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Livestock and Economic Differentiation in North East Ethiopia: The Afar Case

Ayele Gebre Mariam

Among the Afar, in the north east rangelands of Ethiopia, inequality in livestock holding is attributed to the emergence of ownership of livestock capital which includes cattle, camels, sheep and goats. The nature of the livestock capital depends on the growth potential of herds and flocks and the vulnerability of the Afar production system to ecological variations. Ecological pressures such as droughts, diseases, and epidemics, which have the tendency of creating the socio-cultural levelling mechanisms, have an effect on the nature of livestock capital as well. Inequality in livestock wealth among households is also affected by socio-cultural mechanisms and the network of social and economic obligations and credits. The social institutions do not allow for occupational specialization and therefore the increase in growth of livestock is not invested in other sectors of the local community.

Introduction

The Area

The Afar live in both Ethiopia and Djibouti. In Ethiopia the Afar inhabit the administrative regions of Harerghe, Shoa, Wollo, Tigrai and Eritrea. The economic base of the Afar is competitive. The area under discussion constitutes the north-east rangelands of Ethiopia, which is in the hot, tropical bioclimate of Africa and is inhabited by the Afar. The rangelands are hot, harsh and inhospitable for human existence. The region is dissected into arid and semi-arid bioclimate. The Afar in Ethiopia number about 666,000 people with cattle, camel and small stock population estimated at about 700,000, 300,000 and 3,000,000, respectively.

In the arid areas the average annual rainfall from 1962 to 1982 was 225mm, and the range was from 152mm to 322mm. In semi-arid areas the average annual rainfall from 1966 to 1982 was 561mm, and the range was from 444mm to 681mm. Drought occurrence is a frequent phenomena in Afar land and occurs at least once every 10 years. The mean temperature at 1700m on the escarpment is 22°C and increases to about 29°C at 450m. The vegetation types consist of bush land, grassland, dwarf shrub grassland, bushed grassland, sparse bush grassland, and woodland. Volcanic ash and lava flows is a common occurrence, thus making pastoralism extremely precarious.

Livestock

The Afar camel is a humped back slim animal smaller than the Somali camel. The life span of a female camel is about 30 years. The age at first calving starts on the fourth year and sexual maturity is attained at four years of age. The interval between calving depends on climate and food. The calving interval varies from one to four years. The lactation period varies according to bad, good and/or normal years. The gestation period ranges from 12 to 13 months. A female camel gives 8 to 12 births, though a few camels give 20 offspring during their life time. The average morning and evening milk yield of a camel is 1022ml. (sample size 84) and 1131 ml (sample size 55), respectively. The most important subsistence use of camels is for milk, meat, and transport. An Afar camel is also used for riding.

The breed of cattle in Afar land is *senga* type with long lyre shaped horns. The senga type is now replaced by the highland Zebu in areas adjacent to Oromo lowlands. The age at first calving for a cow is 3–4 years.

The calving interval is 10 months to one year. Sometimes, the calving interval extends as long as 2 years. A cow is milked for 5 months. The gestation period for cows is 9 months. The average morning and evening milking of the Afar cows is 1229ml (sample size 125) and 1326ml (sample size 128). The average daily milking is 1278ml. Cows are used for milk. Cattle skins are sources of sandal, mattress and human shelter.

The Afar sheep are fat rumpled. The head has a straight profile without horns. The tail has a fat broad base. The gestation period for ewes is 6 months. The first lambing is at the age of one year and the life span is 8–9 years. The age first calving ranges from 8 months to one year. The lambing interval varies from 6 months to one year. The average morning and evening milk of a sheep is 390ml (sample size 38) and 381ml (sample size 56), respectively. The average daily milking was 385ml. Sheep butter is used for household consumption, the skin is used as a grain sack, or sleeping mat, or put on animals backs for loading, and as pads protecting women knees while grinding corn. Afar slaughter sheep for religious ceremonies, circumcision, burial, visitors, when grain is in short supply, and a woman gives birth.

