# INFORMATION TO USERS

# REFUGEE LIVES AND THE POLITICS OF SUFFERING
# IN SOMALI ETHIOPIA

by

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*For Ifrah Sophia - joy, wisdom*

## Abstract

This thesis examines the lifeworlds of Somali returnees in Ethiopia. Their experience of flight and return is distinctive, shaped by the history and culture of the Somali people and the political and economic conditions of this part of Africa. In emphasizing this distinctiveness, this thesis is an implicit critique of recent efforts by academics and aid agencies to homogenize the experience of refugees in this region and elsewhere. In Ethiopia, "development" and humanitarian aid, in interaction with political contests at many levels, provide the context for interpreting refugee experience and action. Globally, the most powerful of the reductionist accounts is based on the "trauma model" of refugee experience. In this model, "refugee experience" has come to be virtually synonymous with "psychosocial" and, in turn, "mental health" and "post-traumatic stress disorder" (PTSD). Somali refugees and returnees in Ethiopia, however, do not address violence, death, and war-related distress in a framework of psychological medicine, with its goal of reducing psychological, emotional and physiological symptoms of individual distress. Rather, such distress is predominantly assimilated into the framework of politics, with its goals of survival and restitution. Emotion, and talking about emotion, evoke complex individual and collective memories that situate individual and local community experience within, or in juxtaposition to, other realities: competing powers such as the Ethiopian and other states, dispossession, and the precariousness of survival in a harsh natural and political environment. Historical narratives, collective memory, anger, and the rhetorics of development and humanitarian aid play important roles in these communities' efforts to rebuild social networks and what they refer to as a "decent human life."

**Résumé**

Cette thèse examine l'existence des Somalis rapatriés en Éthiopie. Leur expérience du vol de retour a un caractère original car elle est déterminée par l'histoire et la culture du peuple de Somalie et les conditions politiques et économiques de cette région d'Afrique. En soulignant cet aspect propre, la thèse est une critique implicite des tentatives récentes des universitaires et des organismes d'aide d'uniformiser l'expérience des réfugiés de cette région et d'ailleurs. En Éthiopie, le « développement » et l'aide humanitaire qui interagissent avec les conjonctures politiques à des niveaux multiples, fournissent le contexte permettant d'interpréter l'expérience et les actions des réfugiés. Globalement, le plus puissant des comptes rendus «réductionnistes » se fonde sur le « modèle du traumatisme » inhérent à l'expérience du réfugié. Selon ce modèle, « l'expérience du réfugié » est qualifiée de « psychosociale» et devient virtuellement synonyme de « santé mentale » et de « syndrome de stress post-traumatique » (SSPT). Les réfugiés et repatriés somalis n'évoquent pas la violence, la mort et les traumatismes liés à la guerre dans un cadre de médecine physiologique et dans le dessein de réduire les symptômes psychologiques, émotionnels et physiologiques de la détresse individuelle. Cette détresse est plutôt assimilée de façon prédominante au cadre qui délimite la politique, dans son objet de survie et de restitution. L'émotion et les discussions à propos de l'émotion évoquent des mémoires individuelles et collectives complexes qui placent les vécues individuels et collectifs en relation avec les autres réalités: l'État, la dépossession et la survie précaire dans un environnement naturel et politique éprouvant. Les évocations historiques, la mémoire collective, la colère et le discours du développement et de l'aide humanitaire jouent des rôles importants dans les efforts que déploient ces collectivités

pour rétablir des réseaux sociaux et celle qu'ils définissent de « vie humaine décente ».

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## Preface

If you lose your land by force, if you see the government eating your land, if you

are hungry - what do you feel?          Halimo Muusa, Hurso Ethiopia


The main point is to help each other. To talk is fine, but let's get to the main point.

You see our problems with your own eyes, as an eyewitness - they don't need

much explanation.                    Haawa Omar, Hurso Ethiopia


I embarked on my doctoral studies of Somali refugees and returnees determined to

find a new and eloquent approach to Somali studies and refugee research. In particular, I

wanted to examine and understand the embodied experience and poetic symbolism of

trauma. I did not want to get stuck in what seemed like a rut of Somali studies, namely,

politics. I believe that I have indeed begun to understand the embodied experience of

Somali refugees and returnees in one of the poorest countries of the world. It keeps

coming back to politics. The material reality, socio-political conditions and cultural

forms of Somalis in the Horn of Africa are different to those of other populations.

Perhaps other communities' refugee experiences can be well captured by conveying what

Taussig calls the "epistemic murk" of existence and terror, but to my interlocutors' minds

things were not particularly murky. According to them, it was my job to tell the story

straight and to get something done about the miserable conditions of their lives. It is not,

of course, the whole story, nor a simple one, nor does politics contain the whole of their

experience. But it is an essential story to tell first, and to come back to in the end.

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Many of the names and places in this thesis are real. I initially gave the village of

Hurso a pseudonym, Beer Weyn, which means "big garden". However, when I explored

this issue with Hurso residents, they were unanimous that I should use real names and tell

the real history. When I raised the issue of possible risks to the community from having

their story told publicly, I was told that their claims and their history were already in the

public domain, in parliament and in the courts. I have therefore used the real name of this

and other communities and am aware that in doing so I have added this work to the

process of collective memory of particular communities. I have found Jewsiewicki and

Mudimbe's (1993:10) definition of collective memory particularly useful for interpreting

the "narratives of suffering" that I heard:

> Collective memory is a means of producing meanings which belong to a political
>
> field...Collective memory does not signify facts about the past: it is above all a
>
> semantic code for retrieving memories, for making sense out of historical details
>
> in direct relation to political legitimacy.

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Graduate Studies and Research. Apotex kindly provided a generous contribution of essential generic medicines which I was able to donate to the clinic in Hurso village. The Plantagenet Medical Centre was extremely flexible in allowing me to work around lengthy absences from Canada. Paul Lyons and Jean and Denise DeGuise have been particularly supportive. The Population Health Group of the Canadian Institutes for Advanced Research awarded me a doctoral completion fellowship which allowed me to participate in extremely stimulating meetings as well as to conduct an additional brief period of fieldwork in May-June 1998.

My thesis director, Allan Young, has contributed substantively in numerous ways, from suggesting key questions and references, inviting my participation in seminars and challenging me to justify my analysis, to referring me to invaluable colleagues. He has served as a model of rigorous scholarship and clear writing. I hope someday to meet the standards he sets in his own work. He suffered the lengthy gestation of this thesis, as well as my stubbornness, with good humour and compassion, and finally sent a rather bland e-mail – it packed a big enough adrenaline jolt that I was finally able to finish. But the reader must absolve him of any responsibility for my Austenesque sentences[1] and, more importantly, for any failures of logic or argumentation. My two other committee members, Ellen Corin and John Galaty, have also offered advice, alternative

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[1]

He did warn me, part way through what was then Chapter Eight: "Christina, you have suffered a terrible moral relapse, but I'm going to give you a chance to redeem yourself....You may have as many sentences as you wish. You may not have more than two subordinate clauses in any one sentence, and a maximum of three adjectives per page."

interpretations, and invaluable moral support throughout my years at McGill. Ellen's

work has challenged me to delve more deeply into the symbolic structures and processes

at play in this and other social contexts, and to push my analysis of emotion and

matrilateral kinship further. John's interest in narrative, his knowledge of pastoralist

societies in East Africa, and his commitment to research that would respond to the

demands for increased wellbeing expressed by the communities in which we work, are

reflected throughout this thesis.

I have benefitted from the dynamic and creative atmosphere in the departments of

anthropology and Social Studies of Medicine at McGill. Beyond my thesis committee, the

faculty and my fellow students have been enormously helpful in challenging me to

produce sound, relevant, and interesting research. In particular, I wish to thank Don

Attwood, Don Bates, Alberto Cambrosio, the late Roger Keesing, Margaret Lock,

Michael MacAdam, Toby Morantz, George Weisz, Dominique Behague, Lesley Boggs,

Leslie Butt, Patricia Foxen, Catherine Hagen, Yasir Khan, Junko Kitanaka, Vinh Kim

Nguyen, Ian Schokking, Scott Simon, and Bob White. Patricia Foxen has been a

particularly important colleague, as well as friend, from the day we met in the Department

of Anthropology at the beginning of our M.A. studies. Without Rose Marie Stano, I

would never have navigated through McGill. Participants in STANDD–both faculty and

students–commented on draft chapters presented at several seminars. Within McGill's

Department of Psychiatry, the Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry and the

Psychosocial Research Division at the Douglas Hospital Research Centre provided

supportive and challenging research environments. I wish particularly to acknowledge

Duncan Pedersen, as well as Ellen Corin in her capacity as a colleague, Consuelo

Errazuriz, Suzanne King, Laurence Kirmayer, Eric Latimer, and Cecile Rousseau. Kendra

McKnight made helpful editorial comments on parts of the thesis. I take particular

pleasure in thanking Jose Brunner and Derek Summerfield. Derek, one of the colleagues

to whom I was referred by Allan, has commented on most of the chapters here in a

correspondence that has greatly enriched my thinking. The intellectual foundations for

this research were first laid during my year of studies in public health and anthropology at

Harvard. I especially wish to thank Arthur Kleinman, Byron Good, and Pauline Peters.

The responsibility for the content and any errors in this thesis, however, remains mine.

I have previously published earlier versions of what are now parts of various

chapters (Zarowsky 1997, 1999, 2000a, 2000b). They have been substantially reworked

for this thesis. I am grateful to *Refuge, Cultural Survival Quarterly,* Lynne Rienner

Publishers, and *Transcultural Psychiatry* for permission to use this material.

Friends, relatives, and neighbours have provided invaluable personal and family

support, especially in the five years since I took on the additional role of "mother". I wish

to express particular gratitude to Cuauhtemoc Aviles, Ilda Moreyra Basso, Patricia Foxen,

Judy Matthew, Calvin Piggott, Ulana and Henry Abramson, Frances Kilbertus, Isabelle

Bertrand, Claire Pain, Allan Peterkin, Catherine Hagen, Marta Maksymec and Villia

Jefremovas for support at critical periods, most of which seemed to go on for a long time.

In a couple of last stretches, Suzanne King, Consuelo Errazuriz, and Patrick Bond offered

both practical and personal support when these were desperately needed. Angela Kaida

worked hard and with amazing good humour to help me with the final editing, formatting,

and tracking down of elusive references. Villia has been both friend and mentor throughout this process. Firoze Manji has cajoled and admonished me to finish. During an existential crisis towards the end of an almost-final draft, when I thought I should start all over again from a completely different analytic perspective, Allan Young said: "Christina, I have two words for you. CALM DOWN." To all of you who knew when to say "calm down" and when to threaten imminent doom, thank you.

