Taking Narratives on Identity-Based Conflicts in the Horn of Africa Seriously: The Case of Intergroup Conflicts at Pastoral Frontiers in Ethiopia

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Abstract

Identity politics and competition over resources at pastoral frontiers in Ethiopia have a long history of interactions. Macro-political and socio-historical processes in the country have always affected dynamics of interaction between humans and their environment. The attempt to understand why and how this occurs should, however, follow a judicious analytical approach. This paper re-subjects selected data from published works on the problems of identity groups at pastoral frontiers in Ethiopia to a more analytical process in order to demonstrate what can be done to improve their rigor. The paper argues that the truth of meaning in conflict-related narratives lies in creative synthesis of the meanings inherent in the narratives. The paper presents the methodological and epistemological implications of this argument for future researches.

Introduction

Intergroup conflicts are complex. Various historical, political, socio-economic, and environmental factors interact and define the complexity. The meaning and essence of intergroup conflicts lies not only in manifest behavioral conditions, but also involves subtle needs that have behavioral implications. In addition to describing the underlying structural causes of intergroup conflicts, one should explain the hidden assumptions, processes, and transcripts that affect the behavioral dimension of intergroup conflicts in specific socio-political and historical contexts. The other important issue is addressing the negative and positive impacts of external conditions or constraints on patterns of intergroup interactions (Jeong, 2008).

This has important implications for what we should do when analyzing the dynamics of intergroup conflicts at pastoral frontiers in Ethiopia where ethnic identities are the dominant motivators of political and social behaviors among the identity groups. The pastoral frontier is to be understood in this paper as a geographical setting where two or more clans belonging to different ethnic groups interface and interact, and where the state control is an ongoing process (Korf, Hagmann and Emmenegger, 2015). Here, identity groups compete over natural resources not only among themselves, but also with government institutions or agencies and private business enterprises (Kelly & Peluso, 2015).

The anatomy of the politics of identity in Ethiopia's pastoral frontiers

The dominant and trans-generational Amharic expression used to represent the pastoral frontier is *qolamew ye ageritua kifil* (the lowland periphery of the polity). In the traditional state politics of Ethiopia and the discourse of governance, the relationship between the centre and the periphery were expressed through the binary concepts of *mahal agar* (the centre) and *dar ager* (the peripheral region). The pastoral frontiers are called the *dar ager* not because they are found at geographical margins from the centre,

but because they are located on the periphery of the country's power structure (Gnamo, 2014; Toggia, 2008). The *mahal agar* and the *dara agar* define the dominant-subordinate relationship between the centre and the periphery. In addition, they serve as a discursive foundation for the centre to assert and re-assert its greater control over the periphery, which in the grand narrative of the state has been judged unruly and threatening (Markakis, 2011).

As in all state-building and social control processes, state institutions, institutional practices, and state-centric discourses have been interacting and reinforcing one another to create and sustain the state's wield of power over the pastoral communities. Discourses of the statutory control of the centre over the periphery have been deeply institutionalized to entrench the fundamental asymmetrical power structures. As a result of this, the pastoral frontiers have been economically, socially, and politically marginalized throughout the modern history of the Ethiopian state. One way of imposing the centre's control over the periphery is the rhetoric of disparagement. For example, during the Imperial Period, the pastoral communities' patterns of livelihood and socio-institutional conditions were referred to with denigrating expressions such as *zallan hibreteseb* (nomadic society). Such expressions were deployed to portray the pastoral communities as uncivilized, unruly, and undependable communities. Other expressions include *Ye zelan behri* (behaviour of nomadic pastoralist), *ye zelan ananuar* (the nomadic manner of living), and *zelaninet (*nomadicness). In addition to verbal disparagement, pastoralists were subjected to various coercive processes and mechanisms of enforcing sanctification of obedience. Systems of control included direct involvement of institutions of coercion, such as well-trained, armed police forces and a standing army. The administrative and military agents of the Imperial Regime tried to quell recurrent uprisings on the peripheries through both coercive and diplomatic processes. All of the coercive punishments inflicted on groups that revolted against the system of domination were suggestive of the role of excessive abuse of power in ensuring the center's sustained control (Tareke, 1991, 2000; Yihun, 2014).

