

The Politics of Self-Representation in Ethiopia: A Case of the Raya People since the 1930s

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Abstract

This paper is an empirical research that sought to understand the nature of Raya people's self-representation as articulated in reaction to the Ethiopian state administrations since the 1930s. To this end, data was collected from purposively selected informants, focus group participants, observation and archival documents. The collected data was then analyzed by content analysis technique. The study found out that the Raya people see themselves as a united people and the sources of their collective identity are, inter alia, socio-cultural institutions and beliefs and a shared history. The study concluded that the Raya people have been engaging in unhealthy relationship with the Ethiopian regimes and the role of identity was and is vital.

Keywords: Collective identity, self-representation, Raya people.

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As Bourdieu (1991, p.222) indicates, any “conceivable criteria” that can be used to classify or redraw the social reality remains far from being perfect—however it generates its legitimacy from any kind of political rationale. Such form of socio-political reality which is erected on the presumption of “‘natural’ classifications on ‘natural’ region,” Bourdieu strongly argues, “is social through and through.” According to him, such “‘natural’ classifications are based on characteristics which are not in the slightest respect natural and which are to a great extent the product of any arbitrary imposition...of previous state of the relations of power in the field of struggle over legitimate delimitation” (Bourdieu, 1991, p.222).

Given “[t]he frontier, that [is the] product of a legal act of delimitation, produces cultural differences as much as it is produced by it,” (Bourdieu, 1991, p.222) it seems plausible that the Raya people might have been cognizant of such ‘unintended’ outcomes of socio-political compartments, while resisting their division into two by various administrative policies of the Ethiopian State since at least the 1930s. Accordingly, the Raya people rose against Emperor Haile Sellasie I more than once, even before he became emperor of Ethiopia. The single most crucial confrontation between the Emperor and the Raya people that seemed to have a far-reaching consequence is said to be the 1943 *Weyane* rebellion (Tareke, 1991; Desale, 2003; Molla, 2013).

Raya's resentment towards the central government seems to have persisted during the Derg and the current EPRDF regimes. In this regard, following the transformation of the Ethiopian State into a federal structure, for instance, the Raya territory has been placed under the jurisdiction of two different regional national states. While the Northern segment commonly known as Raya-Azebo currently forms the southernmost territory of the Tigray National Regional State, the other half, also commonly known as Raya-Kobbo, is today part of the Amhara National Regional State (Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 1995).

Needless to mention here that the current political decisions that places the Raya people into two separate political units seems to sound logical on the pretensions of language affinity, the Raya people

might have seen such logical pretensions as inherently inadequate and thus unfair to them. They seem to regard the current federal system as doing little justice to them for this very same system might have been understood by them as a perpetuation of the status quo of an artificial bisection (Desale, 2003; Berhie, 2007; Reta, 2004; Reta & Addisu, 2013).

However, as far as literature on our subject of study is concerned, there is a dearth of works. Among these meager sources, unpublished undergraduate university senior essays mainly by students from the study area made up the lion-share. Yet, though their circulation is limited to university compounds, they provide an insider perspective, as far as the Raya are considered, on their respective focuses like ethnicity and collective identity recognition (Berhie, 2007; Desale, 2003) national movement (Reta, 2004) and indigenous traditions and practices (Retie, 2003).

The works of Del Bayo and Parlesak, two veterans of the Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935, are worth mentioning here. These autobiographical works narrate the experiences of these two foreigners who happened to take part in the Italo-Ethiopian War on the Ethiopian side. These works allegedly have played a significant role, as it apparent in the current public and historiographical stereotypical reference to the Raya people, in influencing the perception of 'some' people of Ethiopia towards the role of the Raya people during the war.