Finally, my fieldwork experience and my relationships with Somalis and other Ethiopians in Dire Dawa, Malka Jabdu and Hurso were transformed by my relations with an infant girl. The child's mother had died in childbirth. In the absence of kinfolk able to care for the baby, I assumed this responsibility. Subsequently, I formally adopted this child, Ifrah. My plan to reside in one of the Aware camps for several weeks or months, to live in Hurso village the rest of the time, and to travel more extensively in the region was curtailed by the logistical constraints of caring for a sick infant and doing the necessary paperwork. I lived in Dire Dawa city, travelled to Hurso almost daily, and stayed overnight a few times. However, my knowledge of the constraints faced by local populations made destitute by forced migration, and of the ways people in these communities sought to reconstruct individual and social lives, was immeasurably enriched by my entering into what remains a complex relationship of kinship and quasi-kinship with my daughter Ifrah's birth kin and neighbours. This thesis is dedicated to her.

## Introduction

## A MORAL ECONOMY OF SUFFERING

Ethnic Somalis constitute one of the main populations of northeast Africa. They reside in four countries: Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and northern Kenya. During the years 1977 to 1980, hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian Somalis migrated as refugees to Somalia and Djibouti. Their flight was caused by the Ogaden War between Somalia and Ethiopia and subsequent reprisals against Somali communities in eastern Ethiopia. Thousands more fled drought and localized conflicts from 1991 to 1994. Their destination was determined by a combination of accident (what transport or guides were available at a given time and place) and choice (what news had circulated among kinsmen about degree of security and available assistance). Large numbers of refugees began to arrive in the refugee camps that were established across the border, as these camps offered both food and relative safety. In these camps, many Ethiopian Somalis experienced the rhetoric and practices of international aid agencies for the first time. However, up to a million refugees were absorbed by clansmen in the borderlands and never claimed or received official humanitarian assistance.

By 1996, nearly all of these refugees had returned to Ethiopia. They found their situation radically transformed from what it had been prior to 1977. Many were landless. Social networks had been destroyed. The Ethiopian state had been twice transformed in their lifetime, first in 1974 from the slowly modernizing feudal empire of Haile Selassie into the military socialist state run by Mengistu Haile Mariam and his Derg (Amharic for

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"committee"), and then in 1991 into a federation based on ethnically based National Regions. The new government was a coalition of the guerilla forces that had overthrown the Derg, dominated by the main insurgent group, the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF). For the first time in four hundred years, ethnic Somalis could envisage full citizenship and cultural rights within an Ethiopian state, with the constitutional option of secession.

This thesis examines the lifeworlds of a segment of these returnees. Their experience of flight and return is distinctive, shaped by the history and culture of the Somali people and the political and economic conditions of this part of Africa. In emphasizing the distinctiveness of their refugee experiences, this thesis is an implicit critique of recent efforts by academics and aid agencies to homogenize the experience of refugees in this region and elsewhere. In Ethiopia, "development" and humanitarian aid, in interaction with political contests at many levels, provide the context for interpreting refugee experience and action. Globally, the most powerful of the reductionist accounts is based on the "trauma model" of refugee experience.

### The "Refugee Regime"

Institutions related to refugees and humanitarian aid affect millions of people around the world every year. The "refugee relief system", or "refugee regime" (Leopold and Harrell-Bond 1994), comprises the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), other UN bodies (primarily the World Food Programme - WFP), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from donor and host countries, and some

government bodies such as Ministries of Health and refugee aid departments. The Office

of the High Commissioner for Refugees was created and mandated by the UN in 1951 to

protect and assist refugees and populations in "refugee-like situations" and to promote

three "durable solutions": voluntary repatriation, settlement in the host country, and

resettlement in a third country. Recent estimates of the total number of refugees,

returnees, and internally displaced people range from a conservative estimate of 26.5

million by UNHCR, to 51 million by Francis Deng, former Special Representative on

Human Rights and Internally Displaced Persons to the Secretary General of the United

Nations (Zetter 1999; Deng 1993). The discrepancy in these estimates arises from

disagreement over the numbers of internally displaced: 4.8 million according to UNHCR

and 30 million according to Deng. The number of refugees, excluding the 3.8 million

Palestinian refugees under the jurisdiction of a separate UN body[1], was estimated at 16.2

million in 1996, having peaked at 18.2 million in 1993.

The vast majority of these refugees and displaced populations come from and stay

in poor countries. Fifteen million of the 16.7 million refugees identified in 1991 were in

"developing" or Southern countries. From the decolonization wars of the 1960s to the

early 1990s, nine of the world's ten poorest countries each produced or received

"substantial numbers of refugees...These...include: Mozambique, Ethiopia, Chad,

Tanzania, Bangladesh, Malawi, Somalia, Zaire, and Laos" (Gorman 1993:4). Northern

countries emphasize case-by-case determination of eligibility for asylum and seek to

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1. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, UNRWA

minimize the number of claimants on the one hand, and facilitate individual integration of accepted claimants through employment, language training and so forth on the other. The scale of refugee flows and the poverty of host countries in the South lead instead to an emphasis on emergency food, water and shelter, and longer term "care and maintenance" or development assistance (Callamard 1993; Gorman 1993; Keen 1992; Zetter 1999).

However, although most refugees stay in poor countries, they are significantly affected by the actions of UNHCR, other actors in the refugee relief system, and Western countries in general. To understand the experiences of refugees as well as the statements and practices of humanitarian agencies and practitioners, it is therefore important to examine the assumptions and structures involved in helping refugees. The combination of assumptions about refugee behaviour with institutional requirements–especially of accountability to donors for food or monetary aid–tends to lead to regimented and coercive conditions in refugee camps, and to downplaying ethical dilemmas over the portrayal of beneficiaries as innocent and helpless victims in order to ensure continued funding (Harrell-Bond 1986; Malkki 1996; Prendergast 1996). The politics of pity are played out in particular situations around the world, but the landscapes are sculpted by the donors and helpers into remarkably similar shapes regardless of local histories and dynamics: into refugee camps and development projects in the "Third World", and into mental health centres in the West. It is therefore not very surprising that superficially similar "refugee behaviours" are found around the world. A closer look at these landscapes, and at others constructed under different terms, challenges generic models of refugee behaviour and distress.

Trauma in Refugee Mental Health

Over the past two decades there has been increasing concern in the West about the

suffering of refugees and victims of torture. This concern is most often expressed in terms

of mental health (Ager 1993; Agger 1992; Beiser 1991; Boehnlein 1987; Cole et al 1992;

Desjarlais et al 1995 Chapters 5 and 6; Elsass 1997; Kinzie et al 1990; Marsella et al

1996; Marsella et al 1994; Mollica et al 1987; Williams and Westermeyer 1986). In his

comprehensive review of the refugee mental health literature up to 1993, Ager (1993:3)

notes that "the first coherent attempt at the study of the psychosocial impact of becoming

a refugee was represented by a number of researches examining the psychiatric

adjustment of refugees from central Europe following resettlement after World War II".

This medical and more specifically psychiatric formulation of the psychosocial impact of

forced migration has remained the predominant approach to research seeking to grasp the

lived experience of refugees.

This research is shaped by an emphasis on the stages of the refugee experience,

understood in individual terms, and the ways they might be influenced by economic or

political conditions, social support, and coping styles. The stages of the refugee

experience are pre-flight, flight, reception (which may include years in refugee camps),

and resettlement (Ager 1993:5-6). Stein (1986:8) cites Keller's (1975) more detailed list:

"perception of a threat; deciding to flee; the period of extreme danger and flight; reaching

safety; camp behavior; repatriation; settlement or resettlement, the early and late states of

resettlement; adjustment and acculturation; and finally, residual stages and changes in

behavior caused by the experience." While Ager's structure allows more room for social

interaction and influence than does the psychologically-focused scheme cited by Stein,

both approaches support the idea that the disruption and threat of forced migration are the

central dimension of the lived experience of people who are refugees. Stein proposes that

[f]or social scientists the refugee category is defined by the trauma and stresses,

persecution and danger, losses and isolation, uprooting and change of the refugee

experience (Stein 1986:6).

However, the mental health model goes further. Not only are the disruption and

threat central, but their main effects are psychological. In particular, since the late 1980s

the "psychosocial effects of the refugee experience" have largely been conflated with

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder:

The PTSD diagnosis is highly prevalent in writings regarding refugee mental

health...and is frequently used even in circumstances where analysis is explicitly

social rather than medical in conception...It has become a key conceptual device

in attempts to understand the psychological experience of refugees (Ager

1993:28)

The conflation of "psychosocial experience" with, ultimately, a psychiatric

diagnosis has resulted in large part from the institutional setting of most published

research: psychiatric and other mental health centres in Western cities. As Ager (1993:27)

notes, "[a] coherent picture of mental health issues in refugee populations will only

emerge when this imbalance has been redressed. There is an acute need for study of the

psychological distress amongst those displaced *within* the developing world." Critical

views have been expressed towards conventional refugee mental health research and

practice from within the mental health field (Becker 1995; Lolas 1990; Kornfeld 1995;

Martin-Baro 1994; Richman 1993; Summerfield 1999, 1999b). These critiques argue for

a more politically engaged analysis and practice. Ager's review also supports a more

social and political approach to refugee mental health issues. However, in contrast to the

critiques of authors such as Summerfield (1996, 1998, 1999) and Zur (1996), Ager's

expanded approach remains within the framework of psychiatry and psychology. It would

not address the question of how "refugee experience" came to be virtually synonymous

with "psychosocial" and, in turn, "mental health" and "post-traumatic stress disorder",

and what the implications of this shift in meaning might be for refugees and other

players. Nor would it address the place of psychological distress and, indeed, "the refugee

experience" in the lives of people who are or have been refugees, relative to other

domains of identity, experience, and practice .

This thesis addresses the second of these sets of questions, focusing primarily on

populations of Somali refugees and returnees in Ethiopia. It is not primarily about PTSD,

or even mental health. The "trauma model" represents a way of interpreting the

experience of violence and forced migration that is, in reality, alien to the way in which

these Somali returnees understand their situation. For these people, the main dimensions

of their situation are social, economic, and political. They are framed in terms of justice,

restitution, and rebuilding social networks and a decent life rather than mental conflicts

and psychological distress.

The chapters of this thesis describe aspects of Ethiopian Somali lifeworlds that are directly related to the experience of political violence and forced migration. It would be presumptuous to claim that the chapters add up to a *complete* picture of this experience through the eyes of the returnees. It is rather an effort to understand key dimensions of what the experience of flight and return has meant to some Somali communities in Ethiopia.