Recasting the achievements of previous studies

Over the last two decades, a lot has been written on the interface of ethnicity, politics, poverty, and social problems in the pastoral frontiers of Ethiopia. Some of these works are *generalists*. Among the generalists are Abbink's (2006) assessment of the roots, causes, processes, dynamics, and impacts of the politics of ethnicity and difference (Snajdr, 2007) on intergroup relations. Clapham (2009) is another generalist work in which the author critiqued the political, social, and administrative ups and downs in the post-Dergue Ethiopia. The second category of academic contributions on the politics of ethnicity and dynamics of ethnic or identity-based intergroup relations are labeled for this paper as *context-specific and empirically based observations*. One example is Kefale's (2010) critical evaluation of the dynamics of identity negotiation and re-negotiation at frontier areas where diverse clans that belong to bigger and contesting ethnic groups compete over substantive and symbolic resources. Adugna's (2011) inquiry into the

nature and dynamics of historically entrenched and emerging conflicts between and among the identity groups in southern Ethiopia and Tache & Oba's (2009) inquiry into the impact of the political and social institutionalization of identity-based contestations over resources in the same area are also aspects of context-specific and empirically based observations.

The other informative case is Feyissa's (2010) critical inquiry into the politics of ethnicity and resource control in the Gambella Region, where the Nuer and the Anuak are key actors in local conflicts and confrontations. Feyissa provided a nuanced analysis about how and why the interactions and entwinements between historical and contemporary processes forge micro-political conditions for characteristically unique socio-political and psycho-social contestations wherein the politics of primordialism takes a central and catalyzing role in the dynamics of local power and resistance. In addition, Abbink's (2009) analysis of conflict and social changes in southwest Ethiopia that focuses on the Suri society also reveals how and why the politics of primordialism take a central role in catalyzing and mediating power relations between and within groups. Debelo's (2012) work is also an example of context-specific and empirically-grounded work that attempted to unveil the dynamics of identity politics and how the politics of primordialism come into play within the context of politicized intergroup contestations. A common thematic thread that runs through all of these works is that the structures of identity-based social conflicts is to be grasped in relation to and against particular historical structure and socio-political, economic, and policy conditions from which they arise (Hussein, 2015; Clapham, 2009; Feyissa, 2010).

All of these works emphasize, albeit at different depths, that the interaction between the local and broader political and institutional factors has been shaping patterns of identity negotiations at pastoral frontiers. The identity processes here are thus to be seen within the constraints of historical, institutional and situational contexts that affect how members of identity groups are engaged in an ongoing definition and redefinition of their identities. Built on the bedrock of longstanding history of political despotism and socio-economic marginalization, the ethnofederal system provided incentives for the politicization and ethnicization of inter-communal resource-related disputes at pastoral frontiers (Abbink, 2006). It created local motivations for territorialized local imaginations, mainly sense of a political-administrative control over the occupied territories (Adugna, 2011; Hussein and Beyene, 2015; Markakis, 2011). The political and social processes for the localization of contestations and diffusion of differences have been evident, for example, in the context of Ittu-Issa, Boran-Garre, and Boran-Digodi conflicts over territory, water, and other economically and socio-politically significant resources (Tache & Oba, 2009).

On the whole, the identity groups at pastoral frontiers contest over material and symbolic claims. Materially, territorial claims express themselves in and through practical actions such as acts of territorial expansion and intentional acts of building new settlement areas in what otherwise is known to be a buffer zone or commonly shared open wilderness. Ethnically motivated acts of excluding members of the rival group from having access rights to livelihood resources is also an aspect of advancing material

claims. Symbolically, claims have been made through placing markers of ethnic and territorial identity, such as hoisting the flag of one or the other regional state, in contested areas or in areas that have fallen under the jurisdiction of the other regional state where the material and symbolic claims reinforce one another. The symbolic and material territoriality is particularly intense in contested places along the Oromo-Somali settlement areas.