Only recently do we come to see the publications of Molla (2013) and Reta and Addisu (2013) that are entirely dedicated to the Raya cause. Both books argue that the Raya people are one people that have their own unique identity. But they tried to address this thesis differently. While Molla's work shows how such different constellations as the Oromo, Amhara, and Tigre entered the Raya land and the different components of the cultural wealth of the Raya, Reta and Addisu's political history ventures to tell us how the different rulers of Ethiopia starting from Emperor Yohannes IV until the incumbent regime have infringed upon the autonomy of the Raya people, and how the latter resented and, in defiance of its autonomy, tried to resist these centralization projects. However, these works lack vivid methodological orientation, did not use pertinent archival and oral sources to the periods discussed, and finally lack consistent citation.

Despite some limitations, the reviewed works have rendered some insights to our paper, mainly in terms of understanding why and how the Raya people have not been at ease with centrally orchestrated administrative policies the Ethiopian state, and how the former translate the latter's policies both as an actual and a possible threat to the very existence of the Raya people as one people.

This paper, thus, discusses the basic social fabrics that bind the Raya people as one collective entity or group. To this end, the paper begins its task by setting a historical context before discussing its methodological assumptions in the next section. After discussing the main findings of the research in its third section, the paper finishes its overall task by providing some concluding remarks.

Historical Background

Ethiopia is culturally diverse country where "more than eighty languages are spoken, each embodying a unique cultural heritage and a distinct identity" (Markakis, 1989, p. 118). In this regard, the state expansions that occurred between late 19th and early 20th centuries under Emperor Menilek II are regarded by some commentators as the cardinal catalyst for this outcome (Tareke, 1991).

With the demise of Menelike II, the modernization and centralization process of Ethiopia was taken over by Emperor Haile Sellasie I. Despite his government's concerted effort to tame the Ethiopian population, the regime of Haile Sellasie I was not immune to resistance and eventual down fall as it faced rebellion and armed struggle in his post-exile-reign (1941-1974). The *Woyane* rebellion, to which the Raya were one of the core members, was one of these resistances.

In 1974, the imperial system came to be replaced by the military dictatorship of the Derg which resumed the centralization project. In fact, as Clapham (1988) argued, the main purpose of the regime was to build a "centrally commanded and organized state ... which it ha[d] inherited and sought to extend" (Clapham, 1988, p. 128). Moreover, Derg's philosophy of administration happened to be uneven in theory and practice. Although the Derg recognized "the equality of all peoples and cultures of Ethiopia", and adopted the principle of self-determination of 'nationalities', in practice "even nominal self-government failed to emerge during the first decade of the regime." In other words, the Derg declared cultural pluralism, but denied political freedom (Vaughan, 2003, pp. 147-150). As such, the state was

engulfed in a state of civil war which finally led to the coming of Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1991.

Following the coming of EPRDF, a federal structure that is based on ethno-national identity has been instituted in Ethiopia. One of the 'innovative' elements of this constitution is the stipulation that the various collective identities of Ethiopia known by this constitution as 'nations, nationalities and peoples' have the right to self-determination even up to secession. However, the main criteria employed to organize the people of Ethiopia along ethnicity appears to be language, the very criterion abandoned by the Derg for its impracticality in Ethiopia (Vaughan, 2003, p. 34). Yet, in the constitution it is stated that the delimitation work was based on "the basis of settlement patterns, identity, language, and consent of the people concerned" (Constitution of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia).

It is, thus, against this historical background that we intended to study the politics of self-identification in Ethiopia with a particular reference to the Raya people.

Methods

The research project that we have been engaged with was highly an empirical endeavor that seeks to understand the nature of Raya's way of self-representation and thereby any form of social practices as moderated by their notion of self-understanding throughout their recurrent encounter with the Ethiopian state apparatus since at least the 1930s. To this end, our inquiry adopted a qualitative approach and carried out a mix- of diachronic and synchronic inquiries so that we could be able to see how the Raya people have been situating themselves *vis-à-vis* the different administrative policies of Ethiopian State since the 1930s. To this end, our research made use of a myriad of methods of data collection: library research, interview, and observation.

