of the state in Africa as an effect of ongoing practices and processes rather than as a given object. It thus interrogated the expression of the state through governance, development, bureaucratic and discursive practices in multiple local settings. It has also looked into what the state means as experienced and imagined by differently positioned actors (local people, state functionaries and NGO workers).

Throughout, the thesis has attempted to offer accounts of different contexts of state-society interfaces. The early parts of my study extensively explored the local practices of governance at both the institutional and individual levels by delving into the lives of local people. The later parts focused more on the intersection between the micro and macro, formal and informal, etc. processes. In studying these processes, the thesis predominantly employed interpretive and situational analysis methods. While situational analysis provided the thesis with the tools to

analyse specific social and political events and practices, interpretative analysis (especially of discourses) helped me to place locally situated practices within their broader social and political context.

Throughout the thesis, by exploring these processes and practices, I have at one and the same time demonstrated a disaggregated picture of governance practices and power relations and how this feeds into construction of the ‘state-idea’ (Abrams 1988). In so doing, the thesis argued that state formation is an ongoing process that consists of heterogeneous practices of governance and power relations that produce it as a seemingly coherent entity but which also embed it socially.

In this final chapter I want to bring the main arguments of the thesis together by first presenting the decentred and labyrinthine nature of governance practices and state power and then by showing the processes through which the state as a seemingly unitary actor is imagined. Finally, I conclude by addressing the implications of the study for our understanding of the concept of *mengist*, the centre-periphery divide and the state in Africa.

### **11.1. De-centring the state**

Throughout the thesis four sets of practices (governance, bureaucratic, development and discursive practices) allowed me to present the working and re/production of the state in Ethiopia in a relatively straightforward manner. However, as I described in Chapter 2, the distinction that I made between these different sets of practices was only heuristic in order to capture and analyse in depth the different processes through which the state comes to be constructed. With the task now complete, as I conclude this thesis, I would like to dispense with this distinction. Instead, I suggest that the bureaucratic, development and discursive practices are all encompassed by and contribute to governance and are overlaid with complex power relations. My purpose here is to demonstrate how governance practices embed the state

socially in everyday realities, specific constellations of power relations and social contexts. From this vantage point, in what follows I reflect on how the ideal of a unitary state is in practice marked by fractures in governance and power relations.

The insights to be drawn from the thesis suggest that governance is not merely a function of policy and technological possibilities or ideological imperatives. It is also a social process which at the same time enables, constrains and eludes those institutions that constitute the state. As I have noted in a number of places in this thesis, central government regulations do not always underpin governance practices at the local level. In addition, rules are not always externally imposed but are also produced, negotiated and reshaped in the intersection between actors in multiple local settings. This takes place by actors operating within ‘a semi-autonomous social field’ (Moore 1978) which is permeable and flexible, where alliances between actors are knotted together and shift and where political and material imperatives and ambitions alter. Here, local norms and state regulations are constantly questioned, manipulated, reshaped and rearticulated in new ways, producing new consequences. While certain aspects of legislation (central state interventions) are referred to in certain situations to legitimise a certain action, the very same legislation, in a different context, may also be used to refer to other ideas (see Chapter 8).

Contingency in cases of decision-making fosters a multiplicity of norms (Blundo and Le Meur 2009; Olivier de Sardan 2013; Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2014) which in turn implies that negotiations between actors are not only about the pursuit of particularistic interests and economic or political gains but also about ways to interpret legislation, modes of deliberation and norms governing particular conduct (see Chapter 8).

These processes, which are constitutive of the everyday operation of the state, are mediated by different arms of local state institutions. However, state institutions (such as the kebele,

cooperatives, etc.) are not available to all to the same degree; they privilege those actors who are in control of various forms of capital, including cultural, political, economic, etc. We have seen that some forms of capital are inherited or transmuted from the religious and customary spheres; others are associated with the process of the expansion of the developmental state. Some of the local elites, for example, draw their authority and status from (as we saw in Chapter 8) complex networks of informal alliances with both local power structures within each kebele and outside of the kebeles, with woreda/zone officials. Others draw from their knowledge of the state bureaucracy (writing, reading) and from their ability to imbue national development discourses (see Chapters 5 and 9). By drawing on these forms of capital, local actors have been able to establish dominant positions at the kebele level and are thus able to determine the object and basic rules of the game. Class relations are contingent upon such specific configurations of local actors, their access to different forms of capital and their interactions with the local institutions that constitute the state.