Two cases suffice to explain the situation. The Somali clans' aggressive settlement intensification in a place called Hardim, only about 25 kilometers from Awash Town on the main road from Addis Ababa to Harar, is a typical example. The Hardim village originally began as a rehabilitation centre to support and protect the Somali clans who were displaced in the Oromo-Somali territorial contestation over a custom point at Bordodde, only about 7 kilometers away from it. The Somali clans have since intensified their material claim over the area through enormous and vigorous territorial processes that promote settlement consolidation. The other case is competition for resource control in the Dakata Valley between the Babile Town of the Oromiya Region and the Bombas Town of the Somali Region. For years, the Oromo and Somali pastoralists and agropastoralists in the area have been depending on the dense bushes of the valley. In the past, they managed competitions over and access to resources through conflict governance practices and values that promote the socio-economic interconnectedness between the competing groups (Bogale & Korf, 2007). However, in the post-Dergue context, local competitions over the natural resources in the area have taken different dimension. The ethnic-based redistribution of territories introduced ethnopolitical and politico-legal motivations that significantly disrupted local agreements over how to access resources and prevent the degradation of the ecosystem. The ongoing and aggressive construction of constant settlement infrastructure within the valley is an indicator of how identity-based competitions reflect themselves in and through intensifying the structural and material visibility of one or the other group in a contested territorial area (Markakis, 2011).

Place-bound social activities in these and other places along Oromo-Somali frontier areas are practices of fulfilling place-dependent interests. The practices are reinforced through symbolic representations such as hoisting flags. Hoisting the flag of one or the other regional state serves simply as a symbolic register for these territorial practices. Characteristically, it entails the controller's assertion of ownership, if not an outright expression of exclusionary sentiments. In some of the areas, social and political intrigues and interests give rise to incidents of inter-communal violence. This is true in the case of the Ittu-Issa clashes over Miesso Town in eastern Ethiopia as well as the Boran-Garre clashes in southern Ethiopia, along the Ethio-Kenyan boarder (Markakis, 2011). In these strategic pastoral frontiers , identity groups have experienced discord rooted in the local 'identitarian' processes that involved politicization, manipulation, and polarization of ethnic identities, and politicization of territories. Territorialization of group identity has generally increased the nexus between ethnic identity, environmental security, and territorial control along the Oromo-Somali frontier area. The interaction between historic, longstanding political uncertainties and contemporary change processes

has intensified competitions for and conflict over resources (Kefale, 2010; Adugna, 2011). The experiences generally suggest that ethnically tainted struggles over the production and reproduction of identities are related to and reinforced through material stakes (Kefale, 2010; Adugna, 2011; Hussein, 2015).

Theorizing from dynamics of intergroup conflicts at frontier areas in Ethiopia

Intergroup competitions at pastoral frontiers in the post-Dergue context are constituted through a conscious, adaptive, contingent, and contentious process of self-grounding. A sense of ownership over territory is constituted through complex processes of mutual interdependence that involve socially- and institutionally-based categorizations and identifications through which boundaries of identities are produced and reproduced. The implication is that it is difficult to understand the meanings of identity-based conflicts between closely interacting identity groups without integrating the structural and interactional dimensions of their past and present relationships, and without delving into how contemporary conflicts lock them into new processes of contestation. In other words, intergroup conflicts and contestations should be understood in terms of dynamics of structures and processes of social interactions and interrelations (Jeong, 2008).

Dynamics of identity-based intergroup conflicts at pastoral frontiers can be explained through diverse and competing theories. One of the dominant theories is realistic group conflict theory. It posits the view that such identity groups compete over realistic resources, such as material scarcity, limited positions, and other objective situations that engender competing aspirations and incompatible goals. In such a context, intergroup contestations involve two closely interacting forms: realistic threat and symbolic threat (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Realistic threat involves perception of intergroup competition and conflicting goals. It arises when one group perceives an out-group as striving to usurp important resources. The Boran-Garre conflict in southern Ethiopia and the Afar-Issa conflict in eastern Ethiopia are typical examples of intergroup conflicts that arise from practical and perceived completions over highly scarce ethno-territorial resources (Markakis, 2011). Symbolic threats, on the other hand, relate to perceived conflict between groups over various symbolic values and goals. Both realistic and symbolic threats serve as a basis for diverse and self-perpetuating intergroup conflicts. In both cases, intergroup conflicts involve socio-cognitive and social psychological processes and dynamics that promote intergroup distrust, prejudices, and threats (Hussein, Beyene & Wentzell, 2015). Unless they are carefully managed, competitive contests over both substantive and symbolic resources ignite negative intergroup perceptions. They may evoke-- in one or the other group-- the desire to resort to actions and processes that further intensify the negativity of the relationship. From the point of view of the realist conflict perspective, the principal means to disentangle intergroup rivalry and disagreements over important resources is forging mutual understanding between the rational actors (Stephan & Stephan, 2000).

