

The Transforming Power of Urbanization: Changes and Uncertainties among the Farming Community in Laga Xafo-Laga Dadhi Town, Ethiopian

(Synopsis of a PhD Dissertation)

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Introduction

This article is a synopsis of my PhD dissertation titled “The Transforming Power of Urbanization: Changes and uncertainties among the Farming Community in Laga Xafo-Laga Dadhi Town, Ethiopian”, defended in December 2014. The dissertation has one central point around which several interrelated issues are clustered. The central idea is to explore what has happened to the farming community that has recently included in the administrative boundary of Laga Xafo-Laga Dadhi town. The dissertation consists of eight chapters. Each chapter has its own introduction and subsections. Finally, at the end of the whole body, there are bibliography and annex parts. The annexes contain a sample survey questionnaire, list of farmers who petitioned, and copies of news paper articles pertaining to the major themes in the dissertation.

Background

The United Nations Population Fund (2007:1) disclosed that, for the first time in history, more than half of the world population (3.6 billion people) would be living in urban areas in the year 2011. This same source has shown that, by the middle of the 21st century, the world urban population will likely be of the same size as world’s total population was in 2002, and all of the expected growth will be concentrated in the urban areas of the less

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developed regions whose population is expected to increase from 2.7 billion in 2011 to 5.1 billion in 2050.

The ever increasing proportion of the world urban population, particularly in the less developed regions, brings about a greater change in the size of the built up areas which, in turn, directly affects the livelihood of the farming community in countries like Ethiopia where the majority of the population is dependent on subsistence agricultural economy. In Ethiopia where urbanization is ignited by a capitalist like-new economic policy, the multifaceted changes may be faster than the accepted pattern that some social scientists presuppose in the context of Western or other African urban centers.

In Ethiopia, because of economic and urban policy changes, many of the urban centers in the country are developing with the assumption that they will be the engine for the overall economic growth of the country. However, apart from this fascinating presupposition with a fast expansion of the urban centers, particularly in the small towns around Addis Ababa, no attention has been given to the complex transformation this process exerts on some sections of the country's society. Therefore, making urbanization and urban issues a subject of anthropological explorations will have paramount importance for the practical understanding of the various changes that urban expansion could bring on different aspects of the cultures of societies in new urban areas such as LagaXafo-Laga Dadhi town.

A General Picture of the Problem

Urbanization is "one of the most powerful, irreversible, and visible anthropogenic forces on Earth" (Laumann et.al. 2005: 4). More than half of the world's population lives in urban areas and more than 90% of the future population growth are likely to be concentrated in cities having significant implications for the long-term outlook for humanity (Laumann et.al. 2005:4; UN-HABITAT 2008). Such a process brings about multifaceted changes in a society's way of life as well as to the natural environment.

These changes vary in scope depending on the local contexts in which an urban centre is situated. Yet, there are some common cultural changes that are found out by anthropological studies. One is Barger (1977: 9) who studied the cultural changes that happened among the Inuits and the Cree

people as a result of the establishment of a new urban centre, Quebec, in Canada. Similarly, Ferguson's (1999) exploration into the changes that occurred in Zambia, during which copper mining industries mushroomed along the copper belt, is worth mentioning.

Concerning the area under study, a lot of changes have taken place since 1991, a period when a sudden and abrupt change of the government and a change in economic policy from a socialist oriented economy to a market-oriented economy, was set in place in Ethiopia. Since the establishment of Laga Xafo-Laga Dadhi town, there have been different urban development activities that helped the town to expand to the surrounding areas which were previously inhabited by a farming community.

However, the situation in this town has never been studied by anthropologists. Even in the national context, urban studies seem to be limited to big urban centers like Addis Ababa with their limited scopes on such themes as urban livelihoods, urban poverty, and urban displacement. For example, Nebiyu (2000) has attempted to investigate the impacts of development-induced urban settlement schemes on relocated households in Addis Ababa while Gebre (2008) studied the impact of resettlement projects on low - income households in Addis Ababa. Yet a few works a few works such as Feyera (2005) and Feleke (1999) can be cited as inspiring sources of the current dissertation.

Therefore, every data collected for this study, in one way or another, relates to one or all of the following concerns. First, the urbanization process has altered the communal values and social ties such as the use of land for tracing one's identity or inheritance, and perceptions that have been attached to land have been changing. Second, as it may be the case for other societies, the Oromo farmers who have been living in this area used to exhibit a communal way of life which helped them to maintain their social cohesion which has been affected.