The library research was mainly a review of related and existing literature in the topic under investigation. This study heavily made use of secondary literature as opposed to primary literature due to the unavailability of the latter resources. The secondary literature was written in English or Amharic¹ languages. Undergraduate and graduate university theses, which revealed the opinion and feelings of the authors and the participants of these respective works, were particularly utilized.

Given the research questions we put forward, the best way to gather data was by using semi-structured and unstructured interview. As such, several field trips were made to the research site and the interviews were conducted in 2015. The process of data collection involved many activities. Interviewees were purposely selected and identified based on some criteria like knowledge of the area and issue, occupation, age, and government position and later their consent for the interview was asked orally and eventually gained on conditions that their opinions should be used for the research alone and any harm will not happen to them because of their participation in the interview. As such, the primary data was collected from those selected informants of the inhabitants of the Raya areas of Kobbo, Alamata, and Mehoni towns and their environs. Both one-to-one as well as focus group discussions were conducted. The interview was tape recorded and brief note was also taken during the interview. The data collected through such method was also complemented by the informal and unrecorded discussion held with the inhabitants of the area. Formally, a total of 35 people were interviewed on one-to-one basis and six focus group discussions with six members in each group were undertaken. The notes and audio recordings were then transcribed. Some of the transcripts were showed to the participants for verification. Also, since the participants found the topic under investigation politically sensitive and demanded to be cited on condition of anonymity and there is repetition of statements by the participants regardless of their location, in the in-text citation, the paper provided date of interview. Yet, other pointers like place and occupation were mentioned when necessary.

For the sake of closely observing if there are any kinds of symbolic resources that are used by the Raya people, attempt has also been exerted to observe cultural practices and self-expression by attending some rituals, such as community rituals. A written description of the rituals of the indigenous belief systems observed was made. Using such observations, we were able to see on the spot why and how such symbolic resources; namely, rituals are important for the Raya people to feel as one people.

¹ Amharic has been used as an official or working language in Ethiopia at different times. Currently, it is the working language of the country.

Archives from the Ethiopian National Archives and Library Agency were also utilized for this research. But, the archives we were able to collect and consult were restricted only to the Imperial regime. We could not get archives that cover the Derg and also evidently the current regimes. This happened to be one of the major problems we faced during the research process.

Finally, the data gathered via interview, observation, and documents was analyzed through content analysis method. The transcribed data was studied and categorized. And from this categorization of the ideas collected, themes of the paper emerged.

Results and discussion

The results amassed via various techniques are analyzed along three themes. These themes include the constitutive elements of the Raya unity; the dialectics between Raya's sense of self-representation and the different administrative policies of the Ethiopian state since the 1930s; and change and continuity in the encounter between the Raya people and the Ethiopian State since 1930s. The entire discussion that follows within this section is thus structured along these themes.

Sources and constitutive elements of the Rayan unity

The constitutive elements that are taken by the Raya people as their source of unity are categorized under different aspects of their societal affairs. These aspects include socio-cultural, economical and historical elements. The socio-cultural aspect includes the costume and the dressing style that entails men to wear erbo, dig, gonbiso, and tirq chama; and women to wear kemis, meqenet, netela, and tirq chama. The other important element of this aspect is the role of marriage which "is perhaps the most important" decision of a family that has a huge impact on the source of a certain ethnic group. This is because "endogamy gives concreteness to conceptions of ethnic affinity and makes the group a descent affiliation" (Horowitz, 1998, p.17). The Raya people appear to be linked among themselves by the institution of marriage regardless of their placement under different administration areas (Interview, 2015).

The belief system is also another shared culture among the Rayans. There is a peaceful co-existence between the believers of the two major religions in the Raya area – Christianity and Islam. People respect one's choice and live side by side and accompany each other during bad times and good times. There is also an indigenous belief system among the Rayans that is demonstrated through a series of rituals and ceremonies. These rituals are practiced at individual, family, and village levels and the common rituals include Zar cults, Tufta, Wedaja and Duberti (Desale, 2003; Interview, 2015).