Indeed, as we have seen throughout the thesis, whatever power relations emerge, these are always overlaid with local moral ideals (moral economy expectations) that govern social conduct. Shared cultural practices and values connect the people with state agents and allow local people to negotiate with the authorities to secure access to the basic resources of survival (agricultural resources, land, etc.). This was clearly seen in Chapter 8, in the case of acts of petty corruption which, as it is understood locally, are socially acceptable in so far as they adhere to local notions of care, mutual help and reciprocity. Yet, at the same time, as we have also seen throughout the thesis, the complex enmeshment of local values and governance/development discourses now and then opens up the space for local residents who are disadvantaged by power relationships to contest the specific acts of state actors. As the study demonstrates, local people appropriate development discourses and employ them to criticise the conduct of local officials and the prevailing material conditions and aspects of local



relations of domination. In this way, we can conclude that resistance/ 'counter-conduct' takes place from within the existing field of power relations and hegemony (Foucault 2007: 194–5).

Therefore, although governance practices are articulated and mobilised around state institutions, they are also socially and contextually constructed and they do not always emerge from a particular centre. Hence, in so far as governance practices do not stem from a stable centre, they are shaped more by their own contradictions and simmering tensions than by formal government principles. Each chapter in this thesis has in different ways highlighted aspects of this contradiction. To recapitulate, we saw first that the co-option of locally influential men through their being conferred preferential access to state-sanctioned agricultural resources sat uneasily beside the working of the state to legitimise itself by seeking to represent the interests of all sections of the rural population. This was illustrated in Chapters 5 and 9 through the case of a class of model farmers and pastoralists. Common to this group of wealthy farmers and pastoralists is that they simultaneously occupy multiple positions as state officials, traditional leaders and business people. They have established a complex network of informal alliances with both local power structures within each kebele and outside the kebeles, with woreda/zone officials. These processes, as we have seen throughout the thesis, at the same time limit or exclude large sections of the population from direct access (without patronage) to the basic resources of livelihood. There is then an apparent contradiction between the state's attempt to entrench authority both through claims to provide for the needs of the poor and through governing via the co-option of networks of patronage.

Second, we saw in Chapter 6 that the central government institutions' drive to control local activities and the imperatives of hierarchy run counter to the self-imposed principles of governance through a decentralised and bottom-up mechanism of accountability and active community participation. Moreover, we saw that the introduction of the WUA, with its aim of empowering the local population, had the effect of reproducing an image of an autonomous

state that is separate from the local population and of ghettoizing practices of abuse and corruption as community issues. The WUA was appropriated by local actors and thus was not available to all to the same degree (class, gender, etc.). The project was intended to undo local inequalities yet it also sustained those inequalities.

Third, in Chapter 10, in Odda, tension between state functionaries and NGO workers over definitions of development and about the implementation of development programmes and who is best placed (equipped and work) to reach and benefit the local population profoundly shaped the nature of governance and the administration of development.

Fourth, the stories of the marginalised subjects of Ethiopia – widows, women, landless youth, poor farmers and pastoralists, and informal sector workers – that I have recounted throughout this thesis show how they are re/constituted as underdeveloped subjects by the very same strategies of development discourses and practices that attempt to extricate them from poverty. We saw, for example, in Chapter 9 that at the same time as the Productive Safety Net provides food aid for the destitute, it also requires beneficiary households to become food secure and transform economically over time. Consequently, the poor have to perform and improvise as vulnerable and destitute (marginal) subjects in order to make themselves visible to the state authorities and thereby lay claim to state benefits, at the same time as they enact the identity of individuals undergoing transformation.

Finally, the ethnographic material presented throughout the thesis has shown that the bureaucracy is not a monolithic organisation that works coherently to implement policy. On the contrary, the bureaucracy is made up of different arms and layers of institutions and processes which in turn are composed of different actors such as politicians and civil servants (DAs, health extension workers, teachers, veterinary practitioners, etc.) that have different agendas and interests. These different actors do not function as unified collectives. For example,

for civil servants at the lower level, the primary concern is not programme success and thus legitimacy, as it is for those at the upper level, but rather the production of reports and thus career development. The politicians at the lower level, on the other hand, are concerned with administrative issues, particularly with accommodating (by way of implementing, bending, manipulating, co-opting, etc.) new regulations. The dynamics involved in the intricate relationship between civil servants and politicians also demonstrates the tension between technocratic and personalised modes of governance. Further, as we saw in Chapter 5, governance practices in the bureaucracy are inflicted through social inequalities, tensions and exclusions based on class, gender, kinship and so on.