The Afar goat is a medium legged animal often with a deep chest. The horns are short and mostly bent backwards. A few Ogaden (Somali) type were introduced during the 1972–74 drought. The age at first calving is from 8 months to one year. The gestation period and the calving interval is 6 months. The average morning and evening milk yield of milch goats was 458ml (sample size 130) and 393 ml (sample size 147), respectively.

The average daily milking of a Afar goat is 425ml. A she goat produces 8–11 kids during her life time and its life span is 9–10 years. Goats are used for meat, milk, butter, and as cash buffer. Goat skin is used for butter storing, milk churning, etc.

The Afar donkey is bigger than the Oromo type and is used for short distance transport and to carry water.

In the past, horses were indispensable for raiding, but the Afars, more or less, now live peacefully with the Oromo lowlanders and Wajirat. The number of horses owned by Afars is negligible.

The Problem

Even though, the Afar society is not sharply stratified as some of the East African societies, there are variations between households. The social groups of poor (*tudegoita*) and rich (*geddali*) differ in wealth, but not necessarily in political power and religious merit. Committee members of the grazers association are not necessarily large herd owners. Other criteria, such as oratorical gifts and knowledge, are important if an Afar wishes to be elected as committee member. The sheikhs are involved in politics. The large herd owners are not necessarily political leaders. During the reign of Haile Selassie, political power was based on hereditary positions, but not on wealth. Currently, a person with oratorical gifts and knowledge has access to power; but not, necessarily, those with hereditary positions and wealth.

Inequality in livestock holdings is attributed to the emergence of the ownership of livestock capital which includes cattle, camels, sheep and goats. The nature of livestock capital depends on the growth potential of herds and flocks and the vulnerability of the Afar production system to ecological variations.

Inequality is also affected by socio-cultural factors and the network of social and economic obligations and credits. These factors in combination cause inequality among the Afar. The nature of pastoral capital is recurrently affected by ecological pressures such as droughts, epidemics and diseases which have the tendency of creating the socio-cultural levelling mechanisms. But, the ecological factors do not work on these processes alone, as they relate to decreased security (see Dahl and Hjort, 1976; Hjort and Salih, 1989; Gebre Mariam, 1988). The intention of this paper is not to dwell on the political pressures. In this discussion, I draw

on material intermittently collected among the Afar from September 1979 to April 1982.

Ownership of Resources

Livestock Ownership

Each household owns its cattle, camels, sheep, goats and donkeys, but the local community has residual rights over the animals. An Afar would say "my herd is our herd, our herd is my herd". They recognize a special status in ownership with respect to the animals in question. The animals do not become one's own property until the local community agrees as to what should be done about it. Despite the fact that the local community has interest and rights in the animals of its members, individual households try to build up a herd. Various factors contribute towards this. Some of these have been explained earlier. Some Afar have explicitly stated to me that those who are livestock rich are not respected because of their animals. They are only respected when they share what they have with the local community. Large herd owners are visited by others as providers of food. A large herd owner's place will be a sort of meeting place because all destitute Afar who need help come to visit, as a kind of melting pot for the local community. But this is only for a limited period as drought occurs at least every 10 years and to build up a substantial herd of cattle takes 5 years. This means a household could attain a substantial herd every 4 to 5 years. Large herd owners build up their personal cult through building up their herd. The individual is interested in the growth of his flock and herd where pasture belongs to the public. However, this system breaks down whenever there is a drought.

The selling of animals, especially cattle and camels depends on the consent of the local community. The selling of small stock, however, is solely the wish of the owner and can use the money as he wishes.

If a household member sells his livestock and intends to use others' milking animals, he will not be given animals or will not be helped as the local community members think he is a person without a brain.