## Outline of the Thesis

### Part One: Orientations.

Chapter One provides an overview of Somali, Ethiopian and regional history, including a discussion of competing approaches to Somali studies and Ethiopian history. The intersections of culture, ecology, political economy, and foreign involvement–including foreign aid–are stressed in this chapter. The importance of memory and historical narrative as social and political practice is introduced. This will be a recurring theme throughout the thesis.

Chapter Two considers Western and Somali definitions and rhetorics around refugees and the refugee experience. It draws on the work of Cowen and Shenton (1996), who argue that the assumptions, practices and debates around modern "development" and "post-development" (Rahnema 1997) are a continuation of the British imperial doctrine of trusteeship[2] and not a new discourse of progress invented after World War II (c.f.

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2 "Community development" and state intervention featured prominently in this doctrine, as they do today in competing interpretations of "development". In the imperial

Escobar 1995, 1997; Rahnema 1997; Sachs 1992). This chapter discusses the continuities

among charity, ideas about "the deserving poor", and the notion of a "refugee dependency

syndrome". It proposes alternatives based on Somali interpretations of "refugee".


Part Two: Repatriation and Dispossession.

Ethnographies of refugee camps have found Foucauldian analyses of micro-

processes of control to be useful (Hyndman 1997; Malkki 1992, 1995). Others have

referred to Goffman's (1961) work on "total institutions" (Harrell-Bond 1986; Long

1993). The description of aid distribution for newly arriving returnees in Chapter Three

supports the view that discipline--if not open coercion--is central to the formal provision

of refugee relief. Chapter Three discusses the repatriation of thousands of Ethiopians

from Djibouti to Ethiopia throughout the summer of 1995 through a holding camp or

"reception centre" in Dire Dawa. Politics was consistently downplayed by newly arriving

returnees. Instead, these returnees emphasized their willingness to participate in

"development", the current government strategy for reconstructing a refederated and

peaceful Ethiopia. The findings discussed in this chapter do not support the notion that

humanitarian aid is the driving force of refugee behaviour.

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version, colonial peoples needed to be protected from the negative effects of economic
growth and taught to gradually assume the liberties and challenges of Western-style
democracy. Cowen and Shenton argue that trusteeship in turn was rooted in earlier efforts
by European social reformers to mitigate what were seen as the inevitable negative social
effects of industrialization and economic growth, or "immanent development", through
deliberate programmes of "intentional development" such as social welfare projects,
education, cooperatives, and so forth.

Chapter Four shifts the focus from settings where relief and government agencies are in charge to a community of repatriated but landless and jobless returnees in Hurso. Here, the narratives of dispossession introduced in Chapter Two are developed. In contrast to the newly arriving returnees' apolitical appeals for human solidarity, Hurso residents' accounts emphasize history, politics, and the responsibility of the Ethiopian government. However, "development" also emerges as an important strategy for securing both material and political resources.

Part Three: Kinship, Politics and Gender.

Chapters Five and Six address kinship and politics through the lens of gender. Women seldom feature in accounts of Somali societies or, indeed, in many refugee studies in developing countries except those addressing sexual violence (Callamard 1999; but see Ager et al 1995). Chapter Five focuses on the critical importance of kinship and informal women's networks for ensuring child survival in destitute communities and in situations of displacement and explores the symbolic importance of matrilateral kinship in structuring these important relationships.

Chapter Six returns to the more overtly "political" concerns introduced in Chapter Four and examines formal women's associations as entry points and also as potential alternatives to the traditional clan-based politics that are typically the domain of men. This chapter also challenges the conflation, in much of the development literature, of women's associations with effective "empowerment".

Part Four: Moral Webs.

The two chapters in this section, together with the Conclusion, confront most directly the assumptions underlying the trauma model of refugee suffering. Chapter Seven discusses emotionality and emotion discourse among Somalis, particularly in relation to forced migration, dispossession and loss. The most important emotion word used in narratives about the consequences of dispossession and loss was *niyed jab*, demoralization/hopelessness/despair, but the central emotion behind these narratives and other accounts of refugee experiences was not sadness, but anger.

Chapter Eight presents four narratives of violence and forced migration and argues that the conceptual framework in which Somali refugees and returnees in Ethiopia address violence, death, and war-related distress is not psychological medicine, with its goal of reducing psychological, emotional and physiological symptoms of individual distress. Rather, such distress is predominantly assimilated into the framework of politics, with its goals of survival and restitution.

Map 1
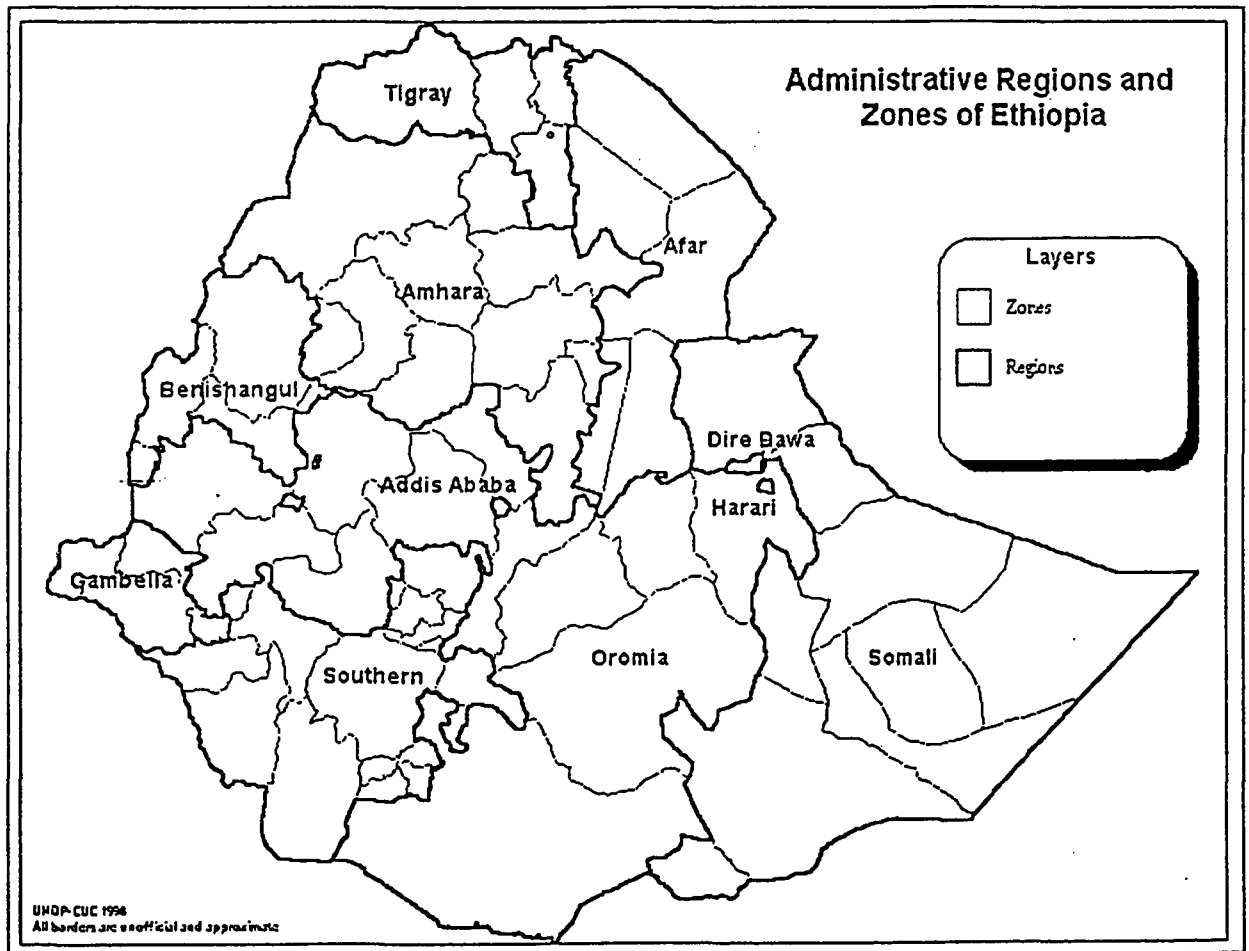


Administrative Regions and Zones of Ethiopia

Reproduced with permission from the UNDP - EUE website.

