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A view of a *bureaucratic* developmental state: local governance and agricultural extension in rural Ethiopia

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This article discusses the hybridism of the Ethiopian developmental state through an analysis of the local interface between the state and the peasantry. The aim is to explore to what extent bureaucratic rationality both conditions and perverts the procedures employed in the implementation of public rural development policies, in this case agricultural extension. And to what extent development policies can operate as an instrument of power that reinforces the local disempowerment of the most vulnerable peasants. The article makes a detailed analysis of the machinery of agricultural extension, the local conditions of distribution and reception of fertiliser and improved seeds in rural Ethiopia.

Keywords: local peasant-state interface; technical package; public policies; rural governance; Ethiopia

For in day-to-day life, domination is above all *administration*. (Max Weber¹)

The Ethiopian developmental state is conducting a series of operations that seek to achieve a key government objective: the ‘Democratic Developmental State’.² A whole set of reforms promises a new deal in local governance, and particularly a remodelling of the interaction between state and society. Academics nowadays agree that the ‘state is deeply embedded in social forces’³ and it would seem somewhat passé to understand the state apparatus other than as a complex of multiple powers,⁴ even in an authoritarian context like Ethiopia. Embedded in society, bureaucracy should not be seen as an apparatus but as a rationality strongly marked by administrative hierarchies, by the close involvement of the state apparatus, by the primacy of technical knowledge over know-how and by the implementation of detailed procedures that impose ‘domination’ on local communities.⁵ Following Foucault – or Bayart’s approach in relation to Africa⁶ – we consider that the analytical core of statehood is moving from an internal position to a position at the state’s local interface, ‘at the coalface of the subjugation process’.⁷ Nowadays however and in Africa especially, this interface is changing, especially through the impact of the globalisation process.⁸

Numerous authors conclude that the interface between state and society in Ethiopia is blurred and that ‘rural dwellers continue to subvert state capture’;⁹ that peasants are taking over and using the channels imposed by the party-state,¹⁰ and that new elites are

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emerging in the rural environment.¹¹ However, the way that agricultural extension policies are implemented – and in particular one of its flagship measures, the distribution of a package made up of fertiliser, improved seeds and improved practices¹² – points to a different reality.

Beyond recognising the expansion of state powers or a rise in authoritarianism, a recognition shared by other authors working on the sectoral transformations of the rural world,¹³ this article seeks to understand the mechanisms at work in the growing disempowerment of the peasantry. In particular, it seeks to understand how a highly technical developmental approach, in this case an agronomic ordering,¹⁴ can become a mechanism for the exercise of power.¹⁵ How bureaucratic rationality dovetails with and replaces the technicist approach promoted by the Green Revolution, and how farmers adapt.

The singular and ongoing process of state-building in Ethiopia – characterised by cultural hegemony, the centralised exercise of power since modern times and a significant but strongly perpetuated centre/periphery dichotomy¹⁶ – deeply shapes the state's local interface and creates an imbalance of power mainly in favour of state actors.¹⁷ The circulation of this disciplinary power on the ground resonates with Clapham's notion of *encadrement*, understood as 'the incorporation into structures of control', conflated with developmental objectives.¹⁸ Although this 'project of *encadrement*' had been established in the singular historical and political context of the Derg, the governmental will to control remains potent. Academics are following with interest the signs of the partisan goal of 'coalition with the people'¹⁹ and adopt this perspective in analysing the recent spread, of (para)-statel or partisan structures like Model Farmers or '1 to 5' groups. Pursuing the path established by works on land tenure, one may argue that land access and control deserve to be analysed in terms of power relations²⁰ and that governmental development schemes can also form a 'roadblock to peasant empowerment'.²¹ Following Lefort's approach on farmer disempowerment,²² Teferi Abate Adem's analysis of the Green Revolution, or the views of Segers et al. on farmer/developer interactions,²³ we propose a political reading of agricultural extension.²⁴ By documenting its empirical implementation procedures and farmers reactions, we seek to understand how far agricultural extension can constitute a technique for the exercise of power at local level.

Perhaps more than any other measure by the Ethiopian developmental state, the distribution of the input package is perceived by farmers as a political act, an act of domination carried out within the 'local arenas of coercive persuasion' analysed by Woldeab Teshome.²⁵ We agree with of Teferi Abate Adem's assessment that package delivery creates a space for the extension of party-state powers but we are not convinced by his cultural explanation, since we consider that public action in rural Ethiopia, especially through the systematic use of bureaucratic logics, is more to do with political leadership than cultural legacy.

We consider that the implementation of public policies by the developmental state is not founded on a technique of *encadrement* that marshals other – or more partisan – structures. Rather, it is the implementation itself that constitutes the technique. This is because the tendency of any development programme to veer toward an *encadrement* structure is greater for rural areas under the authority of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD), since the imprint of 'agricultural bureaucracy' is strong in the Ethiopian countryside.²⁶ This hypothesis emerges mainly because of the globalised application of techno-bureaucratic rule, jointly driven by the neoliberal desire to reduce development to a technique and by the intentional will to control of the party-state. From

an individualised perspective, it operates as a ‘practical norm’²⁷ conflating sponsor strategies with the new grammar and narratives of global development schemes.