We can therefore deduce that in light of such simmering tensions and conflicts, practices of governance are contingent upon ‘interface situations’ (Long and Villarreal 1993; Long 1992: 2) and the specific ways in which power relations articulate in a particular context. In these processes, local institutions that constitute the state, local people, state functionaries and NGO staff members and non-state authorities are key mediating factors. As such, governance takes place through instances of competition a) between various levels and arms of the state system (kebele, woreda, etc., b) between different government workforces (civil servants, politicians, etc.) and c) between government departments and NGOs, as well as through contingent negotiations over norms, resources and methods that ensure compromise within and between competing actors as opposed to through concern with the formal law, policies or common agendas (development/welfare of the people).

However, the contradictory conjunction of practices and power relations shapes the working and the outcome of development programmes in a manner that produces a coherence of effects. In Chapter 6, for example, we saw the ‘instrument-effect’ (Ferguson 1994: 265) of the implementation processes of the Koga irrigation scheme in fostering state-society distinction. Similarly, Chapter 9, through its analysis of sedentarisation and territorialisation cases,

demonstrated how governance practices brought about massive changes to the social landscape or created what Kapferer and Bertelsen (2009) call a ‘society of the state’. This process gave rise to a permanent kebele population and, as a corollary to this, the entrenchment of the ‘modern’ legal framework which legitimates state authority.

### **11.2. The state idea**

From the discussion above, a complex picture emerges in which the state in Ethiopia is without a priori coherence of action. It does not, as a monolithic actor, coherently shape practices on the ground, but its powers are inconsistent, dispersed, contradictory and concealed within multiple levels of social relations. Individual local actors bend and manipulate its rules and regulations; its policies are inconsistent and contradictory and they are not straightforwardly implemented.

However, that said, as has been demonstrated throughout the thesis, the view of the state as a fully formed concrete entity is strongly entrenched within the popular imagination. In both Degga and Odda, one commonly hears local people invoke that ‘the state’ sends resources. Furthermore, state functionaries deploy the rhetoric of the state instrumentally in legitimising various practices of governance but also as a way of deflecting responsibility.

My study has shown that the appearance of the state as a coherent entity is politically and socially constructed through practices associated with governance, bureaucracy and development conducted by various actors. First, I have demonstrated that the state imaginary is reproduced at the local level through the many ‘micro-markers’ (Gupta 2012: 59) of state power such as meetings, representations (displays of material paraphernalia), devices of enumeration (report writing), supervision visits from higher-level officials and discourses of development and corruption. Institutional rites (such as meetings) are perpetually performed by state functionaries as a matter of routine and are thereby durably institutionalised, becoming

a *habitus* (Bourdieu 1997) as local people participate in these practices. These contribute to the re/production of state ideas in the context of local social life and also to the bolstering and sustaining of a reified image of the state as a distinctive, vertical and detached (from society) actor.

Second, I have shown that the state idea is also constituted through local discourses about ‘the art of being governed’ (Foucault 2007). We have seen that in Degga the state is very much associated with paternalistic care and expectations of providence, munificence and reciprocity. The state idea is also infused with powerful hopes of livelihood security and transformation. However, these hopes and expectations are usually frustrated by the perceived venality, corruption and partiality of local politics. As we have seen throughout the thesis, complaints in both Degga and Odda about the failure of development programmes/projects vis-à-vis the conduct of local officials are extensive and persistent. At the same time, however, local people continue to maintain an idea of the transcendent state, one which sends them the resources necessary for survival and around which their hopes and expectations for a better livelihood congeal. The promise of development has served as a dominant trope through which the state comes to be imagined, and this serves to neutralise the critical attitude/popular cynicism towards state power that is implicitly and explicitly expressed against local state functionaries. State ideas, then, are perpetually reproduced through hope and the expectation of a better livelihood, as the conduct of local state functionaries is simultaneously contested through counter-discourses.