Thus, undertaking such a research can be an eye opening launch pad in Ethiopia where the number of urban anthropological research works is insignificant due to some presuppositions. First, land in general and urban land in particular can easily be politicized and, thus, academics might have resorted to silence. Second, at present, urban lands, especially those in big cities and towns have become a lucrative source of income which often

conforms to the interests of the haves who command strong negotiation power at all levels on the ladder of land transaction. In addition, despite fast urbanizing processes in Ethiopia, urban anthropological research is yet to develop and a study of this kind will be an eye opening launch pad.

Theoretical Considerations

Whenever one picks up any matter pertaining to urban issues, it is apparent for one to dwell on the modes of relations that come to picture. For these relations to prevail there are always agents. In the urban context, it is the human being with all his tools and rules that is found at the center of any form of the interaction and the subsequent outcomes. This has become evident in the urban contexts of the globe where modern capitalism is manipulating any type of the resources by organizing and reorganizing the system to make it fit into its fluid nature. In making an anthropological exploration into the complex urban arena, however, we often lack a clear and all encompassing theory or framework for analyzing pertinent data. With the lack of meticulous theoretical framework for analyzing the data in this dissertation, therefore, it is useful to move between two or more complementary theories.

To begin with, Scudder and Colson (1982) in studying the impacts of the Kariba resettlement scheme on Gwembe Tonga developed a model consisting of four - stages through which people and socio-cultural systems respond to resettlement. Cernea (1997:1) “Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction Model” also aims at categorizing the basic impoverishment risks in forced resettlement and the necessary processes for reconstructing the livelihoods of displacees. In this model, eight major impoverishment risks are identified some of which can be used in explaining what is going on in the present study area. However, it does not give enough space to accommodate the complex interaction and risks that are observed among members of farming community who are exposed to various risks without being physically relocated or displaced. In a similar manner, Colchester (2000) overview of the impacts of dam projects on indigenous populations and ethnic minorities highlights the experience of indigenous people with dam development projects. In this study, Colchester concludes that the specific and strong cultural connection that many indigenous groups have

with the land on which they live makes their physical dislocation potentially more harmful than is often the case for other groups.

Although it is used in a different context, Parker Shipton's (1989: 1) idea of "bitter money" is worth considering in understanding the compensation payment and compensation management of the farming community in this study. Of course, Shipton developed this idea while he was dealing with the cultural economy and some African meanings of forbidden exchanges of commodities with the specific experience from the Luo community of Kenya. He found out that money gained by selling culturally forbidden commodities involves some perceived unfairness or injustice. At the same time, the society Shipton studied believe that things for which the income generated by selling communal land would result in wreck.

The situation in the present study area entails a broader analysis of state - society relationship, all the actors, major resources over which the actors struggle, and the local cultural responses. In addition to using the above models as required, therefore, most of the data for this study is found to be analyzed within the scope of the *Actor-System Dynamics Theory* developed by Burns, Baumgartner, and Deville (2002:2) who argue that:

Culture and institutions as well as physical structures shape and regulate interaction processes and conditions such as those of production, exchange, conflict, the exercise of power, knowledge production and innovation, and social reproduction.

Regarding the freedom of choice in the above explanation, one has to be cautious that some individual or group actors are freer than others in playing their respective roles and in influencing others to act in their favor. Of course, in Ethiopia where the government claims its developmental statehood, it is highly likely that the government still controls much of the land resources.

Methodology and Contents of the Dissertation

The complex nature of the issue in this dissertation has called for the use of all possible methods both qualitatively and quantitatively. Therefore, the dissertation is based on the data obtained from key informant interviews, observation, focus group discussions, a questionnaire, and analysis of government policies and documents. Accomplishing this kind of research should be a painstaking process as it touches some sensitive matters and actors.

Chapter Two presents a review of some of the major concepts and issues that are helpful for undertaking this research. The concepts and ideas are taken from a wide range of academic disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, history, politics, folklore, and development. These concepts and theories are framed around the development of urban anthropology and theories of urbanization, the current situation of global urbanization, the Ethiopian state of affairs in urbanization, urban land policies and land tenure systems in Ethiopia, and the development of a new integrated development master plan of Addis Ababa and Finfinne Zuria Oromia Special Zone as an emergent phenomenon.

Chapter three of this dissertation deals with two major perceptions of land, land as a source of life and land as a source of money. The former is a long established but cracking perception among the Tulama Oromo farming community in the study area while the latter is an emergent ideology for land which has quickly been superseding the former. In this chapter, the contested meaning of land, land as money, discussed in the view of the current land access processes for investment projects and the various actors in the whole process are brought into picture through a particular model of interaction which is summed up as “*man, middleman, and little man interaction*,” where, in this interaction, a sense of disintegration within integration is found to be vivid.