Whereas the package was always conceived and presented as a technical measure to increase agricultural yields, its distribution is in fact underpinned by socio-political conditions, so bureaucratic rationality restricts rather than supports the developmental state and leads to ‘decidedly *nondevelopmental* outcomes’.²⁸ We believe that the measure’s increasingly technical character is therefore accompanied by a real denial of its political nature, and agricultural extension to a significant degree constitutes an ‘Anti-Politics Machine’.²⁹ The paper aims to document this localised machinery, its actors, practices and concerns, on the grounds that technical norms can be more effectively subverted at the local scale. Through the growing complexity and intricacy of the procedures developed under its reform, the state is able to intervene more effectively in day-to-day farming activities and raise the level of constraint imposed on vulnerable farmers. Peasant attitudes to this measure are ambiguous. Some of them accept servitude voluntarily in the expectation of immediate gain, an un hoped-for solution to the agrarian crisis they are experiencing. Whether ‘voluntary servitude’ or ‘state domination’, it exacerbates the economic vulnerability of the most vulnerable farmers, deepens their dependency on state-mediated resources³⁰ and as a result disempowers farmers as policy actors vis-à-vis the state. To what extent can farmer reluctance to adopt the technical package be understood as a ‘garden-variety resistance’? In the words of Scott, ‘It is no simple matter to determine just where compliance ends and resistance begins, as the circumstances lead many of the poor to clothe their resistance in the public language of conformity’.³¹

Methodology

Our conclusions are based on a number of research activities³²: a two-stage research programme conducted in Wolaita since the early 2000s (in a region where agricultural extension occurred very early) and shorter missions carried out in 2010, 2011 and 2012 in more marginal or less agricultural regions, where agricultural extension policies were introduced later or through different procedures. The areas surveyed were selected from a comparative perspective, on the basis of dual criteria: the aim was to identify central regions or regions well integrated into agricultural extension (Wolaita and North Tigray) alongside marginal or unintegrated regions (North Gonder, South Omo, the Borana and Hamar areas, Afar, Awsa). It was also the aim of the study to include diverse local areas, with different socio-political structures, in order to observe their reaction to agricultural extension. It was further to work in a variety of economic environments: food insecure *kebeles* (local administrative units) with and without Productive Safety Net Programmes (PSNPs), regions of strong land pressure and others with large agricultural units. The surveys were based on semi-open interviews with a sample of 170 farmers and 73 local Agriculture Ministry officials [development agents (DAs), supervisors, experts]. A wide variety of information was collected: statistical data obtained from local authorities (*weredas* and *kebeles*) with the aim of measuring levels of *encadrement*, interviews with DAs and surveys of peasants. Our methodological approach was qualitative, localistic and comparative, focusing more on understanding the mechanisms involved in the implementation of a public policy (adoption or resistance) than on measuring it, on the grounds that the local level is the best guide to the real arrangements that contribute to its implementation.

Agricultural extension as *encadrement*

Changes and continuities in agricultural extension policy

The implementation of agricultural extension policies in Ethiopia has a long history.³³ Conceived as a state-led input supply and extension system, it constitutes a complex issue. In this article, we will look only at the aspects associated with the distribution of the package, although the programme contains many other evolving components.³⁴ The Participatory Demonstration and Training Extension System programme is currently being reinforced: national fertiliser consumption grew from 35,000 tonnes in 1985/1986 to 200,000 tonnes in 1994 and 550,000 tonnes in 2011³⁵; the packages are becoming more diverse, and various improved seeds are produced in Ethiopia; geographically, it now extends to the peripheral areas and lowlands; and finally, its 'participatory' dimension has been reinforced. Since the 'structural change' towards a market economy in the second half of the 2000s, agricultural extension policies have altered in two fundamental respects: they show greater interest in market linkage (compliance with the objectives of the *Agricultural Growth Program*) and they target the most productive farmers, those capable of investing in the transformation of their farms.³⁶

As a result, we can see a real shift in the way the package is disseminated. The recommended fertiliser quantities remain the same, but it is now acknowledged that peasants can share a package and therefore reduce their investment.³⁷ At the same time, access to credit is more controlled; it depends on the classification of peasants into food secure or food insecure villages. At national level, however, the full credit allocation available in the 2000s is no longer provided; at best, farmers have to pay half the value of the package when they obtain the merchandise ('half credit'). In addition, the individual commitment of farmers is greater. The form this takes is firstly a range of legally enforceable documents (individually signed by the farmer) and secondly the role played by cooperatives in the distribution of the package, which brings the distribution sites closer to the recipients and establishes formal relations between the MoARD and *kebele* administrations. Through the cooperatives, the *kebele* identifies local needs, reports to the *wereda* administration, stores the product and organises distribution to the farmers.

In theory, these measures should spare the most vulnerable farmers, under a policy of agricultural extension first designed for 'innovative farmers'. In practice, however, the local procedures for distributing the package have scarcely changed, since bureaucratic power remains largely unaffected by national shifts in public policy. The criteria governing the dissemination of the fertiliser are still largely driven by mechanisms that are social and political, rather than truly spatial.³⁸ The conditions of distribution and reception of the package have more to do with the economic and social profile of the farmers than with the agronomic characteristics of the land they cultivate; to a certain extent, therefore, it would seem that the measure is more than simply a technique for managing land fertility.

Farmers who use fertiliser thus have very close relations with the DAs.³⁹ They may live within the latter's zone of direct physical influence, near their place of residence, and receive strong and repeated blandishments. Or they may share close institutional proximity. In the 'ironic position of having helped to power a ruling group',⁴⁰ rich farmers, party members and local notables often adopt fertiliser for reasons that have little to do with the technical properties of the package, as evidenced by the case of M, the leader of a Development Group in Tata Koraro.⁴¹ A former farm owner who now lives off his investments in the nearby town, he initially refused the package, but to avoid losing his status and despite his protests, had just bought the fertiliser when we met him.

Or else – in our view the most common situation – farmers adopt the package because they have a relation of strong dependency with all the state officials. They feel vulnerable and dependent on the goodwill of the *mengist* (government), which they know to be conditional on their active participation in the development goals,⁴² i.e. on their ‘loyalty’, as they often call it. Or else, finally, they use it as best they can, especially if they cultivate cash crops,⁴³ and their complaints are about fertiliser shortages, the poor quality of the seeds, delivery delays, credit controls and above all rising prices. Generally, growers of cash crops, such as the onion producers interviewed by Lefort or *khat* growers from our panel, express overall satisfaction with the technical package. To conclude this review of the profiles we encountered, we should also report the handful of cases of people who wish to use fertiliser, but also to retain full control over their consumption levels: quantities, loan repayment terms and frequency of use. In these cases, they acquire fertiliser not from the public institutions but on the market. Indeed, there exists a fertiliser market fed by surpluses from farmers who have been obliged to buy greater quantities than they need.

