Development and Human (In)Dignity: The Impact of Gibe III, Sugar Industrialization and Sedenterization on Minority Agro-Pastoral Groups in South Omo

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Abstract

Based on extensive field research in South Omo Zone since 2011, this article argues that the human dignity of agro-pastoralist groups was sacrificed to promote developmentalism. This zone is home to sixteen minority groups, thirteen being agro-pastoralists. Deployment of developmental state policy in the 2010s, namely sugar industrialization, made a structural break to the state experiences of most agro-pastoral groups, especially to the Bodi and Mursi in Salamago *Woreda*. The sugar industrialization efforts were enabled by the regulation of the Omo River's flow with the construction of the Gibe III hydro-electric dam to the north. Moreover, the government planned to sedenterize and modernize the agro-pastoral communities, and thereby deliver social services to them. However, these developmental state projects were implemented by going against human security, human development and human rights of the agro-pastoral groups residing in the area. First, the Bodi were not consulted about the projects, but were 'convinced', by a combination of coercion and persuasion. Second, the project was preceded by and conjoined with security campaigns, which led to, among others, the imprisonment of many men from Bodi in Jinka, the Zonal capital. Third, the combination of environmental impacts of the developmental projects and the increasing insecurity seriously impacted food security and led to collective impoverishment of the Bodi. The combination of these three major impacts led to deterioration of the dignity of the Bodi, contrary to what development ideally is about.

Keywords: *minority rights, human dignity, developmental state, KSDP, Bodi, South Omo*

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Introduction

The major policy dilemmas of the past few decades, mainly managing diversity and ensuring the rights of minority groups, are mostly products of expansion of the Ethiopian state at the end of the 19th and early 20th century. The FDRE Constitution (FDRE 1995) instituted a range of frameworks to recognize Ethiopia's numerous cultural groups and accommodate their needs at local, regional and federal levels (Haileyesus 2012; Van der Beken 2012). Thus far, when it comes to weighing the minority-friendliness of the Ethiopian federal order, the general tendency in the literature has been debating whether it has delivered or failed to protect and ensure the rights of such groups (see for example the debate between Getachew (2011, 2009) and Tronvoll (2010, 2008)). Others focused on ethnic groups whose minority status is within a particular regional state where they are considered as non-indigenous, for example the Amhara and Oromo in Benishangul-Gumuz regional state (Van der Beken 2010), and the limits to territorial approach to ensure minority rights (Beza 2019). Few, such as Data's (2012) ethnographic work, shows the intricate and contested political nature of translating and implementing human/minority rights norms and ideals into governance mechanisms.

In this article, a focus on minority rights alone is conceived as too narrow. A more comprehensive notion of human dignity, which in addition to human rights, includes human development and human security, is adopted (Arnold 2017; Somsen 2017; McSherry and Freckelton 2013; Fortman 2011). Using human dignity as an analytical lens, this chapter examines how minority agro-pastoral groups fared when developmentalism became paramount in the priorities of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the ruling party. Taking the case of South Omo Zone from South Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS), this chapter argues that 'Developmental State' policy in agro-pastoral areas came with costs to the dignity of the local community.

Despite the rapid economic growth of the past decade, there have been a half-created grievance; the most notable one related to land expropriations. *Woredas*[4] surrounding Addis Ababa and the western and eastern lowland regions were epicenters of 'land grabbing' (Makki 2014:90). This has led to critiques and protests in the social and print media and also on the streets, and was more consequential. However,

4 The second lowest administrative unit in Ethiopia.

the impact of these 'developmental' projects to the very basic fabric of an ethnic group was momentous on the Bodi and their immediate neighbors, the Mursi.

The 'late arrival' of the Ethiopian state in the mid-2000s[5] to Salamago *woreda* of South Omo Zone, inhabited by four small ethnic groups, the Bodi, Mursi, Kwegu and Dime, was a sudden rupture for the communities (Fana 2020). The first intervention was more benign and involved settling food insecure households to the mid-altitude areas between the agro-pastoralist Bodi and agrarian Dime (Ayke 2005). On top of this, the interventions came aggressively with projects such as the construction of Gibe III hydro-electric dam project that commenced in mid-2000s to the north of the *woreda.* The impact of the hydro-electric project, however, reached the *woreda* about a decade later in 2015 by the complete absence of the Omo floods. A third of Bodi's annual diet comes from flood-retreat agriculture, and as such the absence of the floods severely affected food security in the area (Buffavand 2017; Turton 1985).

The Ethiopian Sugar Corporation (ESC) also started land clearing in 2011 in Bodi territory. The zonal and regional governments together started sedenterizing the Bodi immediately afterwards, with the stated intention of easing challenges related to service delivery among agro-pastoral communities; to congregate various public services (such as health, education, agricultural extension, potable water…) at a village center, and thereby reduce the challenges posed by sparse settlement patterns. These two state projects, sugar industrialization and sedenterization, were faced by local resistance, which led to what is dubbed as security/pacification campaigns, leading to tension, conflict and imprisonment of the Bodi in Jinka, the zonal capital located about 110 km away (Fana 2020; Buffavand 2017; Tewolde and Fana 2014).[6]

Hydro-electric dams and agro-industrialization, primarily sugar industrialization, were the hallmarks of the Ethiopian developmental state (Kamski 2019, 2016; Mosley and Watson 2016). These developmental projects in the lower Omo Valley affected many aspects of Bodi's social, economic and political life (Stevenson and Buffavand 2018; Buffavand 2017, 2016). Based on extensive fieldwork

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5 The state was practically absent in these lowlands for most of the previous century.