While the conductors of these rituals are usually Muslims, the participants come from both religions. These rituals and ceremonies have social, economic, and political functions for the Raya people. These rituals are also moderated by their own respective rules and guiding principles which clearly show, for instance, which section of the population is allowed or not to take part in the rituals. As such, wedaja and tufta are practiced exclusively by men; duberti is reserved for women; and zar is open for both sexes (Interview, 2015; Molla, 2013). They synchronize the indigenous belief along with the official religions. That is why we observe big ritual ceremonies held as per the etiquette of their indigenous belief system synchronically with the memorial dates of Christian saints. For example, July 5, September 2, May 1, January 7, etc, all in Ethiopia calendar, are memorial dates for Christian saints in commemoration of St. Abo, St. John, Virgin Mary, and Holy Trinity, respectively (Desale, 2003; Interview, 2015; Retie, 2003).

Besides to such socio-cultural elements as the diet system that is mainly based on milk and milk products; and the ceremonies related to happiness and sorrow, cultural songs, cultural sports, cultural dance, customary conflict resolution mechanisms like Zeweld and Mezarid, the economic aspect is also mentioned as a source of unity. The Raya people have been practicing mixed farming (sedentary and animal husbandry) and harvesting similar types of crops (teff, maize, sorghum). Unique to the animal husbandry practice, the Rayans used to get these cattle via the formal mechanism of market system and also through the now-extinct informal mechanism of forceful acquisition from the neighboring Afar people called gaz zemecha. The gaz zemecha, literally translated as 'invasion campaign', was practiced for centuries by the Raya people against the Afar people. This zemecha had economic, social and military values to the Raya people (Interview, 2016; Molla, 2013).

Common history is also mentioned as a source of unity among the Raya people. The informants and secondary sources argue that the history of the Raya people begins with the Doba, the ancestors of the Raya people. It is argued that, the various expansionist campaigns conducted at different times by the Axum kingdom, Zagwe kingdom, and the Solomon medieval kings had a significant effect upon the territory the Doba once held. As a result of such expeditions, the Dobas lost much their southern territory to the Angot (Qeda) expansionists and were forced to settle in today's Raya Azebo area. As such, the Dobas and Angots were said to have settled in today's northern (Raya -Azebo) and southern (Raya-Kobbo) Raya areas and followed Islam and Christianity religions, respectively. Until the coming of the Oromo people during the 16th century to this specific area, the two groups were arch-enemies. Through time, the Oromo moved to these earlier settlers and overcame these people (Molla, 2013, pp. 177-181).

With such historical event, it is argued, emerged a new synchronized identity, the Rayan identity out of the amalgamation of the Dobas, the Angots and the Oromos. Nonetheless, this Rayan identity has been under transformation as the Raya area came to witness the coming of various groups (Tigrigna speaking, Amharigna speaking, Agewigna speaking peoples) to its territory and in such a way produced the contemporary multi-lingual and multi-religious, but arguably a united people that shared similar societal values and norms (Desale, 2003; Interview, 2015).

The Raya people and the Ethiopian state since the 1930s

Since the 1930s the Ethiopian state has witnessed the reign of three regimes: the Imperial, military junta, and the incumbent EPRDF's regime. These three regimes followed different policies of administration which happened to define and re-define the Raya identity and its concomitant administrative placement. So, in this section a discussion on the nature of relationship between the Raya people and the policies of these three regimes is presented chronologically.