Around the ‘Biro’, state powers in society

As suggested by Migdal,⁴⁴ the state is in society rather than projecting into society: workers in the day-to-day administration or notables convey state power in mutually reinforcing ways. Their actions constitute a much more efficient *encadrement* than the levels of institutional oversight.⁴⁵ We need to understand who they are and how they mobilise individuals or structural institutions in the local context. Although the body of state functionaries is well-defined, minor civil servants are part of a complex interface, under strong pressure from their line managers and applying equally strong pressure on those below them.

DAs represent the most effective vector of agricultural extension. As appointed and assigned agents of the state, they are – unlike *kebele* members – neither elected nor removable by local councils and constitute the perfect vehicle for ‘rational-legal domination’.⁴⁶ They employ techniques of *encadrement* taught in public training institutions, or ways of working acquired in their offices. They juggle their own career imperatives, apply quotas and seek to effect a radical transformation of Ethiopia’s rural world.⁴⁷ As shown by Dom and Carter,⁴⁸ they operate at the interface between two worlds. Hierarchically, DAs occupy a lowly rank in their own organisation, with few powers. They remain accountable to their *wereda* and to their supervisor, who in particular has the power to decide on transfers. In theory, they are supposed to remain in post for an average of two years, but in reality turnover is higher. Geographically, DAs are strangers in rural communities, and often see themselves as educated people surrounded by backwards peasants. The cultural divide with farmers is significant; today, DAs have to hold a Grade 10 qualification and have completed a three-year course at an AgTVET College.⁴⁹ In peripheral areas, they do not speak the local languages; as far as possible, they avoid living in the *kebele* where they are posted: ‘They don’t come here, they remain along the road’.⁵⁰ Unlike health extension workers or *kebele* administrative staff, DAs are not intended to belong to the community in which they work, but regional directors increasingly encourage strong social ties with farmers, in order to facilitate the penetration of agricultural policies in rural areas. Thus, the DAs who work in the Wolaita midlands and highlands are all Wolaita, whereas those who work in the lowlands – where agricultural extension policies are only just being introduced – are not necessarily wolaitigna speakers.

Despite the significant effort that goes into their training, their knowledge of agronomy, agriculture or sometimes simply of rural life itself, is limited, which does little for their credibility with farmers. Their skills are very general, and local specialisms, such as animal health, irrigation and commercialisation are poorly represented. It is not unusual to see experimental MoARD plots that are clearly inferior in agricultural competence to land farmed by peasants, who regularly complain about the DAs' lack of agricultural know-how. In Awsa, where there is strong land pressure on the oasis, the peasants see the existence of these plots as a form of control or takeover of land borrowed from them, since the poor condition of the plots lends little credibility to the stated objectives of extension. Conversely, on some plots the level of technical sophistication (in particular in irrigation) is so high that it is beyond the reach of peasants. As a result, experimental plots are increasingly being shifted to land cultivated by Model Farmers. Finally most of them have a very limited understanding of the Package, promoting fertiliser more strongly than improved seeds or enhanced practices.⁵¹ A North Showa farmer described their action: 'They aim to make us use fertiliser, nothing else'.⁵²

The influence of the DAs is not confined to individuals, since the political boundary between petty administration and the peasantry is very permeable in Ethiopia. It is more a space of interchange, constraint and opportunity, occupied by various actors who, whether temporarily or permanently, act as conduits of state power in rural communities. The leaders of the development groups and their recent manifestation in so-called '1 to 5', or '1 to 10' groups, the Hawas heads, the '*gebrenya* cadres', the channel leaders in Awsa, the Model Farmers, or the heads of women's associations: all these local notables selected by the *mengist* on the basis of the 'right qualifications' act as conduits for the DA's message and assist them in their daily tasks. The influence of this *state notability* affects all peasants, as the priest D. describes:

In the month of *Megabit* (March), people from the *wereda* came to give a 10 day training course. The first meeting was in *Ter* (January), I didn't go. So they forced us to go in *Megabit*. In my case, it was my neighbour, a Party member, who forced me to go. At the meeting, they told us that if we didn't want to stay we could leave, but if we had a problem we shouldn't expect any help from them.⁵³ (Nobody left)

This select notability is required to respond favourably to state encouragement, to set an example and in turn to encourage all the peasants under their authority to do the same, as promulgated in the recently launched '1 to 5' groups. In the most integrated areas, '1 to 5' policy began in 2011, later extending to the remote countryside where the measure can be adjusted to '1 to 10' groups. Unsurprisingly the measure was presented as a revitalised form of the indigenous/traditional institution, the working group.⁵⁴ Here and there, however, farmers are aware of the private political meaning of the '1 amongst 5' cells and understand it as a narrowing of the Development Groups, a revival of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front's local *encadrement*: 'they teach us propaganda' in the words of D. a farmer from North Tigray.⁵⁵ A leader, jointly selected by officials from the kebele administration and the *gebrenya biro* (farmers office), is in charge of the others and passes on official messages and commands, and is also responsible for giving the local authorities regular reports on their behaviour. Chinigo observes that these leaders – distinguished but not necessarily rewarded as Model Farmers – are even responsible for collecting land tax, something outside their legal responsibility.⁵⁶ In spring 2011, in Wolaita lowlands in the Rift Valley, farmers were forbidden by the *kebele* administration even to mention this policy to any foreigner, especially non-governmental organisation

(NGO) workers. These farmers are both channels and victims of state domination in rural Ethiopia, trapped between contradictory imperatives:

The problem is that when you are poor like me, you don't use enough fertiliser. We help each other to pay. I'm in the militia. We go to people's houses to force them to pay. When they have done their harvesting, we tell them to sell so that they can pay. For my part, I pay. If I'm going to tell others, I obviously have to pay myself.