6 As the Gibe III project was hundreds of kilometers to the north of Salamago there was no opportunity for the Bodi and Mursi to resist it.

in South Omo between 2012 and 2018,[7] involving interviews, focus group discussions and informal discussions with members of the local community, *woreda* and zonal government officials and experts, and experts working for the ESC, this chapter argues that the EPRDF government sacrificed the human dignity of the Bodi minority group for the realization of these development projects. When it comes to prioritization, the government had no qualms about the promotion of these national economic interests, in effect erasing the recorded gains of the federal project.

This argument is made in the following six sections. The first provides a brief review of concepts of minority rights and human dignity. The second highlights the ideological contradictions between EPRDF's ethno-linguistic federalization and the developmental state project. The third introduces the study area, South Omo Zone, particularly Salamago *woreda*, as home to minorities, the dominant livelihoods practiced in these lowlands, and the weak administrative, infrastructural and market integration of the lowlands to the state. The fourth section summarizes the major developmental interventions of the government, Gibe III dam, sugar industrialization and sedenterization, in Salamago. This is followed with a section that identifies and presents three major interacting impacts of these developmental interventions on the Bodi: (1) lack of consultation, (2) imprisonments of large numbers of men and, (3) deteriorating food security. The last section concludes by highlighting the deteriorating human dignity of the Bodi through an interactive condition of socio-economic, conflict and human rights dimensions.

Minority Groups, Minority Rights and Human Dignity: Some Conceptual Issues

By definition, the concept of minority groups is premised on difference, be it racial, religious, or ethnic (Fortman 2011; Kymlicka 2010). A group should not necessarily be a numerical minority to be considered as a

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7 During this period, a total of 100 days of fieldwork was conducted for various research projects, among others funded by the Institute for Peace and Security Studies of Addis Ababa University (in 2012 and 2013), the Carnegie Center through the Africa Peacebuilding Network of the Social Science Research Council (in 2017), the SIDERA project (funded by the Economic and Social Research Council) and the Agricultural Policy Research in Africa (in 2018). The findings of these fieldworks are published in various outlets, and duly cited in this article.

minority group.[8] Rather it is a relational concept, mainly premised on the abuse of power by the dominant majority position (Fortman 2011). Thus, minority rights are mainly meant to defend and promote human rights of minority groups against threats posed intentionally or by indifference of the majority. In effect, the desired end is to ensure that members of a minority group have equal rights as those from majority groups (Kymlicka 2010).

Although legal debates dominate the scene, laws will not change the relationships undergirding majority-minority positions. Rather the focus should be on the public-political construction of a certain idea or group into a hierarchical position (Fortman 2011). As such, ensuring the rights of minority groups will be realized through political processes and public engagements, in addition to legal interventions.

Self-governance is one strategy to ensure the rights of minority groups (Kymlicka 2010). The federal restructuring of Ethiopia in 1995 was an opportunity to create the political space for various minority groups to self-govern at local levels, while ensuring representation at national level. By stating that 'nations, nationalities, and peoples' are sovereign (Article 8) and are fully entitled to self-determination (Article 39), the FDRE Constitution provides the legal basis for defending and promoting the interests and rights of minorities. The real challenge is on how to translate these constitutional and other legal provisions into governance mechanisms; without this translation, the legal positions will not be consequential (Data 2012).

This translation became more complicated after the mid-2000s with the ascendance of developmental ideology, at the expense of the ethno-federal arrangement. Economic and resource mobilization interests were given attention by the state than the rights of identity groups. In the peripheral lowlands, such as Gambella and South Omo, the developmental state policy was aggressively implemented before the consolidation of the ethno-federal arrangement. The inability of such groups to make use of the constitutional provisions in the face of increasing violations related to 'developmental' projects is leading to calls for adoption of international legal instruments meant to defend the rights of indigenous people (LaTosky 2021; Seyoum 2016; Adem 2009).

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8 Perhaps a good example from Ethiopia is the case of Somali and Tigre ethnic groups. Although constitutes a slightly larger population, the Somali are a minority group, while, in many forms, the dominant state culture and political position is favorable to the Tigre. Similarly, in Rwanda, the numerical minority Tutsi holds a majority position over the Hutu.

This article avoids delving into the legalistic and definitional debates on which collectivity qualifies to be 'minority' and 'indigenous'. It rather adopts the concept of human dignity as an analytical lens; a broader focus on 'dignity takings' in cases of dispossessions (mainly of land) and the need to 'restore dignity' of minority groups (Guzmán-Rodríguez 2018; Atuahene 2016). As Somsen (2017:356 cited in LaTosky 2021:439) states, dignity gives a condition of "empowering people to assume full control over their own lives and, as a corollary, preventing others from intruding into those lives, unless free, prior, informed consent has been granted". In this sense, dignity is a broader concept than minority rights. Thus, when violations happen, it is not only about the human rights of minority groups; it also infringes into self-respect and autonomy of individuals and collectivities.