The other closely interrelated identity theories that provide useful explanations on causes and dynamics of intergroup differences and competitions are social categorization

theory (Turner, 1999) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These theories posit that individuals generally search for positive self-identities and possess the proclivity to benefit their in-group while discriminating against members of out-groups. Both theories advance the view that members of an in-group discriminate against members of out-groups, mainly because they perceive them as a threat against the individual's positive identity. It should be noted, however, that identities constitute and reinforce a conflict system only in the presence of other internal and external conditions and processes. One should therefore assess the dynamics of identity and identity processes within the context of ongoing policy moves, shifts in political power relationships, and within other broader contexts that affect the motivational, as well as mobilizational, dynamics of identity politics (Vaughan & Tronvoll, 2003; van Stekelenburg, Klandermans & van Dijk, 2009). For instance, the politicization of identities and intergroup competitions over resources can change the nature and dynamics of conflicts between potentially competing groups. One of the enduring realities, regarding the nexus between identity and access to sources of power at pastoral frontiers of Ethiopia, is the fact that the country's ethnic federalism and decentralization provide local elites with the opportunity to assume power over other local groups and extract resources from the federal and regional governments (Hagmann & P´eclard, 2010). The implication is that identity issues should be analyzed by taking into consideration the structural and processual conditions that bind identity groups into their competitive or adversarial relationships (Jeong, 2010).

One should examine the causes of discourses of competition over natural resources at pastoral frontiers in the country and how they shape patterns of competition for possession and exploitation of particular resources by placing them within the broader political ecology of environmental conflict. It is also important to examine and re-examine the ways in which dynamics of negative group processes, adversarial intergroup relationships, and memories of past intergroup violence provide the underpinnings of identity-related confrontations between groups. Therefore, instead of gazing at identities, one is expected to carefully examine how the interactions between macro- and micro-structural processes create the conditions for long-suppressed identity issues and inter-communal hostilities to transform into a consciously orchestrated and selectively constructed or reconstructed intergroup contestation (van Stekelenburg, Klandermans & van Dijk, 2009; Bereketeab, 2011). Micro-analytical efforts should be framed within the dynamics that emerge from the macro-structural preconditions that include macro-political changes, such as regime changes and drastic changes in geopolitical stability. The meso- and micro-analytical preconditions include the proximate institutional, social, and political circumstances as well as the processual dynamics of intergroup encounters at local and sub-local levels (Abbink, 2009; Cambell, 2004; Wimmer & Schetter, 2003).

Objectives of the paper

The purpose of this paper is to re-examine conflict-related narratives collected from pastoralists and agro-pastoralists in Ethiopia from a more analytical perspective.

The paper focuses on ethnic-based contestations between the historically peripheralized identities at ethnic frontier areas in the country, where the post-Dergue political-institutional processes ignited the microdynamics of claim-making and mobilization in which the parties in contestation developed politicized and territorialized interests over the geographical boundaries and frontiers that had long connected them. The paper is based on the view that the data, which previous researchers and reporters presented to support their claims, can be taken as texts that are open to new interpretations, and on the view that re-evaluation of the contents and meanings of the texts through different and diverse perspectives can generate more meaningful and textual interpretation. With this in mind, the paper attempts to provide a critical re-evaluation of the political, economic, and social-psychological meanings of the narratives that the original writers collected from respondents. The paper draws on two analytical philosophies: hermeneutics and interpretivist phenomenology. Hermeneutic perspectives purport that meanings and their interpretations are largely situated within social, political, environmental, and spatial settings, and emerge from the interactions and interrelations that people make within these settings. The interpretivist phenomenology posits that meaning originates in the lived experience of being in the world. From the interpretivist phenomenological perspective, a person's understanding of his or her world is historically and socio-culturally grounded (Given, 2008).

The following analytical procedures are considered to achieve the aim of the paper. First, texts are displayed with details on why they were inserted in the original works and what the authors in the original works did to analyze and interpret them. Then, the potential cognitive, political, social-psychological, attitudinal, or socio-environmental meanings of the selected extracts are re-analyzed through 'a close analytic focus on the words and viewpoints of the participant,' (Watts, 2014: 9), and by placing them in the socio-political, cultural, political, socio-economic, or ethno-moral environment within which the reflection was made. I do this to reveal the importance of the epistemological contextualization of the participants' reflections and perspectives (Sousa, 2014; Watts, 2014; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Rennie, 2012).