This generally contributes to the re/production of an understanding that the state appears to be both above and separate from local politics and society. This popular understanding of the state cannot be dismissed lightly as a mere illusion because it is continually reproduced and consolidated by practices which create the ‘effect of agency’ (Mitchell 1999: 84) and which have real consequences. We saw this very clearly in the case of the Koga irrigation and

watershed management project. That scheme was designed with the aim of bringing together two supposedly distinct entities: the state and the local community. Paradoxically, however, the project has reified the state as a self-contained actor with a mandate to mobilise the local population for development work by defining what community is and delineating those activities which ‘the local community’, as opposed to the state, will fulfil. Thus, the distinction was perceived as a real boundary and has been acted upon. Therefore, it should be taken seriously as it is useful for understanding the ways in which, as we saw in Chapter 6, development practitioners and bureaucrats involved with the implementation of development projects conceptualise the state and construct an objectified and abstract notion of community which is disembodied from empirical realities.

### **11.3. Whither *mengist*?**

What, then, do we make of the concept of *mengist*? This study has shown that in public cultural discourses in Ethiopia *mengist* is described as a subject – named by a national leader. Here the concept of *mengist* has, at times, been attached to the person of a national leader as an individual and, at other times, to his role as a leader. We have also seen that *mengist* is imagined without reference to an incumbent and hence it was often attributed with abstract qualities. In such contexts, *mengist* was described through idioms of familial relations, projected onto the ‘family writ large’ or religious moral relations expanded into society, whose principal attributes include munificence, providence, impartiality and protection.

Local values, expressed through metaphors and idioms, served to orient asymmetrical power relations between *mengist* and local people into a relationship (and mutual recognition) of responsibility and obligation. The ideal nature of this relationship meant that *mengist* was locally identified a priori. For example, people did not need to know or interact directly with any specific national leader in order to claim that *mengist* was responsible for obtaining and sending agricultural inputs and aid to the people (see Chapters 7 and 10). This

reified understanding of *mengist* enables people to distinguish between good *mengist* and bad *mengist* and between *mengist* as a transcendent subject and the structure of the administration by which it administers and controls the local population.

We have also seen how some of the interlocutors treat *mengist* as a thing which imposes its control and power from above. State representatives employ *mengist* instrumentally to either advance their particularistic interests or legitimise development projects. NGO works often invoke a version of *mengist* that is authoritarian and dysfunctional.

This diverse and complex everyday articulation of *mengist* demonstrates how the state in Ethiopia is culturally constructed as an effect of different practices. Hence, I would argue that, in studying the state in Ethiopia, it is essential to dispense with rigid definitions of the concept of *mengist* and investigations that focus on the absence or presence of distinctions (such as *mengist* vs party, *mengist* vs government, *mengist* vs *hagere-mengist*) and to instead focus on the social and political processes in which meaning is embedded. It should be emphasised that, as Bartelson (2001: 2) has suggested, the concept of the state ‘cannot be fully determined by the character of its semantic components or by its inferential connections to other concepts, since it is the concept of the state that draws these components together into a unity and gives theoretical significance to other concepts on the basis of their inferential and metaphorical connections to the concept of the state, rather than conversely’. I argue that state formation can be fruitfully explored from a vantage point that goes beyond semantic distinctions and explore specific configurations of practices, a process shaped by the ongoing contingencies of power relations, as well as the actions, expectations and hopes of the people involved in the process.

Importantly, this is not to say that we should dispense with the term *mengist* altogether, but that we need to recognise and stress the social and political processes that go into its contingent

re/production. Certainly, the concept of *mengist* as an idea is very powerful because it is imbued with complex meaning; hence we can learn a great deal from paying critical attention to its ideal nature. For example, as we saw in Chapter 7, the semblance of division between the subliminal and profane, impartial and partial and the state from above and below serves as a source of legitimacy for the national leadership among the rural masses.

Moreover, as we saw in Chapter 4, the concept of *mengist* is embedded in the knowledge of Ethiopia as a state with self-generated, independent and resilient political and cultural institutions. Particularly noteworthy is that this knowledge of Ethiopia for decades imbued many educated Ethiopians with a sense of being exceptional, as part of a state civilization vis-à-vis the rest of Africa. As Clapham (2006: 111) points out, the ‘cognitive dissonance between an inherited sense of cultural superiority and an acute awareness of Ethiopian “backwardness” has for long driven their aspirations of development’. In the academic literature, the same knowledge promoted a single reified Ethiopian state as a trans-historic entity. Conversely, the concept of *mengist* understood as a trans-historic entity produces resistance and imaginations of group identities as outside the historical imaginary.