As to what B. has to say about his own servitude: 'The *kebele* is very good (*gobez*)!'⁵⁷

Neglect of the local

Although rural Ethiopia is characterised by a very high degree of environmental and cultural diversity, the existence of a local milieu, the recognition of some of its specificities, not to mention their inclusion in the implementation of agricultural extension, is marginal. Despite the political focus of our analysis, we have not found that the ethnicity that otherwise operates as a powerful factor of regional distinction in Ethiopia seems to play any part in the matter.⁵⁸ However, in the peripheral areas, the interface between the state in the peasantry can take a different form,⁵⁹ either with a lower level of *encadrement* or with specific practices. For example, a grower in the Asseyta oasis, in the Afar region,⁶⁰ explained that he never saw the DAs and that when he needed advice, in particular on matters of crop health, he had to pay for the DA to come, in which case several would turn up. Elsewhere, standardised methods and national development objectives are not adapted to a local reality that demands improvement and change. Instead, they seek to transform that reality by promoting new and radical agricultural techniques, e.g. online sowing, monoculture and chemical inputs. The task of exploring local applications of the national objectives is left to the DAs, many of whom are baffled by such initiatives and find it preferable to let themselves be guided by a handful of quantitative targets.

Surveys carried out with the DAs reveal their inability to think in local terms.⁶¹ This inability is clearly generated by the institution. It is a matter of individual career strategy within the administration, where the application of quotas takes precedence over innovation. The hierarchical 'culture' underlying the extension system does little to encourage and exploit the inherent resourcefulness of those who work closely with farmers and rural communities.⁶² In Damot Sore *wereda*, only 10% of the DAs showed clear awareness of the local context and considered implementing specific targets appropriate to local farming systems (distribution of new varieties of coffee and root crops, in particular those developed at the Areka Agricultural Research Center).⁶³ One we interviewed had only been a DA for four years but, unlike most of his colleagues, had actually taken the training seriously. At the interview, he ignored the orders of his supervisor, who was prompting all the interviewees with the number of Model Farmers and fertiliser users per *kebele*, respectively '250' and '*hulum* (everyone)!' The others were content to repeat developmental slogans (fighting poverty, diversifying revenue sources, etc.) and at best sought to apply standardised measures: distributing new technologies and fertiliser and increasing the number of Model Farmers. The majority describe the local context very superficially – in terms of poverty and drought – and many refer to characteristics officially deemed to be of structural significance, such as market linkage. From this perspective, their perception of poverty, as an obstacle to the achievement of their targets rather than as the situation on which they need to work, is very significant.

Communication is characterised by mutual misunderstanding. By way of illustration, the DAs estimate the volume of fertiliser needed by the surface area under cultivation, whereas peasant estimates are based on the particular crop, with greater quantities employed for *teff* growing. Without a real understanding of the local mechanisms on which they are supposed to act, the DAs – in particular those with least experience – apply development techniques and/or quotas that they essentially perceive as propaganda.⁶⁴ This may explain the uneven distribution between fertiliser and improved seeds.⁶⁵ This political component of their activity sometimes conflicts with their agricultural training role. Since fertility is measured simply in terms of fertiliser use, the use of mulching, mixed planting or other types of green fertiliser is not included in their personal evaluations, though in certain regions they constitute an alternative and cheaper way of managing fertility. As a result, ‘continued imposition of targets from above, and weak local capacity in extension management, have not yet permitted the emergence of a more dynamic, demand-driven system’.⁶⁶

Local disempowerment

Distributed without real regard for its local conditions of use, fertiliser use ultimately becomes imposed. In Ethiopian public perceptions, agricultural extension is seen as effectively compulsory. The argument put forward in the MoARD’s local offices can be summed up as follows: economies are to be transformed over the resistance and reluctance of local populations, which are perceived as incapable of accurately assessing the effects of these new development tools, these new technologies. This assumption reflects a context of contempt for and ignorance of local know-how, a very widespread view amongst government officials. Managing development thus becomes a means of applying the rules, of exercising power.

Techniques of power: meetings and manuals

In the local political arena at the interface between the state and the rural world, ‘persuasive coercion’ takes the form of collusion between political propaganda goals and development goals.⁶⁷ In our view, it also entails the implementation – through the meticulous application of a technique – of a multi-stage procedural policy. While political imperatives are undoubtedly at work in the domination of the rural world, at local level the rule imposed on farming activities is bureaucratic.

The domination exercised over farmers by state officials is based only to a very small degree on coercion, but more prosaically on the procedural red tape employed to monitor/develop peasant farmers and on the micromanagement of its application. The fertiliser distribution timetable itself constitutes a ‘system of control’: it both organises and legitimises the interference of state agents in the management of the most malleable and vulnerable smallholdings. It contributes to state control over local populations. It is all the more effective in that it is more or less aligned with and tends to mirror the agricultural calendar, which is the backbone of rural economies:

No, there is no pressure, but they educate us, they tell us what is good for us. There are meetings for this. The *gebrenya biro* experts summon us for this purpose. The last meeting was on the 29th. Every 29th of the month there are meetings like this. It is people from the kebele.⁶⁸

Despite the wide agrarian and rural diversity that characterises peasant communities, agricultural extension follows the same rules, a single system of values, a set of top-down instructions and local authority practices that have more to do with administrative 'know-how' than the specificities of a sector or a locality. The distribution process is thus largely uniform across the whole country.