Guided by these conceptual and procedural principles, the paper attempts to provide an analytic characterization of the socio-political and ideological contexts within which the respondents expressed their views, experiences, and viewpoints. The paper indicates how researchers can give due analytical and interpretational values to the voices they have generated by adhering to the principles of pragmatic (constructivist) hermeneutics that promotes a researcher's engagement with the interpretive norms of a community.

Re-thinking over the thinking of those at the pastoral frontiers

In this section, I recast narratives that some researchers collected from members of the communities at pastoral frontiers and subject them to a meta-analytic re-evaluation. I start with cases from Mulugeta & Hagmann (2008), who dealt with challenges in governing violence in the pastoralist space.

TEXT A

> We are different from the Afar. Our reconciliation with them never lasted long. We soon resort to fighting again. We never stop fighting with them even during Haile Selassie's time and the Derg time. We pay compensation but then never stop fighting with them (Mulugeta & Hagmann, 2008: 78)

The authors displayed this data to reveal that the Afar-Karrayu conflict is protracted. The data suggests the existence in the area of long-standing, pervasive, and recursive violence and retaliation between the Afar and the Karrayu. As a discourse of violence, *TEXT A* depicts the sense of an evil enemy, with which it is difficult to establish peace and harmony. Inherent in this data are complex interactions between identity, history of encounters, violence, and the impact of the interactive processes on social identity formation. The data encapsulates the implication of violent intergroup relationship on people's perceptions, cognition and interpretation. The fact that the authors used the data to offer corroborating and contextualized evidence to their problematization and interpretation of the nature of intergroup conflict and violence has clear methodological and epistemological significance. The narrative contains the potential influence of memory bias in causing people to fear the present and overestimate the likelihood of future violence (Rydgren, 2007).

However, it is evident in *TEXT A* that, as an analyst, one should pay due attention to local communities' schemas, scripts, perceptions, attributions, cognitive biases, and affective representations of their experiences (Staub, 2004 and Brubaker, 2004). The text is reflective of how the cognitive, experiential, and socio-emotional factors interact to sustain the conflict system (Dunham & Degner, 2010). The implication is that a researcher dealing with identity issues in such a context may need to draw on various theories of human cognition and interaction, such as cognitive theories, ethnomethodology, and conversational or discourse analysis, to identify and characterize the nature of the socio-cognitive and conceptual structures within which the reproduction and restaging of collective perceptions and actions are framed. A careful delving into the text uncovers the socio-cognitive and perceptual structures of the conflict system (Brubaker, 2004; Hussein *et al.* 2015).

The way **TEXT A** problematizes the situation fits into the aggressor-defender model, which is a one-way model in which one party strives to take something from the defending party. The narrative apparently entails existence in the area of the perceptual influence of attribution error and hostility attribution biases which, among other things, might arise from lack of adequate information about the actions and intentions of the other party. Regarding this, Eckert & Willems (2003) state the following:

> The actions of the conflict opponent are interpreted as the expression of particular aims, and the reaction always relates to these imputed motives and aims. In conflict situations, which are characterized by mistrust and often by deficient communication, these attribution processes often develop their own

self-amplifying dynamic: insecurity, fear, lack of information, stereotyped prejudices about the opponent, and even simple caution push the process of attribution of goals toward assuming the worst… (1189).

From analytical and epistemological perspectives, the importance is not that the Karrayu perceive their conflict with the Afar as long-lasting. The most important issue is why they fail to imagine the possibility of the Afar-Karrayu harmony and peace in the future. Had the authors probed further, the respondents could have produced more narratives about the historical, social, economic, ethno-moral, and stereotypical factors and their interactions in sustaining enmity between them. The meaning of the narrative can be increased by placing it within a broader system of interactions and interrelations that reinforce dynamics of intergroup differences. It is implicit in **TEXT A** that it is this problem that appears to have caused members of the Karrayu to portray the Afar as an out-group with whom fighting over power and resources in the area is inevitable and natural. The meaning in the narrative has practical reinforcement with meanings in other narratives, though the authors did not try to achieve the harnessing and resonance between their various data. Let us see the other narrative to show the intertwining between identity conflicts and interest conflicts:

TEXT B

You raid the cattle from your enemy because you need to test their capabilities for counter attack, fetch some cattle to your stock, you also can do it as a way of amusement, to boost your image as a man while you attend your cattle (Mulugeta & Hagmann, 2008: 80)

This narrative reveals the role of entrenched group norms, values, and orientations in shaping how an in-group should relate to an out-group in the context of long-standing intergroup rivalry. It also reveals the deep interaction between how a group sees itself and its enemy and how that is in turn affected by historical concerns and changing circumstances. It is implicit in **TEXT B** that the dynamics of conflict interaction are 'guided by mirror images of a demonic enemy and a virtuous self…creates self-fulfilling prophecies by inducing the parties to engage in the hostile actions they expect from one another' (Kelman, 2009: 175). The other important intellectual contribution that readers expect from Mulugeta and Hagmann is a critical and grounded analysis of how biases, fears, needs, and interests embedded in the narratives hinder constructive peacemaking by imposing 'perceptual and cognitive constraints on their processing of new information, with the resulting tendency to underestimate the occurrence and the possibility of change' (Kelman, 2009 : 175). Under such circumstances, the conflictants' ability to create mutual understanding and take each other's perspectives is severely impaired. The implication is that, as an analyst, one should delve further into how the hostile elements that constitute the intergroup problems have been contributing toward inter-communal intractability. The other important issue is revealing how identity groups with historically entrenched memories of intergroup rivalry and violence become

entangled in 'ideologies of antagonism', which is a form of social ideology that creates zero-sum social-psychology in which the out-group's loss or defeat is perceived as the in-group's gain or victory (Staub, 2003).

Among diverse theories, constructivist/interpretive approaches lend conceptual tools and analytical frameworks through which a comprehensive understanding can be gained regarding the meanings of the above texts that represent the community's existential and lived experience. For instance, the phenomenological hermeneutical approach helps reveal the cognitive and affective dimensions of lived experience (Throop, 2003). Frame analysis can also facilitate a conceptually grounded and meaning-focused understanding of the essence of the research participants' reflections. These methods encourage engagement in analytic processes that help identify patterns in the data. In addition, they promote constant comparison of data among and within the emerging data or set of diverse data, to generate themes or conceptual models that may help create nuanced understanding on the connections between and among the elements that constitute the experiences that research participants have shared. One can justify the methodological usefulness, for example, of frame analysis in providing insights about the meanings of the experiences reflected in *TEXT A* and *TEXT B* cited above. For example, *TEXT A* contains various elements of *identity and values frames*, *substance frames* (such as issue construal), and *characterization frames* (such as characterization of self and others.) *TEXT B* contains *identity and value frames* (such as social orientation, economic orientation, group identification and power relationships), *substance frames* (such as aspirations), *process frames* (such as public involvement and participation), and *characterization frames* (such as characterization of self and others) (Shmueli, 2008).

The other cases were taken from Elias & Abdi (2010), who inquired into the structural foundations of pastoral land alienation and expropriation and their impacts on the livelihood of the alienated or expropriated groups, mainly the Boran and Karrayu pastoralists.

TEXT C

By denying us access to the flood plain pastures and the Awash River water, the sugar enterprise has already brought us to the verge of death. And out of brutality, they are now planning to deprive us even a burial place for the dead among us. We shall all die before an inch of additional land is expropriated by the sugar enterprise (Elias & Abdi, 2010: 9)

This narrative reveals what the respondents' livelihood reality is and what the moral status of a marginalized social group is like in a context where people continue to suffer from top-down, statutory expropriation of the lands that are essential to sustain pastoralism as a way of life. The authors displayed the data to represent what one of the elders in the community said in his effort to express his anger and resentment, upon knowing a sugar enterprise's plan to advance into the pastoral territory to expand its sugar plantations. This is a good example of a discourse of collective victimization personified in the body of one person (Oaten, 2014). As a discourse of victimization, the

narrative embodies the elder's perception of the power asymmetry between the community and the state-sponsored enterprises. It represents the voice of the community members who, through what their representative said, had defined themselves as the victimized or as the peripheralized. Through this voice, the respondent portrayed the state-sponsored enterprise as 'the alienator' and his people as 'the alienated.' The narrative reflects a context where one party has freedom of action while the other is denied that freedom through a self-sustaining history of alienation. In the narrative, the expression 'out of brutality, they are now planning to deprive us even a burial place for the dead among us', depicts the existence in the area of hostile enterprise-people relationships. The data reveals the magnitude of societal or collective fixation on 'the threatening Other.' Embedded in the narrative also is the perception that inconsiderate and top-down intrusion to expropriate resources is the historical foundation of pastoral livelihood, plagued with long-standing misfortune and suffering.