In this study, I have purposely focused on ongoing local practices and the manner in which they contribute to state formation. From this point of view, I have explored *mengist* as an idea and as a constellation of practices and processes. I have therefore not fully examined historical imaginary of the state. A fruitful area for further research would therefore be a critical examination of the idea of *mengist* as it is enunciated in religious and ethnic discourses that project the state as a trans-historic entity and that tend to produce resistance.

However, I would also argue that diachronic analysis of the state idea conceals less visible aspects of politics such as variations in regimes of practices in relation to different ‘temporal and spatial contexts’ (Nugent 2011: 257). I would argue that *mengist* should be understood as



being tied to a particular historical context and not as a *sui generis* explanatory concept; it should not be categorically transferred to a different time or historical context.

#### **11.4. Centre-periphery revisited**

I now turn to the implications of the thesis for our understanding of geographic variations in the conduct of the state in Ethiopia. As I described in the introduction, on the surface, the two local communities at the centre of this study seem to differ from one another in every important way; they inhabit two geographically distinct spaces, speak different languages, live by relatively different modes of subsistence and have relatively distinct cultural identities. These regional variations provide a point of entry for scholars to frame the Ethiopian state system as being structured in an asymmetry of centre-periphery power relations. The centre-periphery paradigm presupposes and reproduces a spatial assumption whereby the Abyssinian (as a centre) is depicted as a centre of state power and the periphery (the rest) as areas on the edge of state power.

By contrast, the ethnographic evidence presented throughout this thesis demonstrates that this spatial binary is not tenable in practice. Such a rigid centre-periphery framework obscures complex power relations and changes that have occurred at the local level, especially for those people who live in the lowlands of Ethiopia. I argue that the peripheries are defined more by the patchiness of state institutions they once contained as opposed to being based on current empirical realities. As I demonstrated in Chapter 9, the reach of state institutions has recently been expanded territorially through the presence of schools, health posts and various development programmes. In this sense, despite their geographic location, the Borana are interconnected in numerous ways to the centre that constitutes Ethiopia.

The centre-periphery approach universalises the identities of both the peoples of ‘the centre’ and ‘the periphery’. It assumes a natural affinity of experiences of the state among similarly

identified (geographically, culturally and historically) groups of people. In so doing, it glosses over the state practices and development discourses that sustain status distinctions, hierarchies and power relations across cross-cultural and geographic boundaries.

In this thesis, my fieldwork sites, instead of serving as representative cases of the centre and periphery, are brought within a single analytical frame in order to illuminate the heterogeneous process of state formation. However, my analysis does not merely highlight distinct but homogeneous experiences and processes of state formation as they have transpired across space. The emphasis on differentially positioned local actors at each of the two field sites offers a more complex picture of governance practices and state idea. Hence, there is a variable manifestation of a range of different experiences and discourses, and thus of state imaginations, which in some circumstances are specific to a particular kebele while in others they are an integral component or local variations of more general processes. This reminds us that, in studying the state in Ethiopia, our framing needs to reflect the everyday life and experiences of people situated not only at the spatial but also at the social, political and economic margins, including the ways in which they actively engage with the state in complex and multiple ways.

At a broader level, my concern was not to explore Borana in isolation. Instead, a central concern has been to investigate state formation by looking at the intersection between the local and the national as well as mediations by non-state authorities such as NGOs. Chapter 9 demonstrated that central state projects (such as sedentarisation and territorialisation) are mediated by NGOs and shaped by entrenched local social interests and interactions with the local population. An important conclusion here is that the performance of state power in Borana takes place at the nexus of national and local interests – and through a complex and shifting axis of power relations among state actors, non-state actors (NGOs) and diverse local population groups (wealthy politicians, ordinary people and welfare dependants). Hence, everyday governance practices and power relations at regional and local levels are not merely

the result of state formation at the centre; they also inform and constitute the state formation process itself.