The Raya people and Emperor Haile Sellasie I

Following his return from exile, the Emperor went ahead with its centralization process which was not welcomed everywhere including among the Raya people. The centralization process eventually produced a rebellion popularly known as the *Weyane* rebellion. This rebellion was not an all-Rayan affair as it included Tigrean nobilities and peasants, too. But it was a Rayan-inspired rebellion because it was the Raya people who instigated the uprising and started the flame against the Imperial regime (Reta, 2004). As to Zewde (1991), the *Weyane* rebellion of the Rayans is regarded as a "continuation" of the pre-Italian 1935 invasion conflict between them and the center (Zewde, 1991, p. 215).

The *Weyane* rebellion, which is regarded as a concerted effort of the Raya people against the intrusion of the state, became the "litmus test of imperial administrative and territorial centralization [and] was a relatively restricted, localized movement with strong provincialist or *ethnic overtones* (emphasis added)" (Tareke, 1991, pp. 89-91). The Raya people organized and led this rebellion, along with their northern Tigre neighbors, mainly because "they felt [that the state centralization process] posed a danger to their communal ideals of egalitarianism and justice" and hence, they wanted to hinder this state encroachment (Tareke, 1991, pp. 89-91). But, in addition to such factors, there were immediate causes that sat off the *Weyane* rebellion. The policy of disarmament the Imperial regime ensued (Del Boca, 1965, p. 263) and the appointment of *Dejazmach* Admasu from Wag, a non-Rayan, as governors of the people apparently became the immediate cause for the outbreak of the rebellion. The resistance and its concomitant victory of the Rayans over the appointment of *Dejazmach* Admasu got momentum, spread and saw the rallying of their Tigrean neighbors (specifically Enderta). Yet, the revolt was finally contained with the coordinated attack of air and ground forces. Particularly, the air attack provided by the British was instrumental in quelling the rebellion (Molla, 2013, pp. 117-121; Archives File No. 2.2.86.06).

The consequences the *Weyane* rebellion was not uniform across the participants, however. The nobility, in lieu of punishment, they were awarded positions in the Imperial administration. The Raya people, on the other hand, faced harsh treatment at the hands of the Emperor. But the punishment was uneven across the Raya territory. As retaliation to their orchestration of the rebellion, the state not only bombarded places like Kobbo, but also "it destroyed the social basis of authority and autonomy, and reduced the Raya and Azebo to landless peasants" (Tareke, 1991, pp. 89-91). Particularly, the ramifications of the *Weyane* rebellion on the Raya people were disastrous. Peasants and *balabats* of the Raya-Azebo area were forced to become landless and tenants to the newly appointed aristocrats; heavy taxation was levied; their land was centralized and subjected to measurement and sold to rich

aristocrats. Apart from this, the Raya people were also placed under military administration and the territory was divided into two placed under different administrative units (Interview, 2015).

The letters exchanged from 1944 to 1945 between the Emperor and the Crown Prince Asfawosen reveals that at this time there was some kind of political struggle between the Tigray and Wollo *teqlay gizats* over the administrative boundaries and placement of the Raya people. Initially, an independent Raya-Azebo administrative unit was established and placed temporarily under the Tigray *teqlay gizat* because of security reasons. But as time went on, what was supposed to be temporary placement assumed permanency and *ipso facto* raised the eye brows of the Wollo administrators and the Emperor himself. The series of coded and confidential telegraphs made between the Emperor and the Crown Prince epitomizes this struggle (Archive file No. 2.2.86.06; Archives File No. 2.2.4.10).

The Raya people's link to the *Weyane* rebellion is attributed to their socio-cultural and military tradition called the *weyane* tradition, whereby *weyane* refers to the traditional sport of fighting that was performed at a specific place and time among the Rayas themselves. This *weyane* tradition had various purposes – it was a test of 'manhood' or 'manly' physical fitness; it served as some kind of military academy where the youth would get the chance to learn the basics of fighting (both theoretically and practically); and finally it was the breeding ground for future leaders of like *gaz zemachoch* (Interview, 2015). On the contrary, the *Weyane* rebellion is presented by Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), one of the four members of the coalition party of EPRDF, as the Tigrean nationalism against the hegemony of Amhara. As Young (1996) succinctly stated that "the TPLF regards the rebellion as representing a revolt of an oppressed nation against Shoan Amhara oppression" (Young, 1996, pp. 532-533).