http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/eue_web/newzones.gif

Map 2
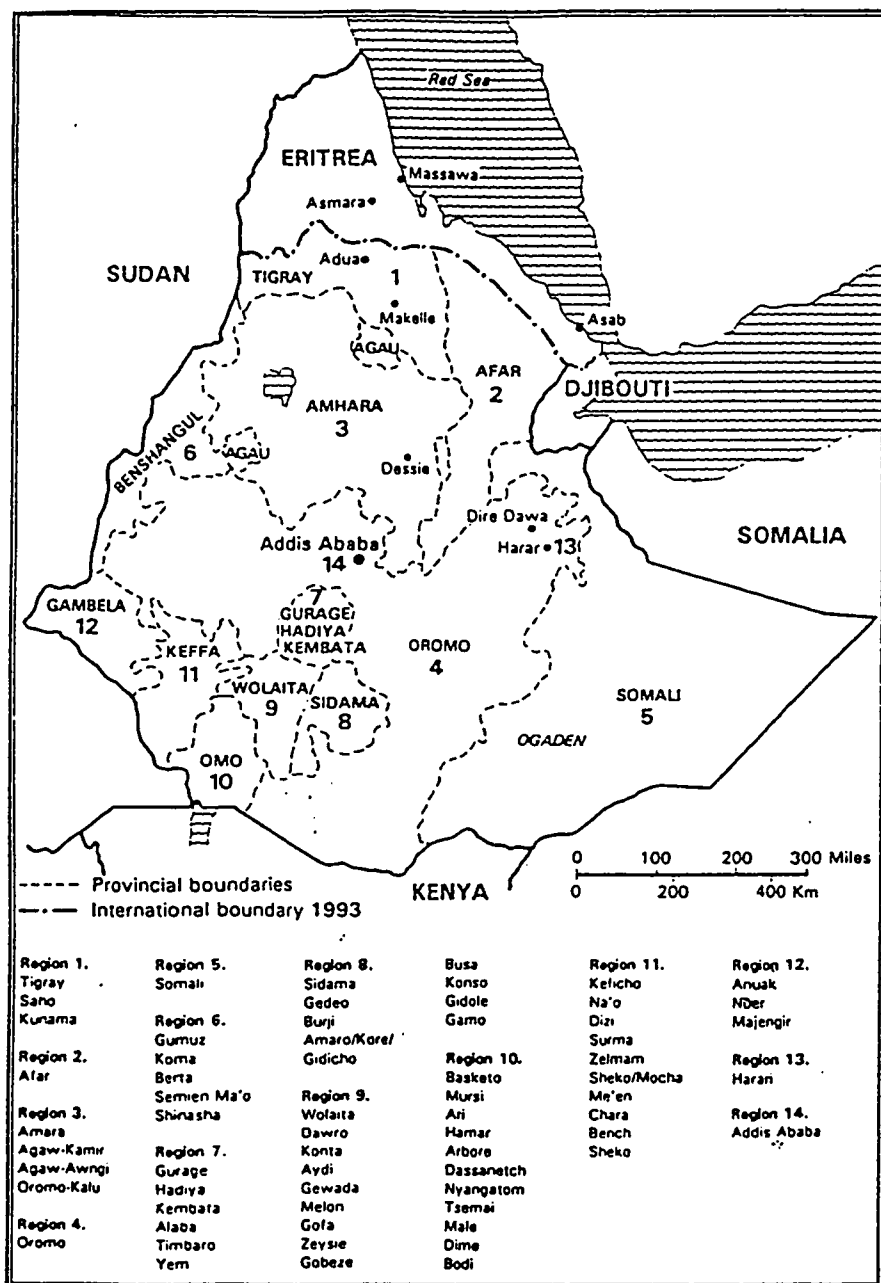


Reproduced with permission from Fukui and Markakis (1994).
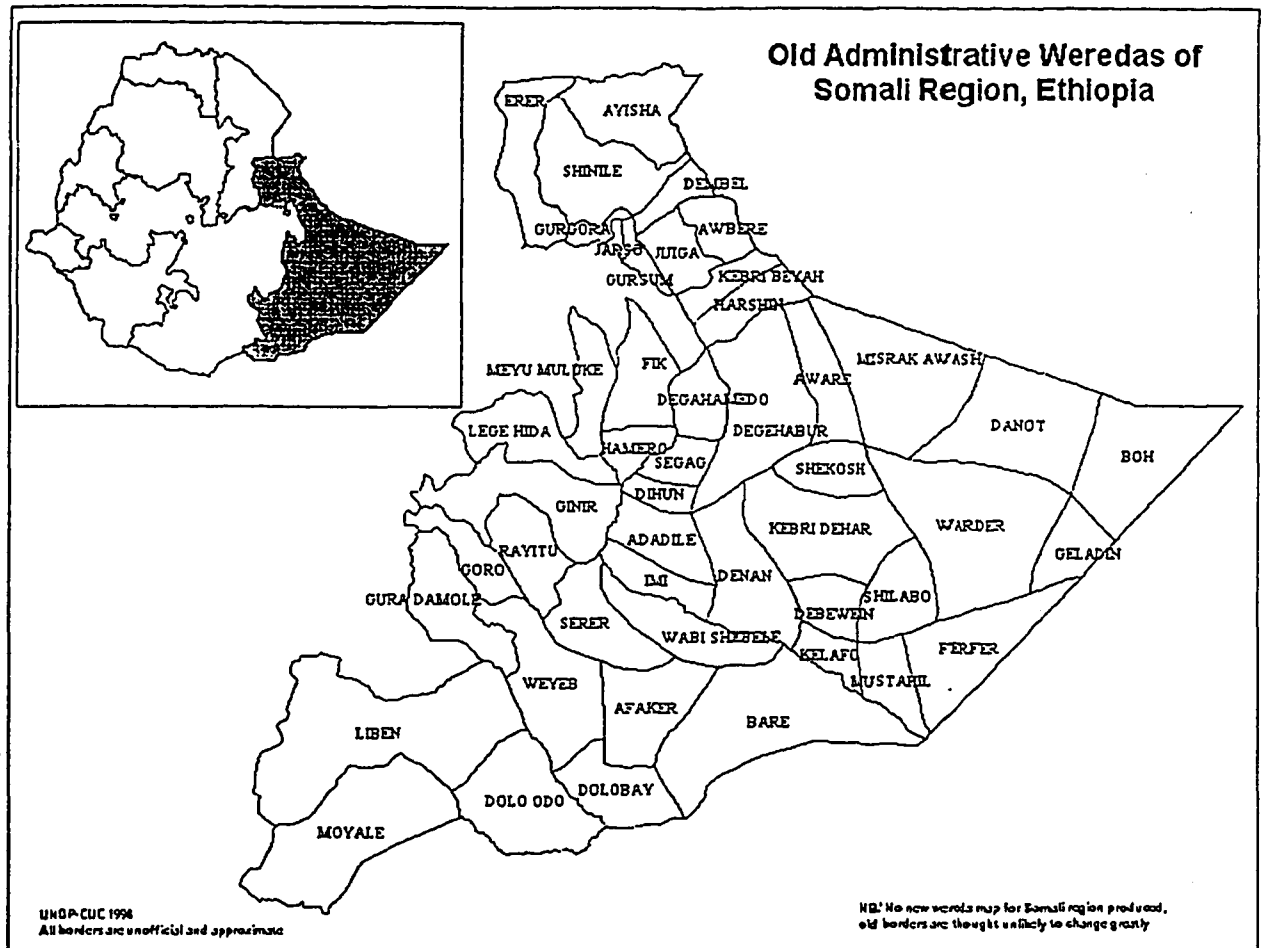
*Ethnic groups and regions of Ethiopia (provisional map, 1991)*

Map 3



**Old Administrative Weredas of Somali Region, Ethiopia**

Reproduced with permission from the UNDP - EUE website.

http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/eue_web/r5_d.gif

Map 4
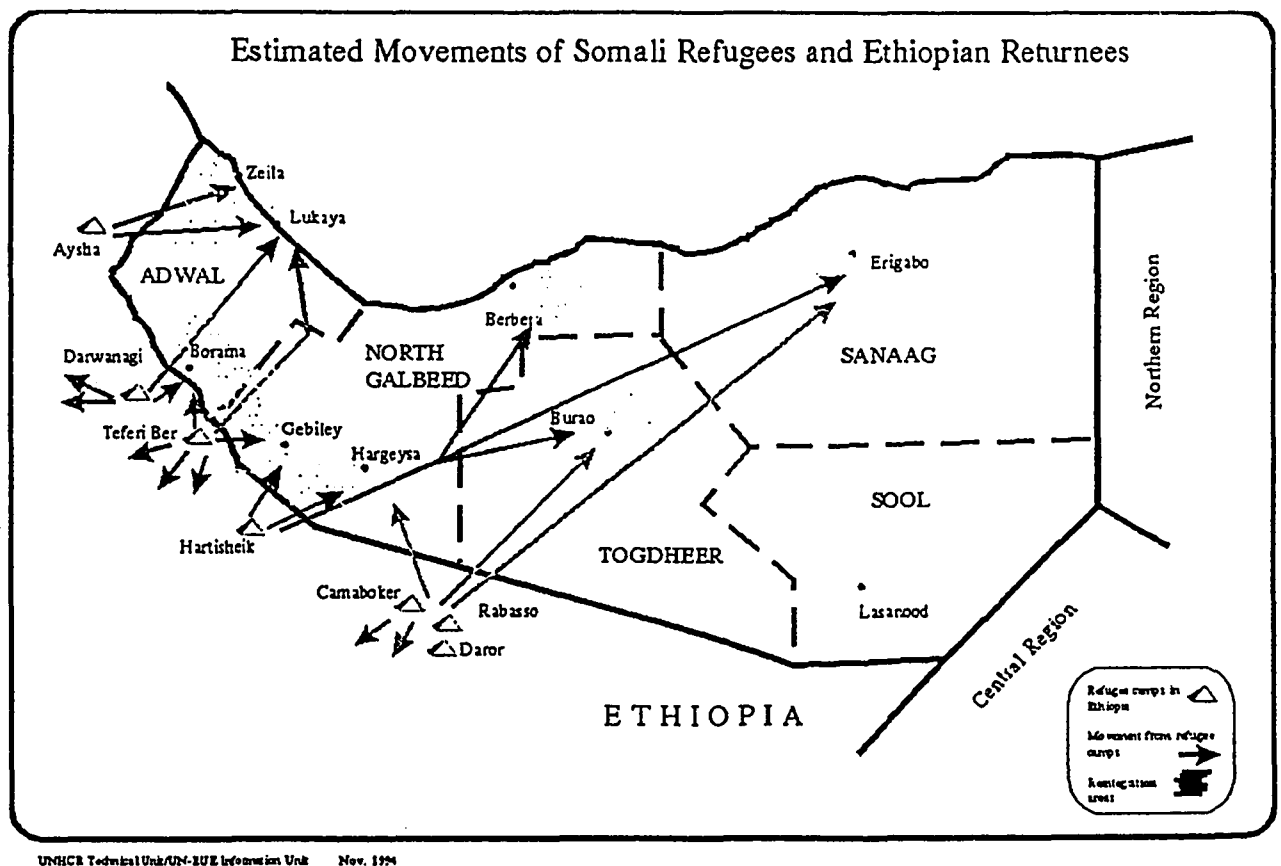


Estimated Movements of Somali Refugees and Ethiopian Returnees

Reproduced with permission from the UNDP-EUE website
http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/eue_web/somali2.jpg

# UNHCR PROGRAMMES IN ETHIOPIA

ERITREA

SUDAN

Massawa

Humera    Inda Selaso

Metema

Gondar    Mekele    Assab

AFAR

Asayita

DJIBOUTI

Bahir Dar    Djibouti

ETHIOPIA    Aisha

Darwanaji    SOMALIA

Shashito    Dire Dawa

Asosa    Jijiga    Teferi Ber

ADDIS ABABA    Kebri Beyah    Hartisheik

Nazreth

Gambela    Bonga    Camabokar

Rabasso

Fugnido    Awasa    Deghabur    Awarg    Daror

Kebri Dehar

Mizan    Gode

Dimma

SUDAN    Negele    Mustahi

Dolo

Moyale    SOMALIA

UGANDA    KENYA

Map prepared by UNHCR RLO Technical Unit
August 1997

▲ Refugee camps and settlements
⬤ Reintegration areas
⬤ Refugee areas

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3 Reproduced from UNHCR (1998) with permission of UNHCR. This map is not
intended as an exact representation. The designations on, and the presentation of, the map
do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the United Nations
concerning the legal status of any country, territory or area, or of its authorities, frontiers,
or boundaries.

# PART ONE

# ORIENTATIONS

# Chapter One

## SOMALI REFUGEES IN REGIONAL CONTEXT

If you don't know the land, you will get lost;

If you don't know the people, you will go hungry.