A herder who tends a camp herd takes the sole responsibility of taking decisions on the animals. The herder could sell male animals to buy rifles, clothing, to take a wife, buy grain, without the consent of the owner if he does not own male animals. Whatever decision the herder makes on another man's livestock is accepted by the owner. Herding control—the decisions about the immediate welfare of the herd, moving it from one grazing area to another, guarding it against predators and watering it regularly— rests on the one who herds the animal. Management control—decisions about the deployment of animals capital to fulfill household needs such as gift, ceremonial slaughter and etc.— depend on the owner. The herder to fulfill his household responsibilities could dispose male animals. The herdsman has a *de facto* right to sell the animals he is herding. In both cases the herder could sell the animals he is herding to satisfy some of his needs. But, members of a local community who are not herding have the same right as well.

Grazing Resources

Under common law, land is the collective property of the Ethiopian people. The individual Afar tries to maximize his herd in this kind of set up, but if one individual does not increase his herd, others do. There is no organizational mechanism to prevent others from grazing the pasture which an individual is saving. This contradiction between private and public interest is referred to as the "tragedy of the commons".

Water Holes

A water hole is named after the individual who dug it. The owner of a water hole is the man who organized the digging of it or his local community. Even if dug by an individual, the local community members have access right to a water hole. Water holes ownership pass from father to son. Watering is not a problem among the Afar as they say "even a fox has a water hole".

Herding Strategies

The Afar household has herding strategies in order to maintain themselves in their harsh environment. The Afar maintain more than one species, and thus keep cattle, camels, sheep, goats and donkeys to secure a constant supply of food through out the year. The small stock and cattle and camel ratio in the rangelands on the basis of the author's estimate was 14.9:2.3:1. The large herd owners practice multi-species herding. They split their livestock holdings into two categories, home (*homa*) and satellite (*magida*) herds for better productivity and better growth of offspring. Home and satellite herds converge in the rainy season but they split in the dry season. For home herds permanent water supply is indispensable, whereas camp herds travel long distances to seek water. Herdsmen won't bring milk animals from satellite herds, unless they have sufficient milk supply. The small herd owners mainly keep home herds and put emphasis on cattle and small stock. Since there have been a series of droughts in Afar country, goats and camels, which can survive drought, have overtaken cattle and sheep. The economic strategy of all Afar households depends on the avoidance of risk from disaster. When drought occurs the grass is completely grazed and this gives way to bush encroachment. Acacia nubica is invading the grassland at Waama. According to Afar informants the Cheleka area was grassland about 20 years ago. Today, it is covered with Acacia species. Chrysopogon plumulosus is replaced by Tribulus cistoides.

Acacia pods are used as goat fodder, since a goat as a browser plays a significant role in controlling bush. Because of its browsing habit it represents a net addition to the biomass rather than a competitive for grazing.

The Afar have wet and dry season grazing reserves. Each grazier association sends its livestock to its own, traditional wet, dry, and drought period grazing reserves. The dry and drought period grazing resources are mainly utilized by large herd owners. Some of these reserves are outside Afar territory where confrontation between Afar, Central valley farmers, and managers of the irrigation schemes take place. Table 1 shows the wet, dry, and drought period grazing reserves.

This livestock movement is not only for pasture which would ensure a good milk supply. There are good reasons to avoid using grazing areas. Harmful insects such as ticks and others insects, *araami*, and biting flies means that sheep and goats cannot be kept in one area for more than 2 months, even if the dung is cleaned from the kraals every morning. Small stock mange is a common occurrence. Accumulated dung is harmful to camels, which will develop scabies, and are also affected by ticks.

Both small and large herd owners tend to keep more adult female animals for milk. This is particularly true of cattle, camels and sheep. Table 2 shows the herd structure percentages.

In the following, I shall examine how differences between households emerge.

Factors Generating Inequality

Nature of Pastoral Capital

Barth (1964) was the first to make explicit a number of important consequences about the nature of pastoral capital and these include:

a) Essentially all productive capital is in consumable form. Livestock can be eaten to any time which means the main assets of a household may be consumed without selling them.

b) A significant proportion of the income is in the form of capital gains, that is, female animals. Some of the herd capital must be set aside for stock replacement.

c) Saving and investment are necessary under all circumstances as the herd capital is perishable and must be replaced.

d) The herd capital affects family organization. The minimum labour force needed for a household among the Afar is three persons. A male head of the household is responsible for herding cattle and supervises all activities.