When it comes to operationalizing the concept of human dignity, Bas de Gaay Fortman's (2011) work is very useful. Fortman incorporates development and human security concerns, in addition to human rights, of minority groups as interacting "indivisible whole" of human dignity (2011:302). Bas de Gaay Fortman's concept of human dignity could be best summarized in the following quote and figure:

> *… the human dignity mission in a wider perspective than just human rights. Essential linkages are laid out that are highly relevant from the perspective of collectivities: to achieve human security, a socio-economic perspective (and hence a functioning economy) is required, as well as good governance and the rule of law (and hence a functioning state); for the realization of human rights, it is also important that people enjoy a socio-economic perspective in their lives, while living in peace and security in a politically stable environment. The latter is crucial for human development, as well as for good governance based on the rule of law. This golden triangle of human dignity – considered as an indivisible whole – represents the core challenges in respect of protecting so-called minorities (Fortman 2011:302).*

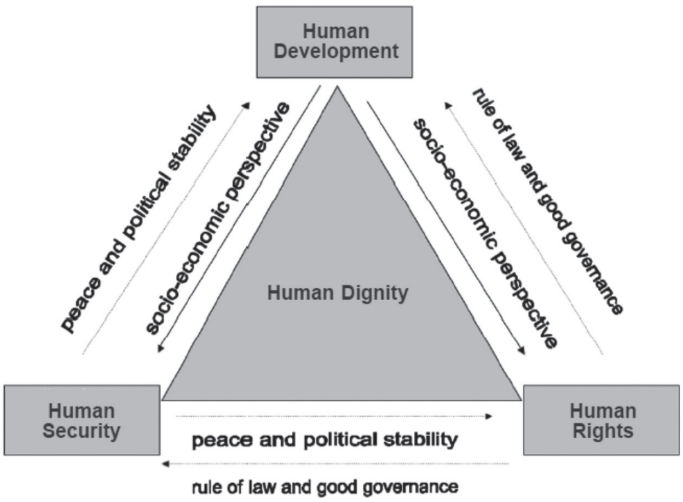

Fig 1: Human dignity as a product of linkages between human rights, human security and human development (Fortman 2011:301)

This conceptualization allows us to go beyond the legalistic debate on rights of minority groups, to consider socio-economic and human security aspects. Given the nature of interventions (mainly dam building, sugar estates and sedenterization) in the study area, and their multi-faceted impacts, this broader focus will be more beneficial to have a fuller understanding of the conditions of minority groups in the face of aggressive developmental interventions.

It is now widely recognized that dams come with significant negative socio-economic implications and conflict, especially to powerless marginalized groups (Del Bene, Scheidel and Temper 2018; World Commission on Dams 2000). One obvious impact of such economic and infrastructural interventions is expropriation of farming land, putting the rural poor under further socio-economic stress (Nguyen, Pham and de Bruyn 2017; World Bank 2015). Moreover, many cases of 'land grabbing' or 'resource grabbing' for development projects result in resistance and conflict at the sites of land investments (Blake and Barney 2018; Del Bene, Scheidel and Temper 2018). As such, the human dignity concept can merge the three dimensions of impacts minority groups' experience; violation of human rights, political economy/ socio-economic impact and conflict/human security.

Implementing the Ethiopian Developmental State

In the post-1991 political order, Ethiopia's diverse groups were hopeful in getting the public space to practice and promote their culture, language and identity (Epple and Thubauville 2012). The 1995 Constitution centers on what it calls 'Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' as sovereigns (Article 8), without differentiating between groups based on population size or political power. Moreover, it gives equal rights when it comes to self-determination (Article 39), and an explicit recognition of land rights of pastoralist groups (Article 40(5)). Furthermore, Article 89(4) states that the "government shall provide special assistance to Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples least advantaged in economic and social development".

The rigor the EPRDF showed towards ensuring ethno-linguistic rights was replaced by prioritization of economic growth with the ascent of developmentalism in the policies of the early 2000s. By the turn of the first decade of this century, the EPRDF (2010:117) came to assert that "if anyone takes refuge in the nation's past history intending to be a special citizen, or intending to look across the border like an alien, it is not because he has good ground, but because he is a rent seeking parasite or because he has fallen for rent seekers". This categorical statement and 'regress' from past notions of giving primacy to the rights of ethno-linguistic groups came at a time when the Ethiopian Developmental State (EDS) project was at its zenith (Clapham 2013), exemplified by the ambitious planning in the first Growth and Transformation Plan (MoFED 2010).

One of the EDS projects is construction of hydro-electric dams. Geography dictates that most of these dams be in the southern 'highland frontier', and the socio-economic impacts being felt in the 'lowland frontier'. Moreover, the government betted on the global land rush as a development opportunity to generate foreign currency, create jobs as well as produce industrial inputs, such as cotton and sugarcane (Fana 2016; Lavers 2012). These EDS projects targeted the lowlands, before the lowland frontier showed any significant progress in terms of political and economic integration (Markakis 2011). Thus, there was a starker contradiction between the federal state (prioritization of 'group rights') and EDS projects in the lowlands (prioritization of economic growth). This is the case mainly considering that the affordances of the federal project were yet to meaningfully deliver in the lowland frontier, especially in the lower Omo Valley, when the EDS project was pushed through.

Indeed, the contradiction between the federal and EDS projects have been recognized early on. Assefa (2014) stated that the two projects are in tension, at least, and that the EDS project was putting additional strains to fulfill the promises of the federal project. The necessity of centralizing power and having a strong executive for the success of the EDS project runs counter to the devolution of power inherent to any federal system (Aalen and Asnake 2012). Clapham (2018:1154-1155) also argued that the EPRDF prioritized the delivery of economic rights, sought 'performance legitimacy' and deferred the promotion of rights. In effect, EPRDF's position was that economic rights need to be fulfilled before a range of other individual and collective rights are properly promoted. This is aligned to the general tendency to view developmental states as "semi-democratic at best" (Meles 2011a:168), following the authoritarian nature of previous developmental states.