As a follow up of the third chapter, Chapter four, *A Change Changes Much*, deals with some of the major changes that have occurred due to a single change, change in the meaning of land and its functions. Some practical but crucial issues such as land expropriation procedures, compensation for expropriation, rate of compensation and management of cash compensation, the journey that the farmers have made from producers

to consumers, and the overall evaluation of their own living condition as a result of the change in land use right are rigorously analyzed.

Chapter five, framed as “*Fafee - A Cultural Lens to Examine One’s Life and a System*,” is about a particular concept, *fafee*, in Oromo culture. In this dissertation, the concept is explained from the point of view of the Tulama Oromo group where the study is conducted. The Oromo have their long established way of transmitting their cultural values they feel worth sustainable. In doing so, whatsoever they do or encounter / be it bad or good/ is the result of the will of *Waaqaa*, the creator God. For everything that happens, they say *Waaqatu godhe; hojii waaqayyooti*. / It is the work of God/. This can also be used by an individual, a group, or a society being in a joyous or under different forms of stressful conditions or in the state of being helpless. Under His all-powerfulness, it is believed that there are some negative things happening to an individual, a group, or the larger community that can be perceived as the outcome of God’s punishments, for wrong doings or curse from forefathers, which are still under the will of God.

I picked up the concept during my first round fieldwork in the town. It was from February to June 2012 when I first interviewed one of the farmers who was the first to give away his landholdings for development projects and received cash compensation. In expressing his attitude towards what had happened to him and his fellow farmers after their land was expropriated, he gave me this statement: “... *Asis dhaqinee achis dhaqinee nama nudhagahu dhabnee, waan fafateetu nu argate*.” (We went here and there, nobody listened to us; we felt unfit). In Oromo culture in general and among the Tulama Oromo in particular, there are some acts and deeds that are considered *fafee*. During my interview with the elderly people I have consulted them to generate data for my larger research project, I had got a list of cultural concepts that are related to some acts which are considered to be *fafee* among the community. But I am going to briefly discuss four of them which I feel can elaborate the concept in various cultural practices of the community.

The first concept is related with physical incompleteness, particularly congenital. For a family that has got a baby with one eye, one leg, or any incomplete part of the physical body, is assumed to be cursed. It is believed that the family has committed an act against the will of God, and hence He

has revenged it. My informant, BT, told me that this type of *fafa* or the name of the *fafee* is not often mentioned and is kept as a taboo. In addition, no one chuckles at someone who is congenitally *fafee*. This is mainly for fear that someone who laughs at or ridicules such a person or an animal with *fafee* part of the body may encounter *fafachuu*, being *fafee*, in his/her family in the future.

The concept can also be associated with marriage or sexual affairs. Among the Tulama Oromo, one of the most serious cultural practices that need inspection is marriage. A naturally competent person is expected to marry. A man or a woman who remains unmarried is considered to be *fafee*, unfit or incomplete in the community. He/she is not invited to participate in some critical social meetings of certain purposes for he/she does not meet the requirements. In a related manner, a member of the community who has a sexual affair with his /her close or distant kin is *fafee*.

Being coward is another concept attached to *fafee* at individual or group level. *Lunoomuun fafa* / Being coward is frivolous/. In their history, the Tulama Oromo are known for their being fighters and it is not allowed to retreat from any form of group feud or individual confrontation of any cause. A mature young man who is beaten by his village fellow man is not accepted by his family. It is also culturally *fafaee*/ shame/ for a wife to beat her husband. In Oromo culture, it is acceptable for a married woman to endure the punishment her husband induces onto her. She is not even expected to run to a neighboring household for protection. If she does so, she might be seen as wayward to her husband or to her marriage at large. She cannot at all react to his deed. If she does so, she is considered manish and the husband is also scoffed at by his fellow men in his village.

It is equally *fafee* for a man and a woman in the context of the value the Tulama Oromo attach to ethics of work. A normal man or woman, who is naturally able, has the land and the resource, is expected to always engage in daily activities and produce. But sometimes there could be a few deviants who, despite their possession, wander here and there in the villages to share and eat what others have got through their labor. Such individuals are socially disregarded and not even called for traditional work parties. In case such a person happens to join a work party organized by a member of the village, he/she is always insulted by songs sung during cultivation or harvesting in the field. Therefore, the norm encourages hard work if a member of the community wants to be fit and socially acceptable.