Roughly after two decades and plus, in 1968, a peasant rebellion also occurred in Wollo, to which Raya-Qobbo *awraja* belonged. This revolt was caused by the 1967 tax legislation, the same legislation that generated the Gojjam uprising. The 1968 peasant rebellion was caused by the decree of land measurement and the fear of possibly higher taxation that would come with the measurement; lack of economic power to pay the taxes; lack of representativeness and impartiality of the tax assessment committee. The revolt was some kind of passive resistance as people with good reputation were selected and sent to Addis Abeba to present their dissatisfaction to the Minister of Interior, Prime Minister, and the Emperor himself (Dessalegn, 2009, pp. 123-131). Here again we see another conflict between the Raya people and the Emperor.

The Raya people and the Derg regime

The military, popularly known as *derg*, came to assume power after a popular revolution in 1974. One of the most important legacies of the Derg regime was its land reform proclamation, Proclamation No. 31 of 4 March 1975: "*A Proclamation to provide for the public ownership of rural lands*" (Van der Beken, 2007, p. 27) that proclaimed all land to be state land, abolished the hitherto land tenure system, and allocated peasants a land to till. This land reform, as to Clapham (1988), was implemented "on a whole successfully, fairly, and without a vast amount of local conflict." However, there were some areas, like Wollo, which resisted this new land reform. The Wollo revolt, which lasted for over two years between 1977 and 1978, posed a serious challenge to the Proclamation and the process of its implementation (Dessalegn, 2009).

The peasant revolts had significant impact on the Derg's political power in rural areas. The rural revolts came to play vital role in restricting state power and concomitantly creating a power vacuum in these rebellion areas which in turn attracted the organized anti-Derg rebel movements like TPLF and EPRP (the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party) to take a foothold in northern Wollo instead (Dessalegn, 2009, p. 173). This argument seems to be proven right when it comes to the experiences of the Raya people. When the Derg clashed with the Raya people, the TPLF rebel forces filled in the power vacuum and made the Raya people their supporter. This in turn also angered the Derg regime which went on to bombard towns like Chercher and Mehoni. Nonetheless, this Derg action went on to further detach the Rayans from the regime (Interview, 2015).

Moreover, the political map of Ethiopia did not change with the coming of the Derg as this regime continued to use the existing administrative structures of the imperial system up until the 1987 constitution (Clapham, 1988, p. 201). But, the introduction of a new constitutional did not change the status of the Raya territory. As such, the Raya people continued to be placed under the Tigray and Wollo provinces (Interview, 2015).

Nevertheless, in the late 1980s, in its twilight period, in an attempt to block any Rayan support to the rebel groups and woo them to its side, the Derg regime is said to have authorized a team to study essentially the 'Rayan' identity so that the regime could decide the status of the Raya people depending on that finding. Yet, this delayed move was too late to appease the Rayans and Derg lost the political power to the coalition forces of EPRDF in 1991 (Reta and Addisu, 2013, pp. 229-230).

The Raya people have played not insignificant role in the process of the eventual overthrow of the Derg regime. They resisted the military dictatorship by joining the two important rebel groups - TPLF and EPDM (Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement, now called Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM)). The form of resistance then was multifaceted that included joining the rank and file of the rebel groups and providing any support that was deemed necessary in the fight against the regime (Reta and Addisu, 2013, pp. 229-230).

Unlike 'Tigrean' or 'Amharan' fronts which were formed to safeguard their constellations against the Derg, there was absence of such an organized exclusive 'Rayan front' that 'represented' the Raya people. Their resistance was rather embedded within the TPLF and EPDM movements. Obviously, this scenario has clear ramifications on the post-Derg Rayan question for self-determination and other related social, economic and political questions. In the absence of an organized and recognized body, like a political party, that represents the Raya people, who would ask the state to answer the allegedly perpetual identity question and mount resistance, when necessary, against the state.