One major expression of the contradiction between the ethno-federal and EDS projects could be discerned regarding land administration powers. The deployment of the EDS in rural Ethiopia (particularly in the lowlands) showed that there is an implicit stipulation that regional territories are not arenas for self-determination solely, or primarily, but are to be exploited 'rationally' for the benefit of the national economy as defined by the central government. This justification by itself, before getting to the practice, tells of the relative prioritization of development. The Constitution gives concurrent powers to federal and regional levels over land utilization and conservation by separating legislative and administrative powers. This mode of concurrency is reflected in Articles 51(5) and 52(2). The former authorizes the federal government to enact laws on utilization or conservation of land and natural resources, while the latter empowers the states to administer land based on federal laws. Despite this, the federal government centralized land administration powers when it came to large-scale agricultural lands under the guise of upward power delegation from the regions, although there is no constitutional base for this (Fana 2016; Ojot 2013). This was openly recognized and reversed in late 2016, following a study commissioned by the Prime Minister's Office.

Moreover, the EDS project necessitated the aggressive mobilization of resources, including natural resources. This had major implications for agro-pastoralist communities located in the peripheral lowlands. The violent nature of the interventions and the impacts are documented in a number of studies. As such, it is in these lowlands that the contradictions between EPRDF's two 'grand projects' (Clapham

2013) are stark. With this in mind, the following section provides the research context, highlighting the South Omo zone's ecological and ethnic diversity, and the weak integration of minority groups with the center.

South Omo: Home of Minority Ethnic Groups

South Omo is a frontier zone in many respects. It borders South Sudan and Kenya, and has the Omo River as its most defining geographic feature. It is home to sixteen indigenous ethnic groups, making more than a quarter of the ethnic diversity of SNNPRS. The zone's population is largely made up of two highland agrarian communities, the Aari and Maale (about 400,000 of the zonal rough population of 600,000) (CSA 2008). The other fourteen agro-pastoral groups make up the remaining 200,000, according to the last census report (ibid). As such, many of the agro-pastoral ethnic groups in the lower Omo Valley number a few thousands. The population in the study *woreda*, Salamago, includes of the Mursi (7,500), Bodi (6,994), Bacha (2,632) and Dime (less than a thousand) (ibid). The population size of the *woreda* is very small, compared to the population of ethnic groups in the region.

Ecologically, the lower Omo Valley is an arid and semi-arid zone, which is suited for pastoralism. With the exception of the Aari, Maale and Dime, the great majority of the population in the zone live off pastoralism. The floods of Omo, Mago and Weyto Rivers bring the much-needed moisture and alluvial soil from the highlands, which the lowland communities make use of by practicing flood-retreat agriculture. Salamago is located on the northern bounds of the zone bordering the southern highlands, cascading towards the rivers and valley. While the Dime fully rely on rain-fed farming, the Bodi and Mursi generate a sizeable amount of their annual diet from rain-fed farming but also recession farming alongside the Omo River. Livestock rearing, however, is the most important socio-economic and cultural marker (Buffavand 2017; Turton 1985).

In many regards, the zone is among the most marginalized areas in Ethiopia. Assignment of government officials to these lowlands was a sign of demotion or of desperation in imperial times (Markakis 2011:153). The poor road and infrastructural integration of these lowlands created a sense of 'social death' for those departing from their extended families to work there. On top of this, the climate was found to be unbearable to state officials originating from the

highlands. Making matters worse, the sparse population density and the proliferation of fire arms made the task of taxing and controlling the agro-pastoral population an uphill battle for state representatives (Markakis 2011:153-156). The state-society relations in these lowlands were heavily influenced by this inimical relationship, and, among others, exacerbated by the fact that the pastoral economy has not been accessible for the state to extract from (Behnke and Kerven 2013).

This was further complicated by the state representatives' project of civilizing the agro-pastoral population. State officials looked down on local cultures, mainly because of the relative nudity and cultural rituals practiced by these communities. Up to present, this view has persisted, and some cultural practices held dearly by local communities are viewed as 'harmful' and activities are undertaken to eliminate them.[9] Ironically, the tourism sector continues to benefit from this same 'backward culture'.

Further, the communities have been criticized of resisting urbanization and development interventions. Meles (2011b) viewed the resistance to development interventions in South Omo, i.e. sugar industrialization, as "want[ing] the pastoralists and their lifestyle to remain as a tourist attraction forever". He also called this group, mainly anthropologists, "the best friends of backwardness and poverty". This in effect shows that this view of "backward" still persists, and the civilizing mission is still intact (Asebe, Yetebarek and Korf 2018). The sedenterization scheme, which aims to settle agro-pastoralists, provide services and train them in ox-plowing techniques to practice irrigated farming, is the latest rendition of 'civilizing' the lower Omo pastoralists.

Therefore, what we see is the promotion of folkloristic aspects of culture, not the core values and practices (Epple and Thubauville 2012). Despite the transformative aspects of the ethno-federal arrangement, particularly in reference to self-governance of minority groups, the national center much remains unchanged. Minority groups of the South Omo zone are still viewed as subjects to be 'civilized,' especially as part of the EDS project. Therefore, the deployment of the EDS in the zone changed the dominant mode of relation between the state and agro-pastoralist groups, with serious implications to the rights of minorities, as will be shown in following sections.

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9 While some practices are deemed harmful following Ethiopia's obligations under international law, mainly related to children and women, others are cultural prejudices including of leather dresses and decorations.

The EDS in South Omo: Konso settlers, Gibe III and Sugar Factories

The expansion of the Ethiopian state southwards to Lake Turkana took place in the immediate years following the battle of Adwa in 1896. After some resistance, the Bodi submitted to the imperial army after many of them were killed (Buffavand 2017:54-62). They were enslaved initially, but later the Bodi started enslaving weaker communities to their south, the Kwegu, in exchange for weapons. They also exchanged ivory for guns (Buffavand 2017). The Bodi used the guns to attack and raid the Dime, and later the Mursi too. By early 1970s, they became the most powerful group in the area and the Mursi had to call for government protection. The imperial army arrived to protect the Mursi and create a semblance of peace. It is at this time a limited government/military presence was established adjacent to Hana River, a small stream flowing into the Omo River (now developed into the capital town of the *woreda*). The assigned governors, however, remained in the Dime highlands, avoiding the lowland's heat (Buffavand 2017).