Table 1. *Livestock seasonal movement*

GRAZIER ASSOCIATION	SEASONAL MOVEMENT		DROUGHT PERIOD
	Wet Season	Dry Season	
Abu Semera	Jeldi, Weranso	Bekeri, foot hills	Borkena Valley Baadu
Dodda	Waama, Ander Kello Weranso	Mille, Waama Waantu, Dirmatu foot hills	Gheffa, Golina Uwa, Megenta
Arapta	Gurale, Uwa	Duba, foot hills	Duba
Aghini	Asboleh, Abuwar	Awash	Borkena Valley, Megenta
	Koraha	foot hills	Baadu
Harsu	Boru, Duba, Dullo	Bilu	Chekorsa
	Biyuda	foot hills	
Kui Henkeba	Mesera, Dullo	foot hills	Awra
	Kolbo, Durungota		
Haishento and Hadermo	Adu, Awra	Adu, Awra	Aware
Asbekere	Megenta, Jeldi	Awash	Megenta

Table 2. *The herd structure (percentages)*

	Sample Size	Adult F	Adult M	Immature F	Immature M	Calf F	Calf M	TOTAL
Cattle	488.0	54.3	2.3	33.1	6.0	3.5	1.2	100.0
Camel	50.0	26.0	0.0	40.0	12.0	14.0	8.0	100.0
Sheep	118.0	55.1	3.4	12.7	4.2	11.9	12.7	100.0
Goats	104.0	0.62	0.96	24.0	11.50	0.96	0.96	100.0

A woman is responsible for household activities and also assists a child herding small stock.

Barth (1964) also pointed out that the Basseri constitute a population of striking social homogeneity. On the basis of the author's field work, most Afar are small herd owners. There are, however a few Afars who have large herds. The large herd owners invest in animals, quality clothing, boxes and torches. When a severe drought occurs the fabric of Afar life is weakened and breaks. The poor households are sloughed off from the pastoral activities due to epidemics, drought and diseases. They pursue a series of activities such as poaching, sale of fire wood, charcoal, mat fibre, aromatic trees, and ropes, together with labour migration, irrigated farms and keeping animals for the Oromo lowlanders who allow them to continue as herdsmen. After a drought period is over, the system of helping one another is reinstated.

Barth (1964) also argued that the pastoral herd capital was continually exposed to the risk of the partial or complete loss of animals due to drought, epidemics, diseases and predators. Barth (1964) contrasts some of these characteristics of pastoral capital with agricultural land:

a) Land is imperishable and cannot be consumed except with the help of economic institutions to convert land to food.

b) Land cannot be increased by investment of the product (crop) except where economic institutions exist to make the conversion.

The argument so far pursued has some implications for inequality. It is an inherent tendency of capital for some management units to create growth and for others to be sloughed off from the pastoral activity. The sloughing off process takes place due to drought, epidemics, diseases and predators. This phenomena does not explain the characteristic it takes among the Afar. The Afar are different to the Somali and the Maasai. Among the Somali and Maasai permanent stratification is maintained. The large herd owners in these societies invest in animals as do the Afar, but unlike the Afar, they invest in the other sectors of their local economies. Let us see how animals are redistributed between different management units in different ways and see if the different ways have a levelling effect. The chance of not loosing everything increases with the number of animals. However, there is no guarantee for this to happen. The general assumption that some rich Afars may be poor tomorrow is right, but the rich may not become as poor as the already poor Afars[1].

After periods of drought, the large herd owners are placed in a socially secure position and have increased status as they have created a social credit for a short time. Let us look at these aspects of pastoral capital which concern epidemics, diseases, raiding, warfare, and natural calamities, and the effect they have of levelling the social structure.