This process begins with the holding of assemblies ('conferences') to which the farmers are summoned. These training sessions are an occasion to promote the use of the fertiliser and to correct the way it is employed by farmers, or else an opportunity for the expression of opinions or criticisms.⁶⁹ However, the sessions are not confined to the promotion of fertiliser use, but also of the different agricultural development objectives: the importance of the model farmers, the need for commercialisation, etc. They are organised by officials from the agricultural ministry and the kebele and take place one to two months before ploughing begins. All farmers are required to attend, in return for a per diem payment which, in practice, they do not always receive. In areas with high levels of *encadrement*, meetings of this type are frequent. For other conferences in North Tigray, only members of the party's local branch are summoned 'to teach you about fertiliser and force you to buy it'; these also merge with other meetings, and those promoting the '1 to 5' – i.e. two 3-day meetings every two months, and one 1-day meeting every month – are also used to sign up on the fertiliser lists.

These conferences are followed by a period, lasting between a fortnight and one month, in which the DAs target recipients of the package. The aim for each DA is to ensure that the previous years' recipients reregister and to achieve the quotas of new recipients set for each new agricultural season. In Wolaita, the local application (calculated by the zonal administration) of the national five-year economic planning target of 6% annual growth in the number of farmers using inputs was reflected in the selection of 250 deserving farmers in 2011, with a target of 15% growth per annum. In order to meet these targets, the DAs therefore enrol peasants regardless of their real needs or ability to pay.

This period is the time in the year when the presence of the DAs in the countryside is strongest, and indeed the only time when they are really present in the regions least involved in the agricultural extension process. The DAs then draw up the list of future recipients and pay regular visits to undecided farmers, to convince them of the benefits of the package. 'They also come during festivals, ceremonies, funerals'.⁷⁰ The management push intensifies during this period, and we estimate that the number of visits in rural areas with average DA presence varies in frequency from daily to weekly. In theory, these door-to-door campaigns should be used to develop a tailored technical solution, adjusted to the real needs of farmers. In practice, their primary purpose is to ensure that the DAs meet their targets. Registering on the fertiliser lists means completing and signing an individual, dated request, specifying the quantity of fertiliser desired. Only one person per household registers, male or female, and at this point it is not specified whether the credit facility will be used. By completing this application, the farmer undertakes to collect the order when it is delivered to the distribution sites, at sowing time. The signed document is kept at the Agriculture Office or the cooperative.

There then follows a period of waiting for delivery of the package. During this time, DAs who have not met their quota or career advancement targets send weekly reports to their line managers indicating the number of additional beneficiaries registered on the lists. The initial lists are sent to the *wereda* office, which forwards the orders to the region. Delivery of the order is then out of the hands of the local authorities, and while the number of recipients continues to increase, a pre-estimated quantity of fertiliser is

delivered. At one *kebele* meeting in North East Tigray,⁷¹ the farmers expressed their satisfaction with the fertiliser but also complained about the rise in its cost. The administration's report to the *wereda* recorded only the positive comments, with the result that larger quantities than expected were delivered and registered farmers had to buy more than they had signed up for. In addition to this mismatch between order and delivery quantities, the research identified two other problems associated with this phase.⁷² The first relates to delays in delivery and the lost productivity this causes when the fertiliser is not used in time, the second to the very uneven quality and quantity of the improved seeds sold to farmers. A seed lottery system may then be put in place to make up the shortfall.

On delivery, farmers who are buying on credit sign a second form specifying the size of the loan. This document does not state the total cost of the loan, as the repayment date has not been set at this stage. This means that some farmers are unaware that they are paying interest, and only see variations in the cost of the package. A copy of the document goes to the *kebele* offices, giving the authorities legal recourse in the event that the farmers should fail to meet the terms of the contract, usually by failing to repay all or part of the debt to Offices of Agriculture and Rural Development (OoARD) at *wereda* level. There is little variation in the price of the package from one locality to another. It is based on an even spread of delivery costs at *wereda* level.⁷³ Nonetheless, prices do vary between *kebele*.⁷⁴

The procedure for distributing fertiliser is a 'rule' – in the Weberian sense of the term – imposed on farmers. They have little understanding of how it works, and it is not structured to reflect their interests. In Djero *kebele* (Bugna *wereda*, North Wollo, Amhara), one woman told us:

I will perhaps tell them that I am not taking it, but I don't know if they will say that I can do that. The *kebele* has said that we have to use the fertiliser and seeds, even if they increase the price. On 17 *Ter*, there was a meeting where they said that we had to use the fertiliser, but we thought that it was the old price. But now the fertiliser has arrived with its new price, and it's too expensive. So we don't want the fertiliser, but we are being forced.

Indeed, there is very little transparency for farmers on the package distribution process. The farmer orders the fertiliser without knowing whether he will take out a loan, and on delivery he may not know the duration of the loan and ultimately its overall cost. The loan is interest-free during the growing period (1.5 months) and interest is charged from the estimated date of harvesting. When it comes to reimbursement, farmers have to have pay off the whole debt, capital and interest. Interest of 15 Ethiopian birr per month of arrears is charged for a full package.

The consequences of this bureaucratic rule can be highly damaging to peasant farm management. 'By merely following the rules meticulously, the workforce can virtually halt production'.⁷⁵ If the rains, particularly the small rains, come late the DAs do not visit and the fertiliser is not delivered, whether or not the farmers are registered on the lists. Fertiliser not distributed during periods of drought remains in the warehouses. In all the rural areas, the peasants say the same thing: the DAs only come with the rains (often adding 'like birds', in reference to their predatory character). In our view, this recurrent comment highlights a major constraint in the procedure: it is aligned with the farming calendar for the purpose of transforming farming practices. The months and weeks preceding the first soil preparation are a time of great social interdependence between farmers, as they make arrangements for share-cropping. Those without a full team have to

borrow oxen from their neighbours. Often these arrangements are made in advance, but sometimes they take place at the last moment. In any case, farmers who borrow oxen need to possess a certain status, a certain social respectability in these rural mutual aid proceedings. It is definitely not a good time for them to oppose the *mengist*.