The Raya people and EPRDF

Following the coming to power of EPRDF in 1991 and *Ipso facto* a ratification of its own new constitution in 1995, a federalism structure that is mainly based on ethnic identity is planted in Ethiopia. However, the main criteria employed to organize the people of Ethiopia along the ethnic line is arguably language.

The transformation of the Ethiopian State from unitary into a federal structure did not alter the status quo as the Raya territory and people continued to be bisected and placed under the jurisdiction of two distinct regional states. While Raya-Azebo (northern part) is under the Tigray National Regional State, Raya-Kobbo (southern part) came to be placed under the Amhara National Regional State. Each part has been also further divided into *weredas* (districts) and the Raya people came to be administered under six *weredas*. As a result, the Raya-Azebo part is divided into Raya-Alamata *Ketema Wereda*, Raya-Alamata *Geter Wereda*, and *Raya-Azebo Ketema Wereda and Raya-Azebo Geter Wereda*. The Raya-Kobbo part consists of Raya-Kobbo *Ketema* and Raya-Kobbo *Geter weredas* (Interview, 2015).

As it appears, the division of the Raya people in such a way, as stated by our informants, is arguably based on the language criterion of ethnic federalism as the Raya people speak dominantly two languages (*amharigna* and *tigrigna*). Accordingly, the inhabitants in the Raya-Azebo part speak dominantly *tigrigna* and *amharigna*, and even some of them also add *oromigna* and *agewigna* to their language skill. But the inhabitants of the Raya-Kobbo part speak solely *amharigna* (Interview, 2015).

Contrary to the government's rule, however, the Raya people argue that the language marker cannot and is not working in their case for the simple reason that it overlooked other vital criteria like psychological make-up, settlement pattern, shared history and above all the consent of the people. Hence, they seem to regard the current federal system as doing little justice to the Raya People for the same system by being artificial and alien system not only imposes an external constraint on the will of the Raya people to exist as one collective entity, but also appears to perpetuate the status quo of their 'unfair' bisection (Interview, 2015).

On top of this apparent dissatisfaction, according to Reta and Addisu (2013), the placement of some of the dominantly *amharigna* speaking Raya people under the Tigray national regional state that officially declared *tigrigna* language the *lingua franca* of its region seems to contradict the very essence of the right to self-determination and as a result perpetuate the resentment of the Raya people. This means that their children are not allowed to get their primary education in their mother tongue; and the people are not administered in the language that they understand. They also argue that the Tigray regional state is purposely following a policy to instill a Tigrean identity and psychological make-up among the Rayans (Interview, 2015; Reta and Addisu, 2013, pp. 231-244).

The Rayans appeared not to be silent about their new post-Derg placement and the concomitant consequences, however. They, particularly university students, try to bring the Raya issue into the limelight whenever opportunities are available. But, according to our informants, the questions they ask are not usually positively met and the government is doing all what it can at its disposal to hinder any

'anti-government establishment' questions. Nonetheless, regardless of the dissimilarity of our informants' background, all the informants are of the opinion that the current federalism structure based on identity is anti-thesis to the character of the Raya identity and history due to the fact that people who follow different religion and who speak different languages have been living in the region for centuries in a peaceful manner. As it is mentioned above, language and religious variances did not matter for the Rayans, they are rather the sources of its identity and its very existence. Thus, it looks almost impossible to think of a Raya identity without such elements. As such, the current federal structure seems to go against their very identity and is resisted by the Raya people. To date, the resistance is short of an organized one, but popular resistance is active and is manifested peacefully as well as in violent ways. The resistance against the EPRDF regime resembles what Scott (1989) calls "everyday forms of peasant resistance" which are characterized as hidden and prevalent (Scott, 1989).