Salamago had the least contact with successive Ethiopian governments throughout the 20th century. After the establishment of a police post in 1972, the next significant state contact was during the mid-1980s as part of the famine relief operations. In effect, the governing attempt was made from a distance with intermittent direct contact when it was absolutely necessary (Fana 2020; Buffavand 2017). This is significantly different from the experiences of other parts of the Zone, where there were attempts to establish large-scale farms in the late 1980s. The geographic location of Salamago, to the west of Jinka and bordering the Omo River, and lack of road infrastructure kept the community from having strong relation with the state unlike other parts of the zone, which was used to secure the borderlands (Fana 2020).

This geographic constraint was resolved in the early 2000s. In 2001, the federal government passed a new rural development policy, which included resettlement as one food security strategy (FDRE 2001). The SNNPRS government decided to bring more than 800 households from Konso area to settle in the northern bounds of the Bodi-territory (Ayke 2005). Extensive discussions and consultations were conducted by the regional and zonal government before bringing the Konso people. To the *woreda* government, the main attraction was the upgrading of the road linking the *woreda* with Jinka. In practice, the coming of the Konso people opened up the area, as the new comers quickly took advantage of the fertile soils and climate to grow sesame, a cash

crop.[10] In due course, as the Konso expanded their farmlands, partly to accommodate new settlers and as the demand for their removal by the Bodi intensified,[11] the situation became intense and conflict between the two groups became common (Fana 2020). The Konso converted the income from agriculture into further business ventures and bought arms to defend themselves to from the increasing attacks from the Bodi.

Further, the federal government announced the sugar industrialization plans for South Omo, while the Bodi were in the middle of intense confrontations with the Konso. The announcement came at Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's speech at the 11th National Pastoralists Day celebrated in Jinka on 25th of January 2011 (Turton 2021; Meles 2011b). The sugarcane plantations in the zone, known as the Kuraz Sugar Development Project (KSDP), was planned to cover 175,000 hectares of land, with the 50,000 hectares being in Salamago. The activities first started with land clearing and the construction of necessary irrigation facilities in the north of the *woreda*, on Bodi territories adjoining the Omo River (Tewolde and Fana 2014); the sugar estates limited the Bodi southern territory.

The road upgraded to bring the Konso settlers in 2001 was not in good condition to serve the ESC's activities. As such, it was revamped, and a better road was constructed. The greater presence and speed of the trucks, a new phenomenon to the *woreda*, caused road accidents resulting in losses of livestock and human lives. This led to a tense security situation in the early 2010s, with the Bodi often retaliating using ambush tactics against residents of the town (mainly civil servants and traders who came from central parts of the country), employees of the ESC or companies it contracted, and transportation vehicles to and from Jinka (Fana 2020; Buffavand 2017; Tewolde and Fana 2014). This was concomitant with the new socio-economic, cultural and political pressures the Bodi were experiencing from the Konso, who among others, were taking their rain-fed farming lands through continuous migration, and the bigger 'enemy', the Ethiopian government with all its coercive (economic, military and technological) power that came to

10 Interviews with Bodi men and women, and Salamago *Woreda* officials and experts, August 2016, July 2017, and August 2018. See also Buffavand (2017:144)

11 The Bodi insist that the government promised them that the Konso will leave after they become food secure, within five years of their settlement (see details in Fana 2020:12).

the south. In the early 2010s, as detailed in section 6.2 and 6.3 below, the Bodi experienced an existential threat to their survival as a group.

A further threat came when the Gibe III hydro-electric dam started construction (2006) and filling (2015). The dam is located some 200 km to the north of the *woreda*. This served as sufficient reason for the government to resist the idea of including the dam's impact on pastoral communities in the lower Omo Valley. Following external pressures, the government eventually considered downstream impacts of the dam, and recommended artificial flooding, although done without consultations with the pastoralist community (Turton 2021).

Although located hundreds of kilometers further upstream, filling of the dam meant an end of the annual floods, which provide crucial life-sustaining resources to the Bodi and other communities in the lower Omo Valley. In effect, a third of the annual diet of the Bodi was slashed off, due to the absence of the floods.[12]

It is at the peak of these concerted pressures that the government commenced what it called 'voluntary villagization' program in 2012. Although the federal government, through the Ministry of Federal Affairs (currently renamed Ministry of Peace) spearheaded such programs in the developing regions (i.e., Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, and Somali regions), the project in South Omo was run by the regional government with finance from the ESC. This program is meant to sedenterize the Bodi (and later on the Mursi), to reduce their dependence on livestock and traditional forms of farming, to ease challenges of service provision, and acquaint them with ways of modern irrigated farming (Tewolde and Fana 2014). The government intensively campaigned and mobilized resources to convert the agro-pastoralist Bodi into smallholders, often coercively as will be shown in the following pages. Villagization was viewed as a mitigation strategy to offset potential negative impacts from land alienations for sugarcane plantations (Mulugeta 2014). However, it became another interference to the lives of the Bodi and threat to their collective existence (Stevenson and Buffavand 2018; Buffavand 2017).