In general terms, the thesis has attempted to widen our understanding of state and society relations in Ethiopia by taking the level of analysis down to the local level and also by questioning the meaning and usefulness of central categories of analysis, such as the state, centre-periphery, culture, tradition and modernity. This study, however, has not addressed all of the practices, elements and referents related to state formation in Ethiopia. The thesis has not, for example, addressed ethnicity. Further studies are needed to analyse the more nuanced interface of the micro-politics of identity politics and state formation. The study has also not devoted sufficient discussion to the process of state formation in Borana. Carrying out similar comparative research in the same or other areas would clearly be beneficial in order to have a more balanced picture of state formation in Ethiopia as well as in establishing a wider applicability to my findings. Moreover, the study has attempted to bring to the fore the views and experiences of farmers, pastoralists, women, rural traders, shopkeepers, daily labourers, the rural youth, state functionaries and NGO workers. However, the study has not sufficiently explored the voice and experiences of women. Thus, a specific study is needed to deal with the experiences and views of women. Finally, what this study has broached or demonstrated about the state, political culture and class relations, etc. generates possibilities for further explorations of democracy, decentralisation and development intervention, etc. Thus, it is crucial that specific studies be devoted to each subject.

### **11.5. Towards an Ethnography of the state in Africa**

Finally, I turn to the implications of this study for the general project of the state in Africa. At the broadest level, my study has situated state formation within the changing context of African political economy. The past few decades have witnessed a number of important transformations that have generated new questions about the state in Africa and its conduct. Most especially,

development has emerged as the legitimating function of state power. I have argued that in light of changing material and ideological conditions, the state in Africa can no longer easily be captured under the themes of ‘the politics of the belly’ (Bayart 2009), criminal power relations (Bayart et al. 1999) or a particular ‘African political culture’ or any other abstracted social norms. The complex conjectures of the livelihood activities pursued by local people, and the ways that these are guided by, re/articulated and imbibed in the context of shifts in the economy, technologies of rule and development projects such as agricultural and cooperative schemes, industrial strategies and programmes of poverty reduction shape the working of the state and the way people interact with them on a daily basis.

Within this context, the state in Africa emerges as central to the dynamics of everyday life and power relations in many ways. The empirical material has demonstrated that the different local institutions that constitute the state are central to local social and political life. However, the centrality of the state does not mean that it controls every aspect of social life, rather that it articulates power relations which affect social processes, and thus the conduct of people. This means that the state as an idea, and through its bureaucratic presence, shapes social relations at least as much as, if not far more than, social relations shape the state. There are different ways in which the state exerts its influence. For example, as we saw in Chapter 6, state discourses of development and the awareness that development constitutes the responsibility of the state perpetually construct subject dispositions that are amenable to the language of development. The study has shown that modernist development discourses enable local people to construct state power in a way that holds its functionaries responsible for failing to deliver development resources, to develop their localities, etc. Thus, state-generated development discourses can at once be a mechanism that is used to enunciate rights, press for fair access to government programmes, demand material transformations and enact the politics of patronage and

inclusion/exclusion. Hence, the state has proven central in how meanings associated with responsibilities of the state in relation to development are locally constituted.

Moreover, state institutions can mobilise and codify power and class relations, in addition to influencing which sections of the local population, how and to what extent are embedded in state institutions. Given this, we can conclude that in the everyday workings of the state, particular social configurations such as class relations and patronage networks are at least partially shaped, influenced and even constituted by the state, and they are definitely predicated on the state's coercive and bureaucratic apparatus to institute and enforce them. Hence, a focus on the informal without relating it to the context of bureaucratic power and everyday governance practices that enable the production of hierarchies and social classes obfuscates the mechanisms and power relations that give the state a material reality and re/produce it as a seemingly unified entity.

Overall, this study shows that the state in Africa matters to the local people in at least two significant ways. First, in its local presence, whereby we have seen that state power is exercised in active ways through its agents. Secondly, the notion of state is discursively appropriated as a resource of legitimation of claims and actions or as a resource to articulate resistance against local structures of domination.