Somali proverb (quoted in Cassanelli 1982:9)

### History, memory, and narratives of suffering

The causes and characteristics of Somali refugee movements in the Horn of Africa over the past few decades cannot be understood without reference to the history, ecology, and political economy of the region. The historical background has seldom been taken into account in the planning and implementation of relief and development programmes by international agencies working in eastern Ethiopia (van Brabant 1994; Hogg 1996; Holt 1996). This chapter reviews historical, political, and cultural backgrounds that have shaped both the occurrence of and the responses to large population movements over the past several decades. Two main themes intertwine in this history: conflicts over control of territory and population–particularly the intersections of ethnicity, religion, clanship, and the state–and the politics of poverty, hunger, and drought.

However, the ethnographic material discussed throughout this thesis reveals that the importance of history to the social and cultural forms through which subsistence is ensured and politics carried out extends beyond a "historical and cultural background". Historical consciousness and rhetorical use of history and politics are central to current

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Somali understandings of and responses to the social and economic fragmentation

experienced by refugees and returnees. This historical and political framing of narratives

of suffering is significantly different from the psychological frameworks proposed by

trauma models of the refugee experience. The importance of historical consciousness can

also be seen in earlier negotiations and conflicts among Somalis and between Somalis

and imperial powers, including for example in the twenty year guerilla campaign led by

Sayyid Mohamed Abdillah Hassan against the Ethiopians, Italians, and English during

the first two decades of the twentieth century (Samatar 1982.) It appears also to be

important to understanding the pre-colonial (1600-1900) history of the inhabitants of the

Somali peninsula:

> Somali society was not only the product of a series of historical experiences
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> whose impact can be described in terms of new institutions, networks, social
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> relationships, and the like; it was also the product of beliefs about the past and of
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> beliefs about the relationship of the present to the past. (Cassanelli 1982:7)

That historical "memories" are as much–if not more–about the present as about

the past is not a new idea to anthropology and oral history ( Comaroff and Comaroff

1992; Connerton 1989; Mudimbe and Jewsiewicki 1993; C. Newbury 1998; Tonkin

1992; Singh et al 1996; Vansina 1965,1985, 1998). Exploration of such memories and

their rhetorical uses in war zones provides (1) a more socially contextualized

understanding of memory and its relation to distress than is currently operationalized in

psychiatric and psychological nosologies, and (2) an understanding more tolerant of

ambiguity than those offered in human rights or refugee determination proceedings and

documents[1].

## The Setting

### Somalis in the Horn of Africa

The fieldwork for this thesis was carried out primarily among Somali speaking

communities in eastern Ethiopia. Somalis are a predominantly pastoral people living in

the Horn of Africa in Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Kenya. Somalis are

overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim. Although significant portions of the Somali population

are sedentary farmers or city dwellers, nomadic pastoralism has historically influenced the

lives of these populations as well. In addition to longstanding economic and political

relations between nomads and urban populations, nomadic pastoralism has provided

models for dealing with uncertainty, in particular, drought, hunger, and conflict

(Cassanelli 1982). Somali is one of the languages within one of the three branches of the

Eastern Cushitic group of Afro-Asiatic languages. Related languages include Rendille,

Afar, and Oromo. Somalis in the fieldwork area interact most closely with Oromos. The

Oromo language in its many dialects is spoken by a large (over 18 million in Ethiopia

alone) and internally diverse group of peoples including Christians, Muslims, and

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1 See e.g. Foxen (2000) for a critical discussion of memory, identity, and human rights
statements in Guatemala; Summerfield (1998) for a discussion of social memory in war
zones; Soyinka (1998) on truth and reconciliation projects in Africa.

animists, pastoralists and agriculturalists.

Kinship is central to Somali social organization, cultural meaning, and political

and economic action. Kinship is modulated by and expressed in terms of Islam and  $xeer^2$

(contract, or more broadly, custom) ( Adam 1992a,b; Cassanelli 1975, 1982; Helander

1988; Lewis 1961, 1980, 1994; Menkhaus and Prendergast 1995; Ahmed Samatar

1994a,b;). Some scholars have stressed that class has been an important variable since the

colonial expansion of the livestock trade (Aronson 1980; Kapteijns 1994; Abdi Samatar

1989, 1994; Swift 1979). Women are almost invisible in most ethnographies of Somalis;

however, women and gender are critical to a kinship and economic analysis of Somali

society (Aman 1994; Boddy 1994; Choi Ahmed 1995; Helander 1988; Kapteijns 1994;

Lewis 1994:19-79; Little 1994;  Mama 1992). Kinship continues to be central to Somalis

as refugees (Christensen 1982; Crisp 1984;Waldron 1984, 1988; Yusuf Farah 1994). The

massive refugee movements following the Ogaden war and more recently the Somali civil

war have revealed lines of fracture and potential social reorganization in key

areas--kinship (including "clanism" and gender relations), customary law, and Islam

(Ahmed Samatar 1994). Oral poetry is the best known of the narrative genres described in

ethnographies of Somalis. Poetry, and rhetoric, are highly valued vehicles for both artistic

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The letter "x" in Somali orthography represents an unvoiced pharyngeal fricative similar
to the Spanish "j", as in "Jorge" or "fajitas". It is often represented in English by the letter
"h". According to standard Somali orthography, "Mohammed" would be written
"Maxamed". As this dissertation is not primarily aimed at Somali specialists, I have used
the letter "h" instead of "x" throughout for ease of reading, with two exceptions. Two
important words that recur repeatedly and which I therefore spell correctly are *xeer*
(pronounced approximately like "hair"), "contract" or "customary law", and  *qaxooti*
(pronounced koHOti), "refugee".

expression and political action (see Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964; Laitin 1977; S.

Samatar 1982).

Somalis are divided into six main transnational clan families: the Dir, the Isaaq,

the Daarood, the Hawiye, and the Digil and Mirifle (or Rahanweyn), two largely

agriculturalist clans settled primarily in the interriverine area in southern Somalia . In

contrast to the first four clan families, which are predominantly pastoralist and seldom

"adopt" outsiders except as temporary clients, the last two clans have been built up

largely by intermarriage and assimilation among local aboriginal communities and

members of all the other clans. While all Somalis understand standard Somali, there are

considerable variations in dialect, and the dialect of the interriverine groups is sufficiently

different to be considered by some a separate language, Af Maay Maay. Clan families are

further divided in a segmentary system into clans, subclans, lineages, and so on. Clan

families and clans are generally too large and unwieldy for effective political action

except on an ad hoc basis against a threat perceived to be occurring at that level.

However, clans remain important at the level of regional and national politics, as does a

general Somali identity. In day to day life, economic, political and social activities

primarily involve smaller lineage based groups, from the household or basic production

unit (*rer*), to the group of men bound by kinship and contract (*xeer*) to support each other

and their families in the event of an injury committed by or against one of the members.

This is the group referred to as the *diya* or bloodwealth-paying group. My Gurgura clan

interlocutors referred to this group as *jilib*, which literally means "joint" and can in theory

refer to any branching of the patriline[3].

The most significant clans in the political landscape of Somali Ethiopia are the Ogaadeen[4] clan of the Daarood clan family, the Isaaq clan family, and the Dir. The Ogaadeen and the Isaaq have a long history of conflict over access to pasture and water in the Haud and Ogaden areas of eastern Ethiopia. These conflicts have also been played out in the international arena, with clan elders pitting Ethiopian, Somali, and European administrations against opposing clans and against other states and conversely, with state governments–particularly Ethiopia and Somalia in the 1980s–conducting proxy wars through the manipulation of clan interests and movements (Bhardwaj 1979; Lewis 1994; 1980; Markakis 1987; Said Samatar 1982). However, at the local level it is the local clans and lineages that are most important. Most of my research involved the Gurgura clan, one of the branches of the Dir clan family. The best known clan of the Dir is the 'Issa (Cissa, 'Iise[5]).

### Gurgura Somali?

The Gurgura clan is interesting in that it brings to the fore questions of ethnic and

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 For what remains the key reference to Northern Somali social and political organization and practice, see I.M Lewis (1961) A Pastoral Democracy.

4

"Ogaadeen" is the correct spelling of the clan name. It is pronounced "Ogaden". I use "Ogaadeen" to refer to the clan, and "Ogaden" to refer to the geographic area of Ethiopia.

5

 The letter "c" in Somali orthography represents the voiced pharyngeal fricative, ayn. For ease of reading in this thesis, I have replaced it with an apostrophe.

other identity. All along the border regions between Somalis and Oromos there live

mixed populations of "Somalized Oromos and Oromized Somalis" (Markakis 1987; van

Brabant 1994). The Gurgura are not mentioned in any of the classic ethnographies of

Somalis. On old French maps of Ethiopia, the area around Dire Dawa is labelled "Terre

des Issas et Gurguras", the Land of the Issas and Gurguras. The Gurgura are one of the

main clans in Dire Dawa city, and one of the *weredas* (sub-districts) adjacent to the city is

called "Gurgura"(map 3). In the few references I was able to locate, the Gurgura are

variously identified as an Oromo clan (Kumsa n.d.), or as a separate ethnic group with

Somali and Oromo speakers (Yusuf Omar n.d.), or as a Somali clan (List of All

Registered Political Parties 1997). Gurgura around Dire Dawa and in the Ethiopian

government emphatically identify themselves as Somali, but state that they are a multi-

lingual and multi-cultural group which even includes a predominantly Roman Catholic

community belonging to one important lineage. In the political struggles around

establishing a Somali regional government, Ogaadeen clan politicians are reported as

rejecting Gurgura input and votes on the grounds that Gurgura are Oromos and not

Somalis. This rejection was in turn refused by other Somali clans. It is unclear whether

the accusation and response were made out of a conviction over whether or not Gurgura

are "authentically Somali" or, rather, represented attempts to muster votes for or against

the Ogaadeen politicians. The question of whether Gurgura are "really" Somali is itself

not straightforward. Somali ethnic and national identity– along with Islam–has been

championed by Somalis as a way out of the perennial ad hoc alliances and feuds that

seem to follow inevitably from segmentary lineage social organization. It has also been

imposed by Somali and Ethiopian regimes seeking to ban clan identities and identify

collective enemies, respectively, with a view to more easily managing a fractious

population. However, the history of Somali speaking peoples is more readily grasped in

terms of clans and lineages on the one hand, and regional movements and conflicts on the

other, than in terms of ethnic Somali nationalism (see e.g. Cassanelli 1982). As Schlee

(1989) has documented for ethnically mixed clans in northern Kenya, it can be *clan*

identity, and not ethnic identity (with its markers of language, custom, and religion), that

is fundamental to political and economic action, including marriage, herding, alliance,

and feud.