12 Interviews with Bodi men and women, Hana town, August 2016.

Sacrificing Human Dignity for Economic Development

As the previous section highlighted, the first century of existence under the Ethiopian state had little consequential impact on Bodi cultural, socio-economic and political life. This changed abruptly since the early 2000s following concerted 'development' interventions, which existentially threatened the Bodi way of life. The material base of their collective life has been transformed, disfigured in Bodi views, and appears to be beyond repairs now. [13] For traditional communities like the Bodi with intimate relations with nature (Buffavand 2016), it will be difficult to argue that these modernist changes of the material environment will not destabilize their identity construction. Lucie Buffavand (2017:64) called this stage the 'completion of state-building'. This meant the state, with all the biased views against agro-pastoralists as irrational, backward and in need of civilizing and capacities, arrived in Salamago and is permanently staying. The interest is to capture and exploit resources (water and land), and in the process promote economic development at the cost of dignity of minorities inhabiting the zone. This section focuses on three notable processes through which the Bodi's dignity was sacrificed for the sake of rapid economic growth. The first relates to the 'good governance and rule of law' dimension, the second to the 'peace and political stability' and the third to 'socio-economic' perspective.

Consultation or Convincing?[14]

Two articles of the English version of the Constitution explicitly state the need for consultation with regards to the 'right to development' (Article 43(2)) and 'environmental objectives' (Article 92(3)).[15] This 'need for consultation' is well aligned to the spirit of self-determination (Article 39). However, the wording of these provisions in the legally binding Amharic version of the Constitution is somewhat different.

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13 See the sub-section on 'Impoverishment of the Local Community' below.

14 This sub-section is largely borrowed and adapted from an unpublished co-authored work (Tewolde and Fana 2015).

15 The English version of Article 43(2) reads as "Nationals have the right to participate in national development, and in particular, to be consulted with respect to policies and projects affecting their community" and Article 92(3) reads as "People have the right to full consultation and to the expression of views in the planning and implementation of environmental policies and projects that affect them directly".

The direct translation of the Amharic version of these provisions reads as:[16]

> *Citizens have the right to participate in national development, particularly have the right to be requested to express their opinions on (development) policies and projects affecting their community directly (Article 43(2));*
>
> *The affected people should express their views during the planning and implementation of policies and programmes concerning the environment (Article 92(3)).*

A more appropriate and stringent translation of 'consultation' in Amharic, however, is *memekaker*. Moreover, as Vermeulen and Cotula (2010) stated, environmental impact assessment (EIA) procedures in Ethiopia require public participation. Notwithstanding this requirement and the mandatory status of conducting EIA before embarking on project tasks, some mega-projects proceeded before the preparation of such a report; a case in point being the Gibe III dam.[17] Besides, even when conducted, such assessments do not necessarily capture community wide concerns, but often rather handpicked clan and local government representatives (Vermeulen and Cotula 2010:908).

In Salamago, there was a lot of 'interaction' between the ESC, the local government, and the local community, before and after land clearing, road and irrigation system construction works started. Twenty-four public discussion forums were organized in two years' time, before February 2013.[18] Most of these forums were held at local venues, and a few included trips to other agro-pastoralist communities, which the Bodi and Mursi could relate to and take lessons from.[19] As local officials

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16 The Amharic reads as "ዜጎች በብሔራዊ ልማት የመሳተፍ በተለይም አባል የሆኑበትን ማኅበረሰብ የሚመለከቱ ፖሊሲዎችና ፕሮጀክቶች ላይ ሀሳባቸውን እንዲሰጡ የመጠየቅ መብት አላቸው፡፡" (Article 43(2)); "የሕዝብን የአካባቢ ደህንነት የሚመለከት ፖሊሲና ፕሮግራም በሚነደፍበትና ሥራ ላይ በሚውልበት ጊዜ የሚመለከተው ህዝብ ሁሉ ሀሳቡን እንዲገልጽ መደረግ አለበት፡፡" Article 92(3)).

17 At the start, there was no EIA. The first EIA prepared, after concerted pressure by environmentalist and anthropologists, only included potential impacts at the project site. It took another round of EIA to include impacts in the lower Omo Valley. This shows the intentionality of not doing these safeguarding procedures by the government (Turton 2021).

18 Interviews with Bureau of Agriculture official, South Omo Zone, Jinka, January 2013.

19 The shortest trip was to Dassanech *Woreda* and the farthest to the Karrayu area in the upper Awash Valley.

explained, due to their "lack of awareness" and their "backward local culture", the Bodi and Mursi could not accept the project easily.[20]

The government and the ESC took this form of interaction as consultation with local communities, while international organizations such as Human Rights Watch (2012) did not. Rather than endorsing either side, the approach in this article is analytical and intends to reflect on what really happened in the lowlands. In doing so, the following significant points were identified:

Government approach as expressed in vocabulary used: In interviews with ESC and government officials (at the regional, zonal and *woreda* levels),[21] there was a surprisingly uniform vocabulary use; what officials worked towards is 'convincing' *(masamen)*, and not 'consulting' *(mamaker)* the local community. The difference between the two words is significant. The Amharic dictionary developed by Ethiopian Languages Research Center (ELRC) of Addis Ababa University (ELRC 2001) defines *mekeker*[22] as "discussion, exchange of ideas between individuals to decide on what should be done and should not be done" (ELRC 2001:59). *Asamene*[23] is, however, defined as "getting an idea to be accepted through *masredat* (explanations) or *megletse* (description)" (ELRC 2001:306).[24] Thus, in the case of *masamen* the community's task is to get convinced, not to influence or be involved in the way the project is designed to a significant degree.

Not all interactions between two or more actors could qualify as consultation. There are various forms of interactions between the community and the government. The most basic is informing the community, in what is a one-way information flow from the top echelons of power to the locals (Schlee 2021). In some cases, the community

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20 Interviews with Bureau of Agriculture expert, administrator of Salamago *Woreda*, and official of Bureau of Agriculture, South Omo Zone, Jinka, January 2013.