These factors make the Afar dependant on one another for support. They create solidarity within the local community and directly produced inequality. They have a levelling effect, indirectly, and have favoured the evolution of certain institutions which increase solidarity, and these institutions imply livestock redistribution. The institutions serve as an effective insurance against personal mishap, and take the form of socio-cultural mechanisms.

Socio-Cultural Mechanisms

The Afar society, like the Toposa and Turkana, has a network of social and economic obligations and credits (Henriksen, 1974). The Afar are governed by obligations and counter obligations of sharing resources, work and food. Work cooperation among the Afar has been treated elsewhere (see Gebre Mariam, 1982a, 1982b, and 1982c). The point under discussion here is the sharing of resources and food (Haaland, 1979).

If an individual slaughters an animal, uninvited people are welcome to eat. If a stranger drops in at meal time, the meal is shared. The poor could go anywhere in Afar land and expect to be fed. For example, if a

neighbor has two cows and the other none, the one without a cow has a legitimate right to the other two cows. Once I hired an Afar camp attendant and told him to bring his food. The guard responded, "this is our land" (*baro ni baro*). This statement implies that wherever an Afar goes, even outside his local community, he faces no problem of getting food.

Afars often state that they do not eat in closed doors as do other people. Other people, in this case, means Oromos and town people. Other Afars state that it is hyenas that eat alone.

The Afar define a wealthy man as one who possesses money rather than one who possesses livestock. They consider that a rich man is one who shares with others. This could take various forms such as re-distributive mechanisms, religious payments, meat feasts, and others. A person with large herds of livestock, but not generous, is not respected. He is referred to as livestock rich but socially poor. A rich man does not seem to gain any dominance over others because of his wealth. In fact, there seems an insignificant correlation between wealth and political power.

During the reign of Haile Selassie, hereditary positions were the basis of power. Today, both wealth and hereditary positions do not mean power and influence. Elders seem to be singled out largely because of their knowledge and ability. A rich man is one who gives away what he has for the relief of his less fortunate brethren, not one who uses his wealth to create more wealth for himself. To illustrate this, I use an Afar proverb which says: *Afar gersi medela, Tegorey sega ruga medelita*. Literally, this means that in Djibouti people have no calves because they do not keep cows. In the same way, the Afar money does not reproduce. Money is something to be shared rather than invested. This is the Afar idea of wealth.

The Afar are involved in giving and sharing of monetary wealth, not just the money itself which is part of a definition of a rich man. Afars can't keep spare items, even clothing. Friends and local community (*Kaidoh*) members without clothing have the legitimate right to take away any clothing which is extra. Let me give an example. Before 1972–74 drought, Ali Hyder opened a shop for selling some necessities such as sugar, tea, clothing, etc., to the Afar at a place called Weranso. Ali went bankrupt because the livestock owners did not pay for the goods they took on credit. There was no way for Ali to get his money back. This is difficult for an Afar who wants to have the image of a good man. Traders such as Ali can't raise their capital unless they detach themselves from the local community.

If a trader refuses to extend credit he is accused of meanness and referred to as a Christian (*Kores* or *Galla*), which has derogatory meanings. Afars who own shops in their local community are highly vulnerable to the pressures of the cultural ideas of sharing.

An Afar can gain respect from fellow Afar through hard work, good deeds, honesty, obedience to Afar laws and elders, talent as a dispute resolver, skills as a warrior, oratorical gifts, helping the needy, and the possession of animals and money. Oratorical gifts are highly valued, as is the practice of helping the poor and the needy. It is also noteworthy that material holdings and possessions were the least frequently mentioned means of earning the respect of one's Afar fellows.

The sharing of resources and food takes place in a specific context. The sharing mechanism is germane to local community members. To help each other is the cultural ideal among the Afar (*Afar ada, Afar dento*). A local community is roughly similar to a self-help association (*idir*) in other segments of the Ethiopian society, or the *dia*-paying group of the Somali established for the payment of blood compensation. It provides assistance for marriage celebration, death ceremonies, and performs social control in case of disputes such as adultery, bodily injury, and theft.