### The fieldsites: Ethiopia and the eastern lowlands

Ethiopia is the tenth largest and second most populous country in Africa. Its

current borders are approximately the same as those of the empire built by Menilek II in

his expansion of the Abyssinian kingdom southward and eastward from its heartland in

the Ethiopian plateau, minus Eritrea. Ethiopia is now a landlocked country, its former

territory of Eritrea having seceded in 1993 after a 30 year civil war. It is bordered in the

north and north east by Eritrea and Djibouti, in the east by Somalia, in the south by

Kenya, and in the west and northwest by Sudan. Although it is situated in the tropics (3 to

18 degrees north of the equator), the two thirds of the country situated above 2,000

metres experiences a fairly cool climate. There are 82 ethnic groups and languages among

Ethiopia's population of approximately 55 million, but the strongest, numerically, are

Oromos, Amharas, Tigreans, and Somalis. Ethiopia is currently a federation of eleven

Regions based on ethnicity or, in the case of the Southern Nations and Nationalities

Peoples' Region (SNNPR), a collection of smaller groups (Map 1). Three of the

Regions–Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa, and Harar–are predominantly urban, but the total

population of the country is overwhelmingly rural - 86.3% according to the 1994 Census.

The internal boundaries of Ethiopia–regions, zones, districts (*awrajas*), sub-districts

(*weredas*), and neighbourhood associations (*kebeles*)–are still changing (Map 2). Early in

my fieldwork in 1995, the number of regions was fourteen and the status of Dire Dawa

was still under negotiation (whether to be part of Oromiya, the Somali Region, or an

Autonomous Region). Most of my time was spent in and around Dire Dawa. Dire Dawa

is the second largest city of Ethiopia and is now an Autonomous Region, as are the cities

of Harar 58 kilometres east of Dire Dawa, and the capital of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, 525

kilometres to the southwest of Dire Dawa in the centre of Ethiopia. According to the 1994

Ethiopian census, the urban population of Dire Dawa is 173,188, which is 69% of the

total Regional population of 251,864. Dire Dawa is on the lowland side of the juncture of

the semi-arid and arid eastern lowlands with the central Ethiopian plateau. It can be

reached from Addis by road, unpaved except for the first hundred or so kilometres out of

Addis; by daily trains; or by a one hour flight from Addis once or twice a day. The capital

of the Somali National Regional State is Jigjiga, approximately 200 kilometres east of

Dire Dawa in the northern grasslands of the Region. The capital of the Somali Region

was initially going to be the southern town of Gode, political centre of the important

Ogaadeen clan of the Daarood clan family, and the clan after which the Ogaden–the

triangle of Ethiopia jutting into Somalia–is named. It was shifted to Jigjiga in 1994 after

the ascendance to prominence and power of a coalition of mostly non-Daarood clans, the

Ethiopian Somali Democratic League (ESDL).

The highlands are home to a number of ethnic groups, including the Tigreans,

remnant communities of the aboriginal Agaw, a significant proportion of the internally

diverse Oromo, and the Amhara. The Amhara are the ethnic group that dominated

Ethiopian politics for several hundred years until the collapse of the Derg regime of

Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991 before a coalition of guerilla forces led by the Tigrean

People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The central highlands are carved by steep river valleys

which hold extensive, but largely inaccessible, water reserves. Most of the dense

population lives and farms on the flat tops of the highlands between the valleys,

practising subsistence ox and plough agriculture dependent on a main rainy season

(*keremt*, July-September, yielding the *meher* harvest in November) and a minor rainy

season (*belg*, around April) yielding the secondary *belg* harvest by August. Food and

income security of the highland population cannot be attained through cereal production

alone. Oilseed production is important in many areas, as is the cultivation of *enset*, the

false banana, as a staple in the south. Cash crops such as coffee (yielding 65% of export

revenue - FAO 2000), and *chat* (khat; Catha edulis, a shrub whose stimulant-containing

leaves are chewed extensively among Muslim populations in the eastern lowlands,

Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, and Yemen) are important at household, regional and national

levels. Millions of Ethiopians depend on intermittent wage labour, petty trade of

vegetables and milk, and  gathering and selling firewood, honey, aromatic woods, or

grass for forage and thatch, to meet their food and non-food basic needs. Frequent rain

failures have led to frequent famines in Ethiopia over centuries primarily because of

structural vulnerability arising from the combination of a growing population largely

dependent on subsistence agriculture, with political elites engaging in continual struggles

to attain or maintain power over regions and the state. These political struggles involved

frequent warfare, which led to impoverishment and vulnerability to famine both directly

through injury, death of family members, and displacement, and because armies "lived

off the land" (Bahru[6] 1991; Markakis 1987).


## Interpreting the 1994 Census

The total population of Somalis today is approximately 12.9 million[7]. According

to the 1994 Ethiopian census (conducted in the Somali Region in September 1997), the

total population of the Somali National Regional State (Somali Region, or Region 5) is

3,439,860 (FDRE 1998)[8]. 96.3% of this total is Somali, including 21,306 Somalians

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[6]

Bahru Zewde is sometimes referenced under "Bahru" and sometimes under "Zewde". In deference to local usage, I have referenced his work under "Bahru".

7 Somalia: 1995 estimate 9,165,000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, International Data Base); Kenya: approximately 500,000 (Northern Frontier District in 1960:approximately 275,000 - Markakis 1987:182; 1989 census [Kenya 1994] reports by clan - approx. 354,000 in the smaller North Eastern Province); Djibouti - 60% of total population of approx. 425,000; Ethiopia - 3.4 million (FDRE 1998). All of these numbers must be seen as approximate, not only because of the logistic difficulty of conducting a census under the conditions prevailing in the Horn of Africa and the politics of numbers (see next footnote and Chapter 2), but also because the majority of the Somali population remains nomadic or transhumant.

8 The political and economic importance of numbers, despite - or at times because of - their inexactness will be a recurring theme throughout this thesis. At a meeting of Somali

(citizens of the Republic of Somalia, but excluding Somali refugees residing in camps).

The population is predominantly rural (85.7%) and dependent on subsistence agriculture,

which includes animal husbandry (95.5% of the economically active rural population).

The Census does not include income or wealth data, but the precariousness of livelihood

of much of the population is revealed in some of the numbers. Of the "agriculturalists",

one third are classified as labourers in "elementary occupations". These are the landless

peasants and destitute pastoralists who have not migrated to urban areas. In the urban

areas of the Region, unemployment among young men from 15 to 19 years of age is 41%,

and 37% for 25 to 29 year-olds. This rate drops to 22% in the 30 to 34 year old group

(FDRE 1998:136). In addition to indicating the poor economic prospects in urban areas,

these figures support the idea that age stratification is important in this society that

perceives itself as egalitarian and non-hierarchical. There are no estimates of nomadic

versus sedentary populations, but the proportions of permanent, improvised, and mobile

housing units in the rural areas are 32%, 19%, and 47.8% respectively (FDRE 1998:178).

Finally, the Census data also illustrate some of the gender-related issues that I will

address in later chapters. Here I will only note that the total reported population has a

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Region politicians with UN, international and local NGOs which I attended in December
1995, a government minister estimated the Regional population at 6.5 million. The initial
census count for the Region was rejected; the final census document states only that "the
results of this census were found to have problems. Because of this the Population and
Housing Census Central Commission decided that the census enumeration had to be done
again" (FDRE 1998:iii). While awaiting the results of the census recount of the Somali
Region, which occurred in September 1997, international agencies used an estimated
population of 2.6 million as a planning figure - see e.g. FAO/WFP 1997, 1998. The
UNHCR estimate of the Somali refugee population - 233,338 in 1998 (UNHCR 1998) - is
not included in census or planning figures.

significant excess of males: 54.5% males and 46.5% females.

## States, Empires and Somalis

In contrast to the practical and ideological importance of gender, lineage, clan, religion, and, intermittently, ethnicity, national identity is of significance to Somalis in the borderlands primarily as a political resource or liability, as it is national identity—citizenship—that determines eligibility for refugee identity and ration cards, or for taxation. Many writers about the region have noted that the borders between states are only notional as far as pastoralists are concerned, except when one or another state attempts to assert effective control over a given border. Such attempts have been intermittent, but longstanding. Since the nineteenth century, European and Ethiopian administrations have sought to define and control the border between Ethiopia and Somalia and to exploit the livestock resources of what is Africa's largest rangeland (van Brabant 1994). These political and economic contests have had significant effects on Somali pastoralists, particularly in the borderlands.

> The British, the Ethiopians, and the Italians are squabbling,
>
> The country is snatched and divided by whosoever is stronger,
>
> The country is sold piece by piece without our knowledge,
>
> And for me, all this is the Teeth of the Last Days!
>
> Somali poet Faarah Nuur (1880-1930) (quoted in S. Samatar 1982:92)

The Horn of Africa has been and continues to be the site of multiple intersecting

waves of flight, migration, and return. The history, ecology, and political economy of

Ethiopia and the political and economic interests of Britain, France, Italy, Egypt, the

U.S., and the U.S.S.R. have influenced the lives of Somalis in the borderlands

enormously. On the Somali side, the dream of uniting all Somalis into one state, or at

least of breaking free of what were perceived as the shackles of Ethiopian and Kenyan

administrations that had only limited interests - taxation - in their Somali populations,

provided constant grounds for conflict, with or without the active involvement of the

Somali state and army. As Markakis (1987:33) puts it:


> Not surprisingly, disaffection and dissidence were the pastoralist attitudes towards
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> the newly established states in the Horn. The herders, as Gellner puts it, proved
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> "state-resistant", and, in the process, gained lasting notoriety for their "rebellious"
>
> and "warlike" nature. Taxation was a common provocation. Unlike cultivators,
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> who value the protection they receive from the state in return, pastoralists found
>
> this imposition irksome... Aversion to taxation was not simply an atavistic
>
> reaction. It was related to the fact, cited in a report referring to the Hadendowa,
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> that "the Government has nothing to offer them in return....which they want and
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> has, in fact, given them very little of anything, whether welcome or not".


### The Church, the Emperor, and Islam

Territories currently claimed by Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, and Djibouti have been

linked through trade, migration, and conquest for millennia (Levine 1974). The ancient

kingdom of Axum flourished from the first to the seventh centuries C.E. in what is now

Tigre region of northern Ethiopia. Christianity took firm hold in the highlands in the

fourth century. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Emperor remained the two poles

of power in Abyssinia and subsequently Ethiopia until the fall of Haile Selassie in 1974.