The several months that can elapse between the time the farmer registers on the lists and the time when the fertiliser order arrives is a period of great climatic uncertainty, in particular in the short rainy season. Farmers adjust their growing choices to reflect the timing and quality of the rains and, especially in the south, prioritise plants that are not commercialised. By directing farmers' planting decisions, the use of fertiliser and its impact on cereal commercialisation restrict their crop management choices and thereby increase their vulnerability.⁷⁶

'Routine resistance' or 'voluntary servitude', stopping fertiliser

Unlike Teferi Abate Adem we do not think that peasants who 'continue to adopt the technology packages with no attention to their economic costs and benefits' are reflecting 'culturally informed concerns and strategies'. Our view is more that the local balance of power forces them to do so and that the lack of visibility masks the '*everyday* forms of peasant resistance'.⁷⁷ Just as Scott notes the effort to stop combine-harvesters in Sedaka, we observe similar attempts amongst vulnerable peasants to stop fertiliser, to deregister from the 'fertiliser lists'. By contrast with practice in the 2000s, adoption of the technological package has become permanent. First for technical reasons: farmers everywhere see that yields fall on land where fertiliser is no longer used,⁷⁸ or need to buy the package to obtain seeds, if they are unable to retain a stock on the farm. But also because the raising of the national productivity targets prompts the DAs to expand rather than adjust their lists of package recipients. Even so, for financial reasons farmers often experiment with stopping fertiliser use on a few plots, though never across the entire farm.

In the *gotts* of Chagouran and Gefao Ager in Wortej *kebele* (Tenta *wereda*, South Wollo, Amhara), the farmers traditionally grow only wetland barley in the small rainy season. For the last two to three years, they have used a package made up of fertiliser and selected wheat seeds. On the advice of the DAs, they tested the package on wheat during the small rains, or simply spread fertiliser on unimproved barley⁷⁹ – with no effect, since the fertiliser 'burned the soil'. After that, they restricted the package to the main rainy season, equally without effect. They say that they are not interested in having fertiliser, even free of charge, since it is ineffective on their land. Yet when we met them, they were still registered on the fertiliser lists. They said that they had no choice, and were forced (*guedej*) by the local authorities to take it. In these villages, the rejection of fertiliser is universal, because the local environment is incompatible with use of the technological package. But although the farmers of Wortej made an oral complaint at the previous conference, as well as sending a written complaint to the head of the OoARD via the chairman of the *kebele*, the latter refused to accept it. The barley growers therefore continue to buy fertiliser and wheat seed under compulsion.

The use of pressure is very common in rural Ethiopia. Because of the big power imbalance in relations between the state and the peasantry, force is rare. It is not really necessary and is limited to the odd prison term. By contrast, threats are constantly employed:

If you don't buy the fertiliser, you will go to gaol ... you will lose your land which will go to someone who uses it better [who uses fertiliser] ... you will get no money from the SafetyNet ... your livestock will go to prison ... you will receive no more government aid when you need it.⁸⁰

This is the main argument adopted by state officials to persuade peasants to buy fertiliser, an argument used in the same way in different development programmes, whatever the area of activity.

People who cannot pay go to prison. You stay in prison until you have paid. Go to any house, you will always find people who have been to gaol. I spent two days there myself. My brother paid and then I sold my goats to pay him back.⁸¹

And the militia member B. adds: 'When the husband is carted off to prison, his wife brings money'. People are only sent to prison for failing to pay back their loans. However, vague threats are employed, even to get farmers to sign up as recipients. Sham detention (a few hours in the offices) is another technique employed.

Most of the reluctant farmers submit to the will of the *mengist* and adapt to the measure. Usually, they try to reduce the quantities of fertiliser they have to buy, thereby reinforcing the pointless and corrosive nature of the measure. They might otherwise sign up as late as possible, which makes the DAs more worried about not meeting their quotas and helps to ratchet up the pressure in the already busy weeks before sowing. Alternatively, they may borrow, in which case debt can be seen as a strategy of resistance to state pressure. In this case, they manage their debt in the same way as any other kind of debt, by doing day labour, by selling their farm products or giving up use of all or part of their land.⁸² Finally, in the most extreme cases, they run away, 'hide' in towns or remote and isolated areas, described as 'forest' or 'deserts', depending on the region, in order to escape state pressure and in particular to avoid prison terms, which they know to be unavoidable. All of them speak of and list the failings of the system, whether or not they see themselves as victims, thereby developing a narrative of resistance, either personally assumed or 'disguised'⁸³ by attribution to an unnamed neighbour.

Few people manage to withdraw from the lists. Those who do are often marginal individuals, relatively immune to the arguments of authority, often old people, lone women, people on the edge of destitution or isolated farmers:

How can I pay? I am too old. [...]. Last year I used it, but this year I refuse. [...] When I stopped the fertiliser, they stopped giving me SafetyNet aid. I refused to take it in January. If I had signed, they could have arrested me, because I would have been in debt. So I am not signing. [...] They threaten to withhold aid, so the others take it because they are frightened. As far as I know, I am the only one stopping.⁸⁴

It has been shown that this rhetoric works because of an overlap in the powers of the state, which reinforces the authority of the *mengist* and the imbalance of power between the state and the peasantry.

Every week, we have some meeting with the *lemaat gudile* [Development Group], we speak about fertiliser during all the ploughing season. DAs are not present. We have such Conference very often because the aim of the development group leader is to distribute fertiliser.⁸⁵

The 'professional workers' of the MoARD and the *kebele* are civil servants like any others, whether they belong to central government agencies or local authorities. They are often based in the same offices. They share the same way of doing things, use the same vocabulary to describe different orders of reality (model farmers and innovative farmers are both subsumed into the '*modelu gabare*'), and they perform the same tasks: thus the people responsible for imprisoning farmers unable to repay their fertiliser purchase loans from the OoARD may equally be *kebele* officials or DAs; it is *kebele* officials who, in the presence of the DAs, distribute the aid managed by the MoARD (in particular under the PSNP); it is DAs in coordination with members of the *kebele* who summon the farmers to *development works* and organise them – whether or not that work is connected with agriculture; and finally, it is also the DAs who collect land tax.