In fact, a local community is a survival unit. For instance, stock owners Bugissa Seiko and Mohammed committed adultery with

a woman of the Abu Semera glaziers association and the penalty for the deed was 12 cows from each. Bugissa and his brothers contributed 6 cattle and the other 6 were contributed by the Seiko local community. Mohammed Sahlisa paid 6 cattle and the other 6 were contributed by the Sekira local community.[2]

The institutionalized mutual aid associations within the local community include:

Hantilla
Lactating animals given as free loan to a destitute Afar to use their milk, but the offspring belong to the owner. The user may return an offspring if the animal had many offspring while with the user. Hantilla milking animals are given when a destitute stock owner asks for it or when the large herd owner reckons that some one needs help.

Irbu
Those who have lost animals due to epidemics or raids continue begging animals from hut to hut but do not consider themselves beggars.

Ees[3]
The individual who is less fortunate takes animals from his local community without the owner's permission.

Gere hara
The individual asks his local community for animals in order to buy a rifle.

Hula hara
The individual asks his local community for animals to slaughter when his wife gives birth.

Digibi hara
For wedding, animals like male sheep or cattle given out to be slaughtered.

Medili hara
Animals begged for sick man to consume.

Rebey hara
Animals begged to be slaughtered for a dead man's burial ceremony.

Ahiwo
A system whereby animal is given to a poor Afar by his local community.

Zeka (Religious payments)
The Afar make the Islamic alms payments (Zeka) which is calculated as an annual tax on animal. It is a compulsory form of stock redistribution in which animals wealth is dispersed and converted. Table 3 shows this pattern.

The payment is made to the poor and "sheiks". Those who grow crops pay one tenth of the produce as Zeka to the poor who live within the same locality. One who does not give Zeka is called *Jahilitu*.

These socio-cultural mechanisms are followed and respected along certain patterns. The most important decisions are made by the general assembly (*mabilo*) which consists of elders. However, even adolescents can participate in these meetings.

A person who fails to comply with elders' verdict must slaughter a bull for the local community. If a person has no animals, he or she will be tied by a rope and beaten by some members of the local community, or thrown into a river but rescued from death. In some cases, if a person fails to adhere to social norms, he will not be helped by others when he is in need of help. For instance, Ali Hyder's father's brother (*ami*) had 10 camels, 30 cattle, 200 sheep, and 100 goats. He is referred by other Afars as a niggard (*geba gedi beli*). In 1981, Ali Hyder's wife was sick for over 3 months and he had no money left. Ali then asked his father's brother to give him one sheep and his father's brother refused. Ali brought the case to the elders of the local community.

The assembly of elders finded Ali's father's brother 6 adult sheep, so Ali got 6 sheep instead of one sheep which he asked for.

There are implications of the arguments so far pursued for inequality. The non-market transactions give access to those without or insufficient resources to share with those who have; so the institutions serve as a kind of security for the poor households. Such sharing and mutual help reduce the exclusion of groups from the pastoral capital. Sharing institutions help local community members to mobilize support among themselves, and may include outsiders who share grazing resources together to stand against a raiding group such as the Issa. In those circumstances the Afar build up a quasi-politico-military organization. Lately, raiding is minimized due to the intervention of the state.

Table 3. *Religious payments (Zeka)*

Livestock type	No. of Animals Owned	Required Minimum Size of Offering
CATTLE	30	1 immature male
	40	1 immature female
	60	2 immature males
	80	2 immature females
CAMEL	5	1 adult female goat
	10	2 adult female goats
	15	3 adult female goats
	20	1 adult female goat
	25	1 immature female camel
	30	1 immature female camel (big size)
	60	in calf camel
	100	male sheep is slaughtered
SHEEP AND GOATS	40	1 adult female goat
	80	2 adult female goats
	100	1 adult female goat

Because of the sharing mechanisms large herd owners are faced with a constant reduction in the accumulation of herds and flocks. But those who share their resources with others remain better off than those who receive, and thus the inequality level is directly offset. Those who give indirectly establish a social debt which they can fall upon in the future.