The communicative power of **TEXT D** can be illuminated through analytical strategies such as discourse analysis and frame analysis (Oaten, 2014), which can unravel the structure of, and the resonance between, the discourse of suffering, victimhood, witnessing blame, and sense of self-perceived vulnerability, frustration, and helplessness (Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Hai, Schori & Gundar, 2009). The resonance between the remembered communal suffering and victimhood and the sense of uncertainty, engendered by the continuing pressures that reinforce alienation, is also evident deep within the narrative. A critical inquiry into the narrative reflects the community members' ecological perception that the plan to expand the production capacity of the sugar enterprise stifles not only access to livelihood resources, but also imposes suffering and alienation that leads to unpleasant and unbearable realities, such as the collective fear of being deprived a burial place. Without dictating methodological approaches, one can suggest that the concerns expressed in the narrative can be elucidated through appealing the sense they make of their world to critical humanity and to other theories that take account of the social, economic, and moral interest of humanity.

The meanings of the concerns articulated in **TEXT C** above have such a connection and interdependence with those in the following text.

TEXT D

We know how to rear cattle and how to live with the wildlife. Our cattle are more familiar with the Oryx than the cars of the government are to the Oryx. Our spears are less harmful than the guns of the government and the foreign hunters. We are forbidden to live in harmony with nature while hunters are allowed to kill the wildlife in our own land (Elias & Abdi, 2010: 10)

TEXT C and **TEXT D** interact in a number of ways. They are reflective of the local community's frustration about the negative impacts of external impositions that disrupt the structure and foundation of the social, economic, and natural ecology of their livelihood. They reinforce each other and help 'sustain a clear argument through the

dimensions of description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics' (Given, 2008: 113). For instance, the last sentence in **TEXT D** that 'We are forbidden to live in harmony with nature while hunters are allowed to kill the wildlife in our own land,' subtly advances the argument that the inconsiderate land alienation and marginalization schemes of the government imposed victimhood not only on the people, but also on the wildlife ecology. Another subtle meaning is that if the indigenous people and the wildlife are left together as they were before, both would regain and maintain a sense of self. The respondent's reflection reinforces the view that pastoralism and biodiversity are forms of land use that are complementary and competitive (Reda, 2015). This represents the critical perspectives of people at the grassroots level. In this narrative, the respondent attempted to challenge the knowledge, moral, and ethical base of the political-economic policy that affects his sense of survival and sense of community. The interesting thing is that this grassroots knowledge emerged from many years of practical experience. The thematic reinforcement between **TEXT C** and **TEXT D** may be enhanced through inductive analytical processes that aim at unraveling the underlying meanings in each text, and by working toward identifying their intertextuality. Another way of achieving a more profound empirical, analytical, and interpretive corroboration is by placing the data in other relevant discourses of marginalization and exclusion, to anchor the experiences in other relating conditions where statebuilding processes and discourses marginalize the indigenous holders of land. The pastoralists' sense of deprivation, marginalization, and alienation gains a more robust analytical meaning particularly when assessed and analyzsed within the context of the long-standing statutory discourses that emphasize the emptiness and wilderness of the pastoral and agro-pastoral lands, to justify their occupation and expropriation (Kelly & Peluso, 2015).

Conclusions and implications

This paper is a meta-analytic re-evaluation of researches on the causes, conditions and processes of intergroup conflict at pastoral frontiers in Ethiopia. The paper focused on work that failed to subject the narratives they produced to rigorous analytical and interpretive processes. The paper emphasized the epistemological and methodological salience of analyzing and interpreting conflict-related, public narratives in historical and contemporary contexts. It emphasized, particularly, the significance of comparing and contrasting the meanings of the respondents' articulations within and across data to search for the synergy and reinforcement embedded in situated narratives.