Conclusion: the local scale of the state

As its local interface represents the new vanguard of state power, the governmental objective is to remodel the local scale through the vehicle of public policies or through the structuring of civil society. The local scale has no partnership role in local governance; it remains an object of intervention rather than a partner in collaboration, an administrative level more than a geographical scale. Public *encadrement* can thus be measured by the state's capacity to destabilise the relations between its representatives and local communities, to restrict the expression and enactment of the collective will at local scale. The limited capacity of farmers to protest against the package is in this respect typical.

The spatial control exercised by the state weighs all the more heavily on local populations in that it has a long history and a powerful presence. The materiality of this aspect of Ethiopian politics cannot be overstated. It contributes significantly to the inertia of the power structures and to the slow pace of change in the balance of power, especially in rural areas. It keeps the countryside under the tutelage of the MoARD/*kebele* tandem, a tutelage that few regions are spared. In our view, this phenomenon is a major factor – as great and possibly greater than poverty, which it moreover helps to exacerbate – in the continuing dependency of the rural world. The mechanism of fertiliser debt contributes significantly to this negative impact.

The reality is that the force that dominates Ethiopia's rural space is bureaucratic power. Its institutional methods are imposed like a rule that is answerable to standards and reproduces a rationality which are not those of the peasant world, a world nevertheless familiar to it through long experience. In Ethiopia, the question of the effective power of DAs – a subject of extensive debate elsewhere – is nowhere on the agenda. DAs, invested with the authority and force of the *mengist*, have power over those under their tutelage. They enact a series of rules, procedures established at levels other than those to which the power is applied. Nonetheless, their connection with and proximity to the local context is far from unambiguous. They occupy an equivocal position in the local political arena; paradoxically, the constraint they impose arises in part from a certain alienation from the local context, and conversely in part from a substantial degree of closeness, in particular in the convergence of calendars.

This capacity of bureaucratic proceduralism to penetrate the local sphere restricts the emergence of peasant action, confines resistance to conventional but futile forms or hidden expressions and gives farmers little room for manoeuvre. It remains to be seen to what extent the enrichment promised by the measure may foster a more balanced 'government' of local areas, a balance of power more favourable to the peasantry.

Notes

1. Weber, *Economie et Société*, 294.
2. De Waal, "The Theory and Practice of Meles Zenawi"; Lefort, "A Response to Alex De Waal."
3. Hagmann and Péclard, *Negotiating Statehood*.
4. Ibid.; Oliver de Sardan, *Anthropologie et développement*.
5. Weber, *Economy and Society*.
6. Bayart, « Le politique par le bas ».
7. Foucault, *Il faut défendre la société*, p. 26.
8. Swyngedouw, "Authoritarian Governance."
9. Emmenegger et al., "Decentralization to the Household."
10. Segers et al., "Be like Bees."
11. Lefort, "Free Market, 'Developmental State' and Party-state Hegemony."
12. For details see Davis et al., *In-depth Assessment of the Public Agricultural Extension System*; Shahidur et al., *Fertilizer in Ethiopia*; Dercon, Vargas Hill, and Zeitin, *In Search of a Strategy*; Spielman et al., "Policies to Promote Cereal Intensification."
13. See Chinigo, "Agrarian Transformation" or Dessalegn Rahmato, *Peasant and the State* on land titling; Lavers, "Food Security" or Fekadu Nigussa and Mberengwa, *Challenges of PSNP* on SafetyNet; Emmenegger, Sibilo Keno, and Hagmann, "Decentralization to the Household" or Abbink, "Ethnic-based Federalism on Decentralization"; and Teferi Abate Adem, "Green Revolution" or Kassa Belay, "Constraints to Agricultural Extension on Agricultural Extension Itself."
14. See Scott, *Seeing like a State*, on the administrative ordering of society as a State simplification.
15. See Foucault, on the disciplinary power in *Il faut défendre la société*.
16. Markakis, *The Last Two Frontiers*, Clapham, "Controlling Spaces."
17. For a non-exhaustive overview on rural imbalance of powers, see: Lefort, "Powers-mengist and Peasants," or, on the connection between *mengist* and *gabare*; Woldeab Teshome, "Irrigation Practices," Vaughan and Tronvoll, "The Culture of Power on the Mechanisms of Domination"; Segers et al., "Developers and Farmers," or Teferi Abate Adem on conflation of powers; Poluha, "Learning Political Behaviour," or Segers et al., "Be like Bees for Vehicles of Peasant's Mobilisation."
18. Clapham, "Controlling Space"; Pausewang, "No Environmental Protection without Local Democracy."
19. See Vaughan, "Revolutionary Democratic State-building"; Lefort, "Free Market for Model Farmers," or Chinigo, in "Agrarian Transformation," for '1 to 5' groups.
20. Sikor and Lund, "Access and Property."
21. Dessalegn Rahmato, *The Peasant and the State*; Aspen, "Models of Democracy."
22. Lefort, "Free Market, or, Powers-mengist and Peasants."
23. Segers et al., "Farmers and Developers."
24. A similar approach has been developed on Rwanda, see Van Damme, Ansoms, and Baret, "Agricultural Innovation."
25. Woldeab Teshome, "Irrigation Practices," State intervention and Farmer's Life-worlds.
26. The MoARD represents a "superministry" (Vaughan, 2011), because it coordinates all rural development initiatives but also because its close ties to local *kebele* government (Pausewang, 2002).
27. See Olivier de Sardan "A la recherche des normes pratiques."
28. Chibber, "Bureaucratic Rationality."
29. See Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*.
30. Mainly vis-à-vis PNSP, *Productive SafetyNet Program*, and their food distribution. For details see Lavers, "Food Security," or Fekadu Nigussa and Mberengwa, *Challenges of PSNP*.
31. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, p. 289.
32. The surveys were carried out as part of a Ph.D. (from 1999 to 2001) then a research programme conducted in collaboration with Institute of Research for Development/French Centre for Ethiopian Studies/Addis-Ababa University (from 2010 to 2012).
33. The use of fertiliser was introduced in Ethiopia by the Food and Agriculture Organisation in the late 1960s, but only really developed in the mid-1990s. For a more detailed history of agricultural policies, see Kassa Belay, "Constraints to Agricultural Extension Work"; Davis