In the context of the present research, the concept of *fafee* is used to explain the individual capability, awareness, skill and commitment at all levels of the urban administration in Laga Xafo-Laga Dadhi town. Similarly, it can also be used in a wider context in which there is no clear structure with any defined responsibility and accountability. In the eyes of the farmer who made a comment in the public meeting held on December 10, 2012, the procedure followed to assign the urban administrators is equally *fafee*. “*Akka aadaa keeynatti bulchaa keeyna nutu fillata. Amma ammo gararraadhaa gadi nuti fidani maal goona.* (In our culture, we should elect our leaders. Now you brought some from above. What can we do)”. For the above speaker, it is *fafee* to assign a manager or a mayor without the knowledge or interest of the society. Thus, there exists individual and institutional *fafee* to get the expected services.

Chapter six explores different means of resistance that the farmers have employed to make their voice heard regarding the *fafeeness* of the individual actors or institutions in the overall system. Although resistance is one of the most debatable concepts in social science studies, we always find ourselves in a wave of resistance because we do not trust, believe, accept, or we do not sense that what is presented to us has a direct relationship with our daily life. Or, we resist to others’ acts, ideas, actions, or principles because we are skeptical or suspicious. Similarly, an act that is perceived to be a resistance may not be considered the same by the other. Likewise, there is no agreement regarding the causes of a certain form of resistance. Yet it is always among us in our everyday life in different forms. We always resist resistances.

Before discussing the specific means of resistance that the farmers used in Laga Xafo-LagaDadhi town, it is important to have an overview of two main issues. The first one is ‘expropriation.’ Different sources define this concept in almost related ways. To be clear, we can start from the 1960 Ethiopian Civil Code which defines the concept as “Expropriation proceedings are proceedings whereby the competent authorities compel an owner to surrender the ownership of immovable required by such authorities for public purposes” (Proclamation No 165/1960, Article 1460).

In the above provision of the 1960 Civil Code, there are some central concepts that are crucial even to interpret the current expropriation practices in the research site. The first is the idea of surrendering ownership.

Literally, to surrender is to admit defeat. In this understanding, the land expropriating “competent” authority can compel the owner of the immoveable property to be expropriated in the name of public interest. Therefore, it is given that the loser has no choice except surrendering as ordered. Secondly, public purpose is a more crude and woolly concept in that it can easily be misrepresented. In the case of the land expropriation in Laga Xafo-Laga Dadhi town, this public purpose can be perceived to be partial. The land expropriated in the name of public purpose is often seen to be instrumental for the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few owners of large business establishments or companies at the expense of the wider interest of the majority of the native farming households. Other proclamations such as Proclamation No. 455/2005 (*A Proclamation to Provide for the Expropriation of Landholdings for Public Purposes, and Payment of Compensation*) and the new “*Urban Land Lease holding Proclamation No.721/2011*” of Ethiopia have similar intents. In both proclamations, the concept ‘public purpose’ or ‘public interest’ is void of concrete meaning.

The second concept is resistance, particularly in relation to the land tenure system and land expropriation. Resistance in different forms examines power, inequality and social change (Hollander and Einwohner 2004: 535). In opposition to what is stated in the Civil Code of Ethiopia, it is usually a struggle for not surrendering or, it may be perceived as an instrument to threaten or challenge a certain act that the resister considers to be not in favor of him or her. In this sense, it develops into a conflict. Kerkvliet (2009) divides resistance into three forms: official, everyday, and advocacy. Official resistance deals with scrutinizing authorities in organizations that construct, implement, alter, and/or avoid policies regarding the allocation of resources. Everyday resistance, according to Scott (1985), on the other hand, explains how people accept, abide by and/or question the norms and regulations of authority over the production and distribution of resources in an indirect and unplanned manner. Finally, the advocacy form of resistance is a “direct and concerted effort to encourage, condemn or reproach and contest policies and authorities and even the system and the manner in which resources are produced and distributed (Kerkvliet 2009: 231-2).

Although studies on resistance prominently examine organized, large-scale movements that pose a threat to the state, Scott (1985) argues that

peasant uprisings are more often everyday forms of resistance. This is because subordinate classes have few opportunities to undertake organized and open resistance since they risk violent or otherwise debilitating reprisals from their teasers. Therefore, peasants resort to expressing their dissatisfactions through covert and unorganized measures that are the 'weapons of the weak'. Scott also argues that resistance does not need to be recognized to be effective. He says that its intent is more important than its outcome.