Change and continuity in the encounter between the Raya people and the Ethiopian State since 1930s

The response to this theme was determined by the background (level of education, membership in civil society organizations and prior and current political involvement) of informants that we have interviewed. As such, our informants happened to be divided when addressing this theme. The majority mass detects change than continuity. What has changed for them for example is the reconfiguration of the internal administrative boundaries of the Raya people and their placement under two autonomous regions that is based on identity marker, especially language. However, there was no internal unity within this group of people as different segments of the Raya mass exhibited different reactions to this very question. This resulted probably out of the current state structure of Ethiopia.

One can find three segments of the Raya population with two types of reactions: those people who speak dominantly *Tigrigna* (inhabitants of such places as Mehoni, Churcher and Alamata) that are under the jurisdiction of Tigray regional state; those people that speak dominantly *Amharigna* language (inhabitants of such places as Balla, Waja and Selen Wuha) that are under the jurisdiction of Tigray regional state; and finally those people that are currently under the Amhara regional state and are speakers of *Amharigna* language. True to this language profile, those people that speak dominantly *Amharigna*, but located within the Tigray region showed great dissatisfaction with the current political system as it does not allow them to use their own mother-tongue language and enjoy its concomitant rights.

The other segment mentioned above those who are not subject to such experience are not really opposed to the system as such if we were to take language as a criterion for they are the speakers of the language of their respective regional languages. Particularly, here they emphasize the negative impact the current federalism experiment that has brought upon those segments of the Raya people that are located within the Tigray regional state who speaks Amharigna. Here it is underlined that the *Amharigna* speakers are disadvantaged as they are forced to communicate any official cases via the medium of *Tigrigna* language to which they are not familiar with. As such, they failed to see any continuity that runs since the 1930s (Interview, 2015).

The educated "elite", on the other hand, ventured to mention changes and continuities. What has changed throughout the period since the 1930s is them the administrative structure of the Raya people: the placement of the Raya people under different administrative centers – for instance, during the Haile Sellasie I era some of them were placed under Tigray administration and the rest under the Wollo *teqalay gizat*, and now some of the former Wollo *teqalay gizat* are placed under the new Tigray regional state. As to the question of what has continued, the informants focus on the continued division of the Raya people and its placement under various administrative centers respective to the various eras. They emphasize the unanswered question of Raya quest for unity and its resultant self-rule (Interview, 2015).

However, both the majority masses and the educated "elite" sections of the Raya people vented their unhappiness vis-à-vis the Tigray regional state for this very state not only arguably prohibits them from using and developing their language and culture, but also for daring to continue appointing an outsider governor (usually from the heartlands of Tigray) both at *zone* and *wereda* levels, instead of cultivating the home-grown talents. And whenever an appointment of a local figure occurs, though they are very few in number, people think he is serving the interest of his masters, not the

people. Likewise, they believe that some kind of hidden plan is being ensued by the Tigray regional state that meant to achieve some kind goal (like expansion of the Tigrean authority and identity) (Reta and Addisu, 2013, pp. 6-7).

Concluding remarks

This study was conducted with the objective of understanding the nature and constituent elements of the Raya people self-representation and the dialectics between Raya's sense of self-representation and the different administrative policies of the Ethiopian state since the 1930s. The study, then, found out the relationship between the Raya people and the Ethiopian governments to be unhealthy and the main sources of conflict between them has been the state's centralization process (like land tenure system and policies and infringement upon the traditional political autonomy) and identity-based federalism. As such, the role of collective identity in the confrontation between the Raya people and the regimes is not always clear cut: it was visible in the *Weyane* rebellion and has come to the forefront under the current regime, but it was not the central issue during the Derg. Finally, based on the finding of this research it is tempting to conclude that the criteria the three regimes employed to structure and restructure Ethiopia has not been free from criticism and even resistance. And this has been illustrated by our case study, the Raya people.

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