Islam arrived in Ethiopia in the sixth and seventh centuries, changing the Red Sea trade

and marking the entry of the principal focus of external threat perceived by Abyssinia and

the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Islamic kingdoms flourished around the central

highlands of the Abyssinian kingdoms, and, in the Emirate of Adal at Harar, entering the

highlands themselves. One of the central myths of Ethiopia is the continuity of the

Solomonic dynasty - the legend of the Queen of Sheba's visit to King Solomon and her

subsequent delivery of the child Menilek I. The story of this lineage, the *Kebra Negast*

("Glory of Kings") was written down in the fourteenth century in Ge'ez (the ancient

language of Axum, now the liturgical language) and remains one of the central works of

Ethiopian literature. The memory of the sixteenth century wars between the Muslim

leader Ahmed Gran (known to Somalis as Ahmed Gureh) is a second pillar of Ethiopian

political and religious identities. In these wars, Muslim armies started from Adal and

occupied almost all of the territory of Abyssinia, facing defeat in 1543 near Gondar in the

northwest. Neither the Muslim nor the Christian kingdoms fully recovered from these

wars, facilitating the entry of Egypt, the Ottoman Empire, and Europe into the Horn of

Africa.

Empire Building in the Colonial Period

In the colonial period[9], Britain began to show interest in Somali lands after the

establishment of the British garrison across the Red Sea at Aden in 1839. Initially, British

interests were explicitly limited to securing a steady supply of meat for this point on the

trade route to India. Britain subsequently signed an agreement with the Egyptian

Khedivate in 1877, recognizing the Egyptian jurisdiction over the northern coast, "as our

only security against other European powers obtaining a footing opposite Aden" (Lord

Salisbury, quoted in Lewis 1980:42). Egypt evacuated its Somali territories in 1884,

during the Islamic Mahdist revolt against Egyptian authority in Sudan. That same year,

the Consul for the Somali Coast at Aden received authorization from London to enter into

agreements with Somali clans. Britain occupied the Somali littoral, establishing a British

Somaliland Protectorate in order to prevent the French from doing so.

In 1859, the French consular agent at Aden had purchased the Afar port of Obock,

on what is now the Djibouti coast, and the Franco-Ethiopian trading company was

installed there in 1881. In 1888 France and Britain settled the boundary between their two

protectorates, and Djibouti (Jibuti) became the official capital of the French colony in

1902. In 1917, a railway connecting Djibouti to the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa was

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 On the colonial history of Somalia and Ethiopia, see Bahru (1991); Lewis (1980);
Markakis (1974); A.Samatar (1989); S. Samatar (1982). For an economic history of
Ethiopia and the region, and a history of Ethiopian famines prior to 1900, see Pankhurst
(1968, 1985). On Islam in Ethiopia, see Trimingham (1965). On the precolonial history of
Ethiopia, see Levine (1974) and Pankhurst (1982). On the Oromos, see Legesse (1973).
On the precolonial history of Somalis, see Cassanelli (1982). For eloquent explorer's and
military expeditions' accounts, see Burton (1966[1894]); Drake-Brockman (1912);
Jennings and Addison (1905).

completed, giving Ethiopia a rail link to the sea.

Italy established a colony in Eritrea in 1890. A second colony was established in

Somali territories south of British Somaliland. Italy sought to address domestic

agricultural and economic needs and to enter the imperial arena of other European

powers. Italian plans, in contrast to those of the British, included a much more active role

in its territories - plantations were established, settlers arrived from Italy, and the dream

of an Italian East African Empire was briefly realized with the occupation of Ethiopia,

Eritrea and Italian Somaliland from 1936-1941. Somali fighters were recruited by Italy

for skirmishing with Ethiopian forces during the war and occupation of Ethiopia.

Ethiopian occupation of the Ogaden and Haud rangelands inhabited by Somali

pastoralists began in the latter half of the nineteenth century. "Taxation"–actually raiding

of herds–and a push southwards and eastwards from the highlands in search of land

increased in the late nineteenth century, partly in response to the Great Ethiopian Famine

of 1888-92. This famine, still remembered as *Kefu Qan* (Evil Days), was triggered by a

severe rinderpest epidemic (that began with the importation of Italian cattle through

Massawa, Eritrea) and drought and locust plagues. The extent of the famine following on

these natural disasters has been attributed to the degree of destitution of the populace after

decades of war and exaction of tribute by soldiers and rulers (Bahru 1991:72; Markakis

1987:39; Pankhurst 1985). However, the quest for expansion and consolidation of

imperial power was at least as important as the famine in the Ethiopian occupation of

lands occupied by Somali pastoralists. Menilek II (r. 1889-1913) completed the project

started by the Shoan ruler Tewodros II (r. 1855-1868), who ended the century of

internecine wars (The Age of the Princes) and began a process of expansion and

centralization of power. This process of empire building involved alliances and conflicts

with Egypt and with European powers from the outset. By the end of the nineteenth

century, Ethiopia, through Menilek, was an active player in the scramble for African

territories. In a circular sent to the European courts, Menilek stated: "If Powers at a

distance come forward to partition Africa between them, I do not intend to remain an

indifferent spectator" (quoted in Markakis 1987:28).


Somali-Ethiopian Conflicts in the Postcolonial Period

Since 1963, Somali and allied Somali-Oromo militias have been engaged in

continual conflict with the Ethiopian army [10]. The radical change in regime in 1974 did

not significantly affect the relations between the Ethiopian state and its Somali

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[10]

For a comprehensive discussion of nationalist movements in the Horn in the postcolonial
era, and a detailed history of Somali resistance movements against the Kenyan, Ethiopian,
and Somali states from 1963 to 1978, see Markakis (1987). For other views of
Revolutionary Ethiopia, see Adebo (1984), Habte Selassie (1980), Keller (1991). See
Lewis 1980 (1988) for a general history of Somalia, including its relations with Ethiopia.
For official Somali Government views, see Government of the Somali Republic (1962).
On the Ogaden War, see Gorman (1981); Legum and Lee (1977); Lewis (1980);
Markakis (1987), and Nuruddin Farah's (1986) novel Maps. A "colonial" perspective
sympathetic to national Somali and Isaaq clan interests can be found in Drysdale (1964).
Drysdale was the British Liaison Officer when parts of the Haud and Ogaden were
designated as Reserved Areas under British and not Ethiopian control from 1945 to
1954, in an attempt to meet treaty obligations the British had with some Somali clans. For
discussions of the civil war in Somalia, leading to the collapse of the Siyaad Barre regime
and the Somali state, see Lyons and Samatar (1995); Deng (1993); Ahmed Samatar
(1994); Lewis (1994, 1997); Clarke and Herbst (1997). On the Somali National
Movement (SNM) see Lewis (1994). On Somaliland since 1991 see Bryden (1996);
Helander (1998); Menkhaus and Prendergast (1995), Somaliland Centre for Peace and
Development [1999] ).

population. Haile Selassie had attempted to modernize Ethiopia while maintaining an

imperial and feudal system. The 1974 coup installed a socialist military regime eventually

led by Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam and his "Derg" (Amharic for "committee"). A

certain degree of autonomy was given to the Somali and other ethnic regions of Ethiopia in 1987. Relations improved between Ethiopia and the Somali state after 1988. However, Somalis did not attain any effective political power in Ethiopia until the downfall of the Derg in 1991 and the establishment of an interim government consisting of a coalition of ethnically-defined resistance movements (van Brabant 1994).

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Box 1:
Refugee flows affecting the study population

1978: Ogaden War - Somalia invades Ethiopia to annexe the Ogaden; repelled by Ethiopian army with Soviet and Cuban aid. 500,000-800,000 Ethiopian Somalis and Oromos flee to Somalia and Djibouti. Aerial surveys lead to estimates of a million or more displaced Somalis on either side of the border in 1991, absorbed into local communities.

1977-1991: Ethiopia pursues wars on Somali, Eritrean and Tigrean fronts. Increased resistance and counterinsurgency within Ethiopia. Thousands flee to Djibouti, Somalia and the Gulf to escape "Red Terror" and forced conscription

1988: Bombing of Hargeisa and other Isaaq areas by Somali government forces. 250,000 Somalis flee to Ethiopia.

1991- 1995: multiple local conflicts, drought, mass desertion from Ethiopian army, and generalized chaos, looting and insecurity following downfall of Derg. Tens of thousands of Ethiopians and camp-dwelling refugees flee to Somalia and Djibouti

1991-1996: Hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian returnees return from Djibouti and Somalia; civil war between Isaaq factions send more refugees from Somaliland to eastern Ethiopia, 90,000 in 1994 alone

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Refugee movements since 1978

Box 1 outlines some of the main refugee movements affecting eastern Ethiopia since 1978. Most of the refugees and returnees with whom I interacted during the course of my

fieldwork had been part of more than one refugee flow. There is considerable diversity of

"refugee experience" even within apparently homogeneous categories such as "Ethiopian

Somalis". I conducted my fieldwork primarily with poor returnees and middle class urban

Somalis in and around the city of Dire Dawa. Most of these people had fled the 1977-

1978 Ogaden War between Ethiopia and Somalia. In this war, Somalia openly assisted

two Ethiopian-Somali militias (the Ogaden-based Western Somali Liberation Front,

WSLF, and a joint Somali-Oromo militia, the Somali-Abo Liberation Front–SALF–based

in the southern Bale region) in the attempted secession of eastern Ethiopia, including the

Ogaden. These lands are occupied primarily by ethnic Somalis and were known to Somali

nationalists as "Western Somalia". As the Derg was in internal disarray and faced armed

resistance on the Tigrean, Somali, and Eritrean fronts, Somali leader Siyaad Barre felt the

time was ripe to add the Ogaden, one of the points of the five-pointed star on the Somali

flag, to "Greater Somalia[11]". At this point, the USSR withdrew its support from Somalia.