21 Interviews with Economic Affairs Standing Committee member of the SNNP Regional Council, October 2012; Interview with Zonal, *woreda* and ESC experts and officials, January and February 2013.

22 The Amharic reads as: መደረግ ያለበትንና የሌለበትን ለመወሰን ከአንድ በላይ በሆኑ ሰዎች መሃከል የሚካሄድ ውይይት፣ የሃሳብ ልውውጥ።

23 The Amharic reads as: (በማስረዳት ወይም በመግለጽ) አንድ ሃሳብ ተቀባይነት እንዲኖረው አደረገ።

24 Thus, *masamen* should be translated into convincing, not consultation. The Webester (1981) dictionary defines convince as "to bring to or cause to have belief, acceptance or conviction", and consult as "to deliberate on".

could have the 'luxury' of being allowed to contribute to refining or adjusting the development plans coming from the top. In other cases, local people could be exposed to a constant barrage of information intended to turn them into a believer of the intended project. This form of information flow could best be termed 'convincing', not 'consulting', local people. The crucial difference lies in what is expected from the community. In consulting a community, the official pre-assumes that views of the community are worth listening to and that the information has the potential of affecting the project design significantly. When a government goes to convince a community, however, it will not be to take the views of the local but persuade the community.

Top-down approach: the Bodi resisted the project at first. This resistance, according to project officials and *woreda* and Zone administrators, has been attributed to "pastoral backward" life of the Bodi. As a result, the direction taken to appease local communities and lower the extent of resistance was an intensive discussion campaign with the objective of making them accept the decision cascaded from above.[25] The approach was to 'convince' the Bodi and the Mursi that the KSDP and associated villagization would first and foremost benefit them. The lopsided nature of the interaction in these forums is that the outcome is bound to favour the government and ESC. Furthermore, during the discussions more emphasis was given to socio-economic benefits locals would reap from the KSDP, with little room left for its ramifications on identity and cultural issues.[26]

Timing: The interaction between the local community and government (or ESC) was deferred to the implementation stage, which again shows that the government's intention was not genuine consultation.

Handpicking participants in meetings/negotiations: The South Omo Zone Council, which has the highest political power on issues related to self-determination,[27] did not take part in the actual project appraisal and planning.[28] Neither did the Zone Council properly deliberate on the activities and implications of the development scheme during

25 Interview with key official involved in these interventions, Hana Town, August 2018

26 Ibid

27 Article 81(2) of the Revised Constitution, 2001, of the SNNPR states that the Zone Council "shall exercise the highest political power", "without prejudice to the powers and functions of the House of Peoples' Representatives, House of Federation, and the State Council".

28 Interview with speaker of South Omo Zone Council, February 2013.

implementation. The local elites (mainly young men officials with some schooling, serving in *woreda* and zone governments) were thus only instrumentalized to convince their ethnic fellows.

Failure to implement lessons learned in the past: The EPRDF government is well aware that a genuine consultation (*mekeker*) is a two-way communication process, and that *mekeker* should not be rushed (Bereket 2011:127–129). Following the 2005 elections that resulted with the opposition getting more votes, the EPRDF decided "to stop the cascading of… developmental ambitions from the top and imposing plans on the farmer, and start working only through consultation (*memekaker*) with the farmer; for this reason, it was decided to give ample time for consultation (*memekaker*)" (Bereket 2011:129). Although not certain, if this was followed in the highlands, the experience in Salamago tells that no lesson was drawn from the assessment in South Omo.

The above discussion shows that the government did not meet good governance requirements of consulting the Bodi during the design and implementation of the development projects. The interactions were on sugar estates and sedenterization, ignoring impacts associated with the Gibe III dam. The lack of consultation fed into the ensuing tension and resistance, as will be shown below.

Security Campaigns and Escalation of Conflict

At the turn of the second decade of this century, there was a concerted government effort to deploy all forces (including military) to ensure that the KSDP plans are met in Salamago as well as in other parts of the country. The Bodi experienced this while simultaneously facing a southward push from Konso settlers from the mid-altitude areas the government settled them on. Moreover, car accident related killings and retaliatory attacks have become common. Thus, the Bodi felt they were threatened existentially, and thus found it necessary to do all they could to defend their territory and collective identity. Among others, this resistance was a consequence of the lack of consultative process, the scale of the interventions and their pace.[29]

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29 Various interviews with Bodi men and women, January and February 2013, July 2016 and August 2018.

The government resorted to the use of 'security campaigns' to break this resistance.[30] These campaigns involved the deployment of regional special police force, and at times federal forces, to imprison men suspected of ambushes. In these conflicts, many Bodi men were killed by security forces as well. Over the years, these actions and the permanent stationing of security forces created a strong sense of fear among the Bodi community. In effect, the 'development projects', employees of the sugar estate and town residents, in addition to the machinery and sites of development, were protected from the Bodi. A curfew is enforced in Hana town at 10:00PM, forcing all hotels and restaurants/bars to put their generators down and close. The tense atmosphere in Hana town on market day, Saturday afternoons,[31] is also case in point (Fana 2020).