The narratives that the community members provide over territorial issues indicate that conflicts over territory are aspects of human relationships, shaped by and emerging from territoriality (Elden, 2010). For example, the data that Mulugeta and Hagmann collected from the pastoral elders of the Karrayu suggest that the issue of territory sparks concerns particularly when the motives and actions of one party are thought to affect the needs and interests of the other party (Cox, 2002). The data suggest that changes in the meaning of territory and territoriality are largely prompted by shifting circumstances and the meanings attached to those circumstances. Thus, the effort to understand the

meanings of territory and how the identity groups' competitions over those meanings affect humans' actions and perceptions should provide proper explanation about how the social construction of territory is related to and reinforced by humans' material interests, political aspirations, and symbolic contestations over territory.

The paper implicates that the methodological thrust of the interpretivist epistemology fundamentally lies in our ability to identify, sort, and interpret the diverse meanings that people attach to their experiences. The other important tenet in the interpretivist epistemology is that as conflict researchers, we should attempt to grasp phenomena in the light of the broader social, cultural, political, socio-economic, and physical environments. This interpretive search fundamentally involves processes that are emergent and reiterative. The process is emergent because the design of research is never fixed, since the inquiry involves constant interplay between design and discovery, and since findings emerge continuously. It is reiterative mainly because the researcher repeatedly visits and interacts with the data he or she has generated, in search of more meanings and revelations (Watts, 2014).

The paper advances the argument that, by subjecting respondents' reflections to rigorous analytical processes, a conflict researcher can reveal the interconnections of experiences, perceptions, and feelings, and illuminate meanings that emerge and re-emerge within contexts and from the multiple and interconnected pathways or networks of meaning. This is important particularly in the context of unregulated contestations over territory and politicized rivalries over localities that, in the eyes of the contestants, are perceived to have significant political-economic values (Feyissa, 2010). Inquiry into such contestation may provide insight into the interaction between structural and cognitive factors of the conflict system. It may also reveal how uncertainties that are inherent in transitional contexts catalyze dynamics of contestation and shape the meanings that individuals, as well as collectives, draw from the vicious cycle of uncertainties. As an analyst, one is thus expected to reveal the power of politicized needs and interests that shape the motivational and cognitive behaviors of individuals as well as groups (Adugna, 2011; Feyissa, 2010).

The paper entails that the cognitive, emotional and motivational aspects of identities, and how they factor into conflict dynamics, need critical attention. This is true particularly in contexts where the parties in conflict have developed antagonistic goals, needs, and interests that, in turn, provide fertile conditions for the proliferation of enduring intergroup prejudices (Malešević´, 2004). In such contexts, one may need to address how and why territorialization of identity unfolds and interacts with other social, political, and institutional practices that propagate the politics of difference at micro-political level. One may also need to examine the ways in which a particular group's attempt to assume more control over a territory is fused with its perceived political, economic, and social destiny. This may be done with the help of carefully selected cases that show the role of boundary-related narratives and counter-narratives in the reproduction and legitimation of socio-spatial identities, and by delving into the local impacts of macro-political processes that nurture the localized image of 'they' and 'we'

in a geography of complex ecological, socio-economic, and ethnocultural interrelatedness.

One may also need to reveal the interaction and reinforcement between the various discursive expressions of territorialized identities and how, as socially embedded meaning-making processes, these expressions are constituted through, and crystallized by, the views and positions that the community members and their more conscious representatives hold about the meanings of territorial possession or dispossession. A deeper analysis into the local discursive practices may provide robust insights into the manner in which identity-based differences convert a shared geographical territory into an arena of discursive opinions. It is explicit in the cited narrative data in Mulugeta and Hagmann (2008) those community members' reflections are full of contradictions and dilemmas that cause territories to become constitutive of the competing groups' politicized self-identification. They also contain informative frames about the processes through which local territories gain more politicized symbolic and social meanings. Deep-lying in the narratives are the role of the instrumentalization and objectification of territories in pursuit of a more politicized collectivity. Inquiry into recurring and continually self-transforming public frames of conflicts can provide insights into what contestants do to generate and deploy politicized collective identity. The most important issue is the way practical issues, such as incompatibility over substantive stakes, feed into the social psychology of conflict within which collective action framing and processes sustain collective participation.

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