There is a nonlinear connection between resistance and social change which explains the interest in visible social movements and revolutions, regardless of whether they successfully reform the power structures that impeded the movement. However, resisters may also support structures that they oppose in order to question their place within the state. Thus, resisters have varying objectives, and acknowledging these complexities is crucial to understand farmers' resistance. Similarly, in the case of Laga Xafo-Laga Dadhi town, as it could be elsewhere, farmers may adjust their forms of resistance to best suit their circumstances where it turns to be a resistance of every minute in every action.

The literature on resistance here demonstrates that covert, unorganized, unstructured forms are most commonly undertaken by the rural poor farmers. However, the increasing tensions, especially in the battle between capital and the rural land losing farmer, may result in the emergence of advocacy politics which, as a form of resistance, may deepen and transform to a more organized and overt approach. It is in the above broader context that this chapter deals with the new forms of resistance that the farming community used to react to what was going on in their villages as a result of the land expropriation in the name of development activities in Laga Xafo-Laga Dadhi town.

In the case of the farmers in Laga Xafo-Laga Dadhi town, urbanization seems to follow the same pattern that the expansive nature of Addis Ababa has exhibited to date. Many of the people who have constructed houses in the town are migrants from different areas of the country. What is new about this urban centre is that many farmers and their children are still living in the town despite the fact that they were not granted of the use rights over their remaining plots of land due to the fact that the Oromia National Regional Government officially declared that urban land permit

and issuance of site plan was suspended. Therefore, there was a feeling among the farmers that they did not have any guarantee for not losing the remaining land and, thus, started to openly resist any act that went against their interest in the name of development because as, Foucault (1980) argues “there are no relationships of power without resistance...”. In relation to this, Motoji (1998) argues that resistances can take both soft and hard forms. For him, hard form of resistance is the attempt that the poor often show in the form of revolt, riot, or even day- to-day illegal activities. Motoji describes the other form of resistance as soft which appears in everyday life of the resistance through various ways such as networks, organizations, and rituals. In general, both hard and soft forms of resistance are exhibited in Laga Xafo-Laga Dadhi town although the former is more common and structured one. These forms of resistance were expressed by different ways such as petition, using print media, electronic media, strategies, and individual lawsuit.

The seventh chapter deals with the various livelihood strategies that individual farmers employed to adapt to the new urban way of life for they are administratively within the boundary of the town. The last chapter is a conclusion of the whole argument in the dissertation by indicating what possibilities are there to minimize the social and economic risks that that might prevail due to the inevitable urbanization.

Concluding Remarks

This dissertation has engaged in exploring the overall power of urbanization in transforming a particular farming community within a relatively short period of time around the capital city of Ethiopia. The main question that the dissertation has dwelt on is how urbanization has changed the life of a community that was entirely agrarian on a fertile farmland which had been producing surplus agricultural products for the nearby metropolitan area. Urbanization, in the due process, has brought about profound changes.

Among this community, there are always changes, continuities, and uncertainties. The power of urbanization, above all, has changed the perception that the people in that particular area have for land where its original meaning of has started to be contested. Land is now taken as any commodity that anyone can buy or sell it overnight. Even within an interval of a few hours, someone who has bought a plot of land in the morning can

sell in the afternoon with a certain amount of profit, without any value addition. This situation has forced the farmers in the study area to deviate from their traditional understanding of land as a provider of everything to sharing the new meaning of land as a means of accumulating money. By the end of my field work, most of the land in the center of that new urban area was no more used for crop production or animal grazing but for building urban modes of houses and for establishing business setups.

In the whole process of land transaction, the main motive is to accumulate money. Where is this 'bitter money' now? Most of the actors I have mentioned in this dissertation possess it. It is in the pockets of the farmers. It is in the government treasury. The *dallalaa* who mediates both the legal and illegal land transaction has its own share. The individual civil servant or a political appointee who abuses his /her power at municipal, regional, or federal level has got the opportunity to accumulate this 'bitter money'. The change in the meaning of land and the emergence of different actors and formation of an unusual social structure seems to bring about a feeling of exclusion. This sense of conflict had brought about resistance that was exhibited in many forms.

In general, irrespective of individual or group variations on some sensitive global issues of this kind, this dissertation has established that there was a mismatch among the actors' perception regarding the transforming power of urbanization. Actors from the local government and the investors take the position that urbanization had positively transformed the lives of the community while actors who were entirely dependent on agriculture before the coming of an urban way of life into the area were skeptical.

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