Inequality varies a great deal within the East Africa pastoralists. It is significant among the Maasai and Somali because the increase in the growth of animals is invested in other sectors of the local economy. Their social institutions allow occupational specialization in both societies (Galaty, 1982). Among the Afar this is not so, though there are differences in livestock wealth among households. We see the same pattern among the Arsi, Gurra, Hawiya, and Kernley pastoralists in East Africa. The social organization counteracts the growth poten-

tial of pastoral capital and thus presents gross social differences. However, unlike the east African pastoralists, the differences are temporary, with the possibility that the rich households of today might become poor tomorrow.

Concluding Comments

The argument developed in this paper is in disagreement with Schneider (1979), who attributes egalitarianism to an economic base (such as livestock) which cannot be monopolized. In all societies livestock is private property. Nonetheless, sharing does not mean that it is not private. Moreover, livestock production cannot take place without some kind of monopolization except, perhaps, among the Mongolian herding cooperatives and even that is a recent phenomena.

In some other societies ownership is vested in some kind of collateral units. If wealth is not monopolized everyone will be equal, but there is a limit to that. Because of institutions established within the Afar, people have claims on each other. According to Schneider (1979), a one to one cattle/people ratio is a sign of egalitarianism. Among the Afar and other societies, cattle is kept, but multi-species herding is the practice. For the Afar, the ratio of cattle, camel, sheep and goats to people was 1.1 : 1; 0.5 : 1; 3.8 : 1; and 3.1 : 1 respectively. Pastoralists such as the Afar depend on multiple activities as alternative sources of income to attain a threshold viability level.

However, in the Afar case, inequality is maintained by the nature of pastoral capital and cultural mechanisms. The socio-cultural mechanisms are essential institutions in the fabric of Afar local life through which economic needs are met and social relationships are created and maintained. There are variations in livestock wealth between households. A few households may have large herds, though most of the Afar households have small herds.

Ecological stress, on the other hand, dictates the nature of pastoral capital and the socio-cultural mechanisms, thereby causing inequality which leads to decreased security.

The Afar forms of inequality are destined to change in the future because of socio-economic and political changes induced by the government, market economies and internal dynamics. A number of processes which had overall effect in stressing the individual's gain at the expense of communal benefit would be curtailed. When the levelling mechanisms are transformed and ceased to function, inequality would occur between households.

The Afar have lived on the periphery of the modernization process for several centuries, and it is very difficult to say that political and other boundaries are firmly established. Some organizations of the Afar are in conflict with the territorial principles of Ethiopia. The government seems to have marginal control over Afar country and the Afar are on the fringe of the monetary economy. Besides, the questions of citizenship, customs, and border security, indicates that Afar institutions are based on kinship groups rather than on territorial delimitations.

Notes

1 Ali Aredi, ex-chief of the Harsu tribe lost 600 cattle, over 30 camels and over 27 kraal of sheep and goats (about 1080 sheep and goats) during the 1972–74 drought. By the end of the drought he had no cattle, sheep and goat left, but remained with 5 camels. After the drought was over, Ali Aredi exchanged a rifle for 9 bulls and 3 heifers and another rifle was used for grain purchase. During the restocking programme of the then Livestock and Meat Board, Ministry of Agriculture, he was given one heifer which he gave to a member of his local community. During January 1980 to February 1981, Ali Aredi lost 68 cattle. In March 1981, he had 10 cows only.

[2] Payment could be made in small stock and camels. The exchange rate is as follows:
1 cattle = 12 sheep and goats
1 camel = 4 cattle
1 camel = 48 sheep and goats

[3] I witnessed three persons who sold small stock which originally belonged to another person in the same local community, and another person sold a male cattle which belonged to his community.

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