The first security campaign preceded major sugar development works in 2011. Security campaigns were repeated afterwards almost on a yearly basis. Such campaigns involved the deployment of larger teams of police force, including the regional special police, to the *woreda*, with an aim of capturing suspected criminals, often translated into men who resisted the development interventions. Eventually, by mid-2018, more than 300 Bodi men were imprisoned in Jinka, often with little due process. This is a significant number for a small population such as the Bodi. At the time of imprisonment, the Bodi numbered less than 10,000 individuals, of whom roughly 5,000 would be male. Of these, children and those above the fighting age were at least 60 percent. Thus, the 300 imprisoned men make up to 15 percent of the about 2,000 economically active Bodi men, which had severe socio-economic impacts as shown below. As Carpenter (2006) explains, the sex-selective targeting of men in conflict situations is explained by many factors, the more appropriate for our case being the assumption of men being more violent than women. The latest round of campaign in September 2019 was intended to disarm the Bodi, but left about 40 killed, 50 to 60 people disappeared (mainly men, but including children too) and properties destroyed.[32]

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30 Interview with former expert and official of the Zone's Security and Administration Bureau, Jinka, August 2018. The campaigns took place almost annually, with the first preceding the ESC activities.

31 Saturday is a market day in Hana town where many Bodi sell animals. The view is that many will drink alcoholic beverages with the money and cause problems.

32 https://www.canr.msu.edu/oturn/Memo_(4.0)_on_violence_in_South____Omo_areas_SNNPRS_Ethiopia_(26_October_2019).pdf

The imprisonments and killings constituted a major human rights violation. All of the imprisoned were found guilty despite the fact that they did not have a fair legal process. Most of the men did not have a good grasp of Amharic language and no translators were provided by the courts. There was also no proper legal support provided to the Bodi men; the courts simply sentenced the men by rubberstamping what the zonal government wanted.[33]

Impoverishment of the Local Community

After nearly a decade of interventions, and despite the government's claims of improving the lives of the local community, among others through sedenterization, job creation and creation of an effective demand for meat nearby (i.e. the livestock the Bodi rear), there is very little delivered positive change. The likelihood of meeting the most basic need, food, deteriorated over the course of this decade. As mentioned above, the annual diet of the Bodi used to come in comparable shares from three sources, i.e., flood retreat agriculture in areas adjoining the Omo River, rain-fed agriculture in the mid-altitude areas, and livestock products. The filling and operation of the Gibe III dam as of 2015 meant that communities in the lower Omo Valley, including the Bodi, will no longer be benefiting from the moisture and alluvial soil brought by the floods. Moreover, with the expansion of agricultural activities of the Konso and associated conflicts, rain-fed farming became more and more difficult. Coming to close proximity with the Konso invited conflict, and the government allegedly always sided with the Konso (Buffavand 2017:271). The imprisonments mentioned above resulted in a reduction of men's labour in the local economy too. Although women do most of the agronomic practices, it is men who do the laborious land clearing tasks on which productivity hugely depends. In effect, this second leg of their economy has been devastated by the combined impact of fear of conflict with the Konso and imprisonment of men.[34]

This means that the Bodi have to excessively and increasingly rely on livestock to make ends meet, even in the face of livestock disease and lack of treatment having its own toll (Fana 2020). Thus, the Bodi are converting livestock into grain. Moreover, there is the additional

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33 Interview with former expert of the *woreda* administration, Hana town, August 2018; interview with former expert of the Zone Security and Administration Bureau, Jinka, August 2018.

34 FGD with Bodi men and FGD with Bodi women, Hana town, August 2018.

expense of visiting imprisoned men in Jinka, which is also met by selling livestock. The number of animals owned is on the decline in the Bodi community.[35] As such, the Bodi experienced 'development' as deterioration of their herd holding, socio-economic standing and self-perception. Development in effect became the reverse of what it claims to be: it impoverished them (Fana 2020).

Conclusion

The deployment of the Ethiopian Developmental State project in South Omo lowlands, in the form of sugar industrialization (enabled by the regulation of Omo River's flow by the Gibe III hydro-electric dam) and villagization schemes, negatively impacted the life of agro-pastoral minority groups. The experience of the Bodi shows that an exclusive focus on the human rights, i.e. legal and governance centered analysis, will only tell part of the story. Thus, a human dignity perspective, which takes two additional dimensions, human development (socio-economic) and human security (peace and stability), was adopted for this study.

The lack of consultation, rather the aggressive push to convince the Bodi, was among the major hindrances to ensure the rights of the Bodi with respect to their traditional territory. This did not follow good governance practices, in addition to not meeting the constitutional and legal rights of the Bodi. The limitations in this dimension contributed to further entrenching the dominant view that the Bodi are traditional communities averse to modernization and development. Taking the Bodi as enemies of the state's developmental vision, the government commenced activities in the hitherto isolated area through a security and pacification campaign. This campaign was meant to subdue Bodi's resistance to land alienations and grievances against car accidents (usually fatal), and led to imprisonment of hundreds of men. This did not bring peace and stability, rather fueled further tension and conflict between the Bodi on one side and the government, sugar development activities, town residents and the Konso settlers on the other. Moreover, many interacting factors, i.e. the alienation of land by sugar estates and the Konso settlers, inability to practice flood-retreat agriculture following the filling of the Gibe III dam in 2015, withdrawal of men's labour due to imprisonments, and fear of entering into conflict with the Konso if they practice rain-fed farming, negatively affected the

35 FGD with Bodi men and FGD with Bodi women, Hana town, August 2018; see also Fana (2020).

livelihood and food security of the Bodi. This forced the Bodi to extremely rely on livestock, mainly by selling animals to buy grains, resulting in socio-economic impoverishment over some years.

The interacting three dimensions of human dignity show a deteriorating state of affairs espoused by development interventions. Development and developmentalism was implemented at the expense of Bodi's human dignity. This is not inevitable. Proper planning, consultation and assistance to help the community practice irrigated farming could have helped reverse this situation. The design of development projects, which center on resource extraction in the peripheries should have the interests of minority groups at the center, not as something to be worried about during implementation.

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