- et al., *In-depth Assessment of the Public Agricultural Extension System*; Spielman et al., "Policies to Promote Cereal Intensification."
34. Shahidur Rashid et al., *Fertilizer in Ethiopia*; Dercon, Vargas Hill, and Zeitin, *In Search of a Strategy: Rethinking Agriculture-led Growth in Ethiopia*; Spielman et al., "Policies to Promote Cereal Intensification."
 35. Shahidur Rashid, *Fertilizer in Ethiopia*.
 36. Growth and Transformation Plan.
 37. Only a DA can approve these arrangements and guarantee their agronomic suitability.
 38. On the large scale, there are very sharp variations between *weredas*, *kebeles* and, of course, between farms. In Eastern Tigray, the proportion of fertiliser beneficiaries thus varies between 73% of all householders in Ganta Afeshum *wereda* and only 36% in the neighbouring Kulo Mukheda *wereda*. In Wolaita (Damot Sore *wereda*), where the average proportion of farmers using fertiliser is 58%, percentages vary from 38% to 91% between one *kebele* and another (surveys, April 2011).
 39. Kassa Belay, "Constraints to Agricultural Extension Work."
 40. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*.
 41. Interview, Western Tigray, 2012.
 42. See the confusion between Party's supporter and volunteer in the Program, in Teferi Abate Adem, "The Local Politics of Ethiopia's Green Revolution."
 43. See onions cultivators observed by Lefort, "In Free Market, 'Developmental State' and Party-state Hegemony" or Khat producers in our enquiry.
 44. Migdal, *State in Society*.
 45. The MoARD physical encadrement is presented in Planel, "Usage de l'engrais en politique."
 46. Weber, *Economy and Society*.
 47. Teferi Abate Adem notes in "The Local Politics of Ethiopia's Green Revolution," that "they were concerned more with the political consequences of not fulfilling the required quota than with its economic outcome."
 48. Dom and Carter, "The Role of the 'Government Go-betweens.'"
 49. Agricultural Technical and Vocational Education and Training College.
 50. Interview, Abela Gefata, Humbo, Wolaita, April 2011.
 51. Dercon, Vargas Hill, and Zeitin, *In Search of a Strategy: Rethinking Agriculture-led Growth in Ethiopia*, 3: "Fertilizer use has moved more than 40% of land area cultivated with cereals, but selected seeds only cover less than 5%."
 52. Interview, North Shewa, Amhara, February 2011.
 53. Interview, Shasge kebele, Metema wereda, North Gondar, 2011.
 54. Overcrossing of traditional institutions and states administration are frequent. See Vaughan for Tigray in "Revolutionary-democratic State Building."
 55. Interview Kalakel Tatokoraro, East Tigray, July 2012.
 56. Chinigo, "Decentralization and Agrarian Transformation."
 57. Interview, Amara Biyo kebele, Shashura wereda, West Amhara, 2011.
 58. Arriola, "Ethnicity and Opposition Support."
 59. Markakis, *Ethiopia, the Last Two Frontiers*.
 60. Interview, Oumaïdota, Afambo, Afar, February 2012.
 61. See also, Fasil and Habtemariam, "Assessment of the Current Extension System"; Kassay Belay, "Constraints to Agricultural Extension Work"; Spielman, Kelemework, and Alemu, "Seed, Fertilizer and Agricultural Extension."
 62. Spielman et al., "Policies to Promote Cereal Intensification."
 63. Interview, Wolaita, SNNPR, 2011.
 64. Interview, Gununo, Damot Sore, Wolaita, December 2011.
 65. Dercon, Vargas Hill, and Zeitin, *Rethinking Agriculture-led Growth*; Spielman et al., "Policies to Promote Cereal Intensification."
 66. Ibid.
 67. Woldeab Teshome, "Irrigation Practices."
 68. Interview, D., Leinsha kebele, Metema wereda, North Gondar, Amhara, 2011.
 69. According to our surveys, criticisms at the collective meetings are confined to the productivity outcomes associated with the Package, and there is no mention of the debt that it sometimes causes, an issue that is not aired publicly. The responses by MoARD officials are therefore

- restricted to the way the farmers use the Package, in particular their failure to use sufficient quantities of fertiliser.
70. Interview, A., Genta Afeshum kebele, Bete Hawariat-Sassun wereda, Eastern Tigray 2012.
 71. Agere selam tabia, tataruba kushet, Kulo Mukheda wereda.
 72. Spielman et al., “Policies to Promote Cereal Intensification,” and Spielman, Kelemework, and Alemu, “Seed, Fertilizer and Agricultural Extension.”
 73. For details see Shahidur Rashid et al., *Fertilizer in Ethiopia*; Dercon, Vargas Hill, and Zeitin, *In Search of a Strategy: Rethinking Agriculture-led Growth in Ethiopia*.
 74. Ibid.
 75. Scott, *Seeing like a State*, 6.
 76. Planel, *La chute d’un Eden éthiopien*.
 77. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*.
 78. Some of the poorest peasants or those most reluctant to buy fertiliser from the MoARD, buy their neighbours’ surplus fertiliser on the market.
 79. In reality, on old improved barley varieties.
 80. Various interviews, 2011 and 2012.
 81. Interview, Washa kebele, Shasura wereda, West Amhara, 2011.
 82. Planel, *La chute d’un Eden éthiopien*.
 83. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* on the “hidden transcripts.”
 84. Interview, A., Genta Afeshum, Bete Hawariat-Sassun, Eastern Tigray 2012.
 85. Interview, N., Alaye, Kalalel, East Tigray, 2012.

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