But at the same time, it is important to recognise that the state in Africa is also deeply embedded in social networks and is shaped by local values. As I have shown throughout this thesis, as much as the local population is encompassed and shaped by the state's hierarchy and power, the state apparatus has in turn been incorporated into the local population to a different degree. In other words, local governance practices are anchored in the everyday reality of social and economic life, social norms, familial obligations and power interests. The social character of governance therefore conditions the working of the state. We have seen that local cultural

values and moral economy precepts shape the ways in which people imagine the state's responsibilities by way of, for example, comparison to spiritual patronage. Further, as we saw in Chapter 8, what is locally accepted as governance involved petty corruption. This suggests that while the organisational structure of the state transcends the local, its institutions, policies and personnel are tightly embedded in the local social context, which constitutes the state as 'a part of society and apart from society' (Migdal 2001: 263). Central to the study of the state in Africa in this sense is an understanding that the state and society are neither neatly bounded distinct domains nor is the state completely overtaken by social forces.

In conclusion, this study is a small contribution to the growing body of ethnographic scholarship on the state in Africa (Lund 2006; Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2006; Hagmann and Péclard 2010; Friedman 2011). An attempt has been made to distinguish the thesis by emphasising its distinctive points of departure on a set of practices, namely governance, bureaucratic, development and discursive practices. In so doing, it suggests that study of the state in Africa should not only be linked to ethnographic perspectives of state formation but also to the changing nature of African political economy and especially to the situated and changing contexts and specificities of practices. What my study has revealed, if anything, is the complexities of power relations and contradictions and layers of enmeshment between state bureaucracy and governance practices as well as the multiplicity of the state idea. This points to the need to avoid singular readings of the nature and operation of the state in Africa. Rather, based on the findings of this study, I suggest that the various and specific referents that produce the state need to be contextually identified. I would argue that situational analysis (Gluckman 1958; Mitchell 1983; Kapferer 1987) and interpretative methods (Geertz 1973; Bevir and Rhodes 2010) of local practices can reveal the working of the state as it is practised and experienced by local people, state and non-state actors as well as the specific ways in which these operations are embedded in social realities. This demands giving primacy to agency and

meaning-making. Since agency 'attributes to individuals the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life' (Long 2001:16), it allows us to explore the ways in which the state is experienced in contemporary Africa as well as in the public life, agricultural and other practices of rural people. This also helps us avoid treating the local level as a testing ground for more general processes. Instead, I would argue that, in studying the state in Africa, we need to pay attention to specific contingencies of power relations and governance practices at both the micro and macro levels.

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# Appendix

## Interview Codes

During the interview, I asked participants about their social position, life experiences and self-understanding. At a later stage, I used the socio-economic position of narrators both to thematically examine the interviews and anonymise their identities. The interview codes therefore identify social positions and attributes such as gender, socio-economic status, age, etc.

### Interviews in West Gojjam (Chapters 5 - 8)

- #1 Interview, model farmer and senior kebele official, Degga, October 2014.
- #2 Interview, model farmer, Degga, September 2014.
- #3 Interview, model farmer, Degga, September 2014.
- # 4 Interview, model farmer and senior kebele official, Degga, October 2014.
- #5 Interview, DA, Degga, November 2014
- #6 Interview, DA, Degga, November 2014
- #7 Interview, DA, Degga, November 2014
- #8 Interview, health extension worker, Degga, October 2014.
- #9 Interview, health extension worker, Degga, October 2014.
- #10 Interview, health extension worker, Degga, October 2014.
- #12 Conversation, civil servant, Degga, October 2014.
- #13 Interview, PMU officer, Woreda town, October 2014.
- #14 Interview, senior PMU officer, Woreda town, October 2014.
- #15 Interview, Amhara bureau of water resources official#15, Bahir Dar, October 2014.
- #16 Interview, middle-aged farmer, Degga, October 2014.
- #17 Interview, middle-aged woman, Degga, October 2014.

#18 Interview, middle-aged trader-cum-farmer, Degga, October 2014.

#19 Interview, a young farmer, Degga, November 2014.

#20 Interview, middle-aged farmer, Degga, November 2014.

#21 Interview, senior PMU committee member, Woreda town, November 2014.

#22 Interview, woreda senior civil servant, Degga, October 2014.

#23 Interview, woreda politician, Woreda town, October 2014.

#24 Interview, head of the WUA, Degga, November 2014.

#25 Interview, middle-aged farmer, Degga, October 2014.

#26 Interview, an elderly man, Degga, October 2014.

#27 Interview, middle-aged farmer, Degga, October 2014.

#28 Interview, middle-aged farmer, Degga, October 2014.

#29 Interview, middle-aged farmer, Degga, October 2014.

#30 Interview, an elderly man, Degga, October 2014.

#31 Interview, young man, Degga, October 2014.

#32 Interview, middle-aged woman, November 2014.

#33 Interview, middle-aged farmer, Degga, November 2014.

#34 Interview, widowed woman, November 2014.

#35 Interview, middle-aged farmer, November 2014.

#36 Interview, middle-aged farmer, Degga, October 2014.

#37 Conversation with middle-aged farmer, Degga, September 2014.

#38 Conversation with middle-aged farmer, Degga, September 2014.

#39 Conversation with a young man, Degga, September 2014.

#40 Interview, a young labourer, Degga, October 2014.

#41 Interview, middle-aged farmer, Degga, September 2014.

#42 Interview, a young farmer, Degga, September 2014.

- #43 Interview, middle-aged farmer, Degga, September 2014.
- #44 Interview, an elderly man, Degga, November 2014.
- #45 Interview, middle-aged farmer, Degga, November 2014.
- #46 Interview, an elderly man, Degga, November 2014.
- #47 Interview, unemployed young man, Degga, November 2014.
- #48 Interview, unemployed young man, Degga, November 2014.
- #49 Conversation with local elder, Degga, November 2014.
- #50 Interview, young woman, Degga, November 2014.
- #51 Conversation, a young resident, Degga, October 2014.
- #52 Conversation, a young resident, Degga, October 2014.

### **Interviews in Borana (Chapters 9 and 10)**

- #1 Interview, *Abba Reera*, Odda, Odda, December 2014.
- #2 Interview, *Abba Reera*, Odda, Odda, December 2014.
- #3 Interview, *Abba Olla*, Odda, Odda, December 2014.
- #4 Interview, *Abba Olla*, Odda, Odda, December 2014.
- #5 Interview, *Abba Olla*, Odda, Odda, December 2014.
- #6 Interview, *Abba Olla*, Odda, Odda, December 2014.
- #7 Interview, director of an international NGO, Woreda town, January 2015.
- #8 Interview, head of international NGO, Woreda town, January 2015.
- #9 Interview, senior woreda official, Woreda town, January 2015.
- #10 Interview, senior woreda official, Woreda town, January 2015.
- #11 Interview, middle-aged man, Odda, December 2014.
- #12 Interview, an elderly man, Odda, December 2014.
- #13 Interview, middle-aged herder, Odda, December 2014.
- #14 Interview, middle-aged resident, Odda, December 2014.

- #15 Interview, middle-aged man, Odda, December 2014.
- #16 Interview, middle-aged cooperative head, Odda, December 2014.
- #17 Interview, middle-aged cooperative head, Odda, January 2015.
- #18 Interview, young cooperative head, Odda, January 2015.
- #19 Interview, senior woreda land administration expert, Woreda town, January 2015.
- #21 Interview, young domestic NGO worker, Woreda town, December 2014.
- #22 Interview, middle-aged domestic NGO worker, Woreda town, December 2014.
- # 23 Interview, a senior member of NGO staff, Woreda town, December 2014.
- #24 Interview, middle-aged international NGO worker, Woreda town, December 2014.
- #25 Interview, young domestic NGO worker, Woreda town, December 2014.
- #26 Interview, kebele health extension worker, Odda, December 2014.
- #27 Interview, kebele health extension worker, Odda, December 2014.
- #28 Interview, kebele health extension worker, Odda, December 2014.
- #29 Interview, field coordinator of domestic NGO, Woreda town, December 2014.
- #30 Interview, field coordinator of domestic NGO, Woreda town, December 2014.
- #31 Interview, domestic NGO director, Woreda town, December 2014.
- #32 Interview, young DA, Odda, December 2014.
- #33 Interview, DA, Odda, December 2014.
- #34 Interview, DA, Odda, December 2014.
- #35 Interview, young man, Odda, December 2014.
- #36 Interview, an elderly man, Odda, December 2014.
- #37 Interview, PSNP beneficiary, Odda, December 2014.
- #38 Interview, middle-aged farmer, Odda, December 2014.
- #39 Interview, parent-teacher committee chairperson, Odda, January 2015.
- #40 Interview, school director, Odda, January 2015.