The Ethiopian army, with the support of Soviet and Cuban advisors, 16,000 Cuban

soldiers, and Soviet-supplied military hardware, defeated the Somali forces. The war

---

[11]

"Greater Somalia" was to bring together into one state the five territories inhabited
primarily by Somali: British and Italian Somaliland (united in 1960 into the Republic of
Somalia), Djibouti, the Ogaden and adjacent regions of Ethiopia, and the Northern
Frontier District of Kenya, whose population had voted in favour of joining Somalia prior
to Kenyan independence from Britain. Britain and the Kenyan government decided to
ignore the referendum results and maintained the colonial boundary between Kenya and
Italian Somaliland. "Somali irredentism" met with a cool reception from other African
states, particularly Somalia's multiethnic neighbours, Kenya and Ethiopia. The
Organization of African Unity (OAU) supported maintaining established colonial
borders, for fear of unleashing secessionist struggles all over the continent (see Lewis
1980).

occurred during a period of increasing repression, known as the Red Terror, within

Ethiopia. The war intensified the counterinsurgency campaign in the predominantly

Somali areas of the east. This counterinsurgency continued for several years, merging

with campaigns of forced conscription to supply troops for the wars on the Eritrean and

Tigrean fronts. The Ogaden War and subsequent reprisals caused some 700,000 refugees

to flee to Somalia and up to 100,000 more to Djibouti (van Brabant 1994; Yusuf Farah

1995). Most of the population of Hurso village, site of much of the fieldwork discussed in

this thesis, had fled to Djibouti in the 1970s, where they stayed for eight to twenty years,

the last waves returning to Ethiopia in 1995 and 1996 under pressure from the Djibouti

government

Many of my interlocutors in Dire Dawa had experienced and fled the relentless

1988 bombing of Hargeisa and other territories of the Isaaq clan by the forces of former

Somali leader Siyaad Barre, when 15,000 residents of Hargeisa and Bur'ao towns were

killed in less than a month (Africa Watch 1990; van Brabant 1994:47). In fact, a

significant proportion of them had fled *to* Hargeisa and other areas to escape the fighting

and terror in Ethiopia, only to flee back among the 250,000 refugees coming to the Aware

camps east of Jigjiga. Other returnees had left Ethiopia in the chaos and violence

accompanying the downfall of the Mengistu government in 1991, and still others left

localized drought and famine before and after 1991. I also visited refugee camps

populated primarily by urban refugees fleeing the 1994 conflict between branches of the

Isaaq clan family in the cities of the self-declared republic of Somaliland, the former

British colony of Somaliland. Somaliland had seceded from Somalia because it appeared

that the civil war in the South would be protracted; Isaaq and other Northern interests

would not be on the Southern agenda for years to come. The fighting in Somaliland in

1994 led to 90,000 Somalis fleeing to Ethiopia. Only a few individuals in this part of

Ethiopia had been directly affected by the civil war around Mogadishu, the capital of

Somalia, in the early 1990s.

These refugee flows and their effects were not limited to refugee camps and the

refugee relief system. While the most visible signs of these wars are the large refugee

camps[12] dotting the countryside of eastern Ethiopia, western Somalia, and Djibouti since

the end of the Ogaden War, the refugee movements have influenced local populations

enormously (maps 4 and 5). An aerial and land survey of the Ogaden suggested that a

million or more refugees had been hosted or absorbed by local kinsmen and towns (Holt

and Lawrence 1991).

## Ethnicity, Religion, and State Formation

Ethnicity, religion, and nationalism have been important in both the history and

the historiography of the Horn and Somali-Ethiopian relations[13]. Lewis (1980) argues

that Ethiopia and Somalia represent the two classic models of African state formation: a

military conquest state with subsequent efforts to encourage or coerce "nationhood" in

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[12]

Hartisheik camp, just east of Jigjiga, was at one point the second largest settlement in Ethiopia.

[13]

For a collection of essays addressing these issues in many areas of the Horn, see Fukui and Markakis (1994).

the case of Ethiopia, and in the Somali case the territorial expansion of a group sharing

linguistic, cultural, religious, and economic traits, attempting first to expel outsiders

(through the twenty year Dervish rebellion of Sayyid Mohammed Abdille Hassan) and

subsequently to consolidate a modern state. In 1994, Lewis reconsiders the commonsense

assumption that an obvious "nation" should without too much trouble be able to create a

state. He emphasizes that cultural unity is insufficient: Somali society was and remains

fragmented in the domain of political unity, which is essential for effective statehood.

"Thus, in a word, they formed an ethnic group or nation but not, traditionally, a single

polity. Before and after independence, nationalist politicians naturally sought to politicize

this cultural legacy and transform it into effective, national, political cohesion" (Lewis

1994:222. See also Laitin and Samatar 1987). Levine (1974) does not interpret Ethiopia

as a "conquest state". He argues that because the diverse peoples inhabiting the Horn

from Sudan to the Red Sea share many core cultural traits and have been interacting

through trade, migration, and warfare for six thousand years, this region can be

considered a "culture area", which he calls "Greater Ethiopia":

> Is there sufficient evidence to justify treating all of Ethiopia as a single complex
>
> system?...The question last raised has political overtones as well as intellectual
>
> urgency. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century a series of conquests
>
> under emperors Yohannes IV and Menilek II tripled the territory subject to the
>
> Ethiopian government, adding dozens of tribes and millions of people to the
>
> empire. Traumatic though they were for most of the peoples subjugated, these

conquests have been judged beneficial in several respects...Even so, it is not idle

to raise the question whether this imperial expansion was basically *a subjugation*

*of alien peoples or an ingathering of peoples with deep historical affinities,*

especially since many of the conquered peoples still appear to chafe under the

dominion of the Ethiopian state.

(Levine 1974:25-26, author's emphasis)


In the years since Levine published his work, analyses of state formation and its

links with nationalism and ethnicity have focussed precisely on the ways in which

hegemony is constructed, maintained, and contested (Alonso 1994; Anderson

1991;Doornbos 1991; Gellner 1981, 1983; Hobsbawm 1990; Malkki 1989, 1992). The

"problems" of Ethiopian "imperialism" and Somali "irredentism" and more recently the

complete disintegration of what should be, according to primordialist or ethnicist theories

of nation and state, the most stable state in Africa, are good issues for applying and

reconsidering this body of literature.

State formation in the Horn has typically used these ethnic and religious

differences as key tropes for building "nations", while simultaneously denying their use.

A collective memory of the sixteenth century wars between the Muslim armies of Ahmed

Gran and the Ethiopian state shaped subsequent Ethiopian action and remains important

both for Somalis and for Ethiopians today (Gorman 1981; Markakis 1974:368ff;

Trimingham 1965). Religion has been a key axis of identity for the predominantly

Christian highlanders as well as for the predominantly Muslim pastoralists and

agropastoralists surrounding the highlands. Somali fighters are said by highlanders and

Somalis alike to have formed the core of Ahmed Gran's forces, thus welding ethnicity to

religion in this persistent mutual distrust. The Oromo expansion which followed on the

devastation left in the wake of Ahmed Gran's invasion has left a complex legacy. The

Oromo, known by highlanders as "Galla"[14], were recruited or assimilated into some

governments and led to the downfall of others, either by overcoming them or by

triggering a Church-led revolt against the government which allows itself to be ruled by

"Galla" (Bahru 1991:120-128; Levine 1974:78-86). In Imperial Ethiopia, unity was

constructed through the cult of the Emperor, reinforced variously through expropriation

of land and transfer to military personnel resettled from the North (Bulcha 1988;

Markakis 1974:104-140), through the incorporation of local elites into the privileged

stratum of society allied with the Emperor, through development projects and other

efforts at persuading rather than coercing outlying regions (Levine 1974; Markakis

1974:393). The supremacy of Amharic as the language of state was maintained, in part by

default (it was the official language) and in part directly, by forbidding education and

publishing in other languages (Keller 1991:140, 160). This process was reinforced by the

Derg government, which made any mention of the ethnic aspect of Ethiopian social

stratification dangerous (Markakis 1993).

---

14

The term Galla is used in earlier ethnographies and histories of the region. It is now considered offensive by Oromos.

"Nation building": Class, ethnicity and power

Ethiopian scholars writing under the Derg emphasized important class differences

that had been obscured in earlier writing focusing on ethnicity. This Derg-mandated focus

on class and silence about ethnicity was part of the government's efforts to create an

"Ethiopian" nationalism. It served, paradoxically, to escalate the fission of the state, much

as the Siyaad Barre regime's ban on references to clan identity in Somalia made the

political manipulation of clan links more visible (Lewis 1994b). According to some

observers (e.g. Crummey 1994), the current "ethnic federalism" in Ethiopia is both

theoretically and practically flawed, in part because ethnic groups in Ethiopia are often

highly intermixed or occupy small islands of territory, in part because this ideology

determines that ethnicity is the only level of identity that will be politically significant.

However, the solution of ethnic federalism to the problem of Ethiopian dissent is not

surprising, given that the ethnic base of much differential access to power in Ethiopia has

been strenuously denied while simultaneously exploited by the rulers, both to maintain

Amhara dominance and to diminish Amhara peasant alienation.  For example, Tarekegn

Adebo (1984), in presenting the case for a class rather than ethnic analysis of the

Ethiopian revolution and Ethiopian society, writes:

> As it is hinted above, both the feudalists and the petty bourgeois separatists tried
>
> to appeal to what seemed ethnic, regional and cultural sentiments at any rate, in
>
> order to exploit local feelings. They often presented themselves as liberators
>
> prepared to free 'colonized' people. Such claims as "We are an African people

colonized by another" [quoting an Eritrean nationalist] are not rare in the writings

of these groups.... One outrageous paper which is absolutely foreign to the

Ethiopian reality, produced as late as 1979, spoke in such terms as 'the colonial

empire of Ethiopia', 'self-determination from colonial domination' and 'genuine

national liberation...struggle of broad masses of Oromo, Eritrea, Afar, Somalia

etc.'.

Although successive Ethiopian governments have constrained scholarly and other

writing, the vehemence of Adebo's view cannot be dismissed as merely the "politically

correct" version of the era. It reflects one vision of the nature of the Ethiopian state. Its

emphasis on class is also a corrective to models focusing solely on ethnicity or religion.

Levine offers a neo-evolutionary "image of Ethiopia as a complex sociocultural

system that has evolved through determinate stages" (Levine 1974: 25). Levine argues

that "[t]he crucial feature of its evolution has been the transition, still under way, from an

intersocietal system to a single societal system, thanks to the development of increased

adaptive capacities in some of its units" (ibid). He compares Amhara with Oromo social

organization and concludes that the authoritarian and highly stratified Amhara system,

which encourages aggressive competition through allowing some upward social mobility

(see also Levine 1972), was better suited than the fragmented, internally relatively

egalitarian Oromo system, for dominating Greater Ethiopia. This is indeed an "adaptive

advantage", evolutionary-type argument, but it is a very different conclusion than the

"ingathering of peoples" argument. The latter effaces the conquest and dominance based on manipulating ethnicity to gain control of material and political resources that Levine's own text explores in depth.

John Markakis (1974), writing at the same time as Levine, offers a more convincing analysis of Ethiopian political and economic history. Markakis considers both class and ethnicity to be key analytic concepts (Markakis 1974, 1984, 1993). He writes:

> Although there is no doubt that this factor [ethnicity] is capable of assertion independently of others, and that in a given situation it may, by itself, prove decisive, the premiss followed here is that in the general course of the political process, the role of ethnicity is conditioned by, and usually subordinated to, class considerations....For example, the northern Christian ethnic group is commonly referred to as the dominant group in Ethiopia - a fair statement as far as it goes. To include the peasant mass of northern Ethiopia in the designation 'dominant' is a gross distortion, however, for this class belongs to this group in cultural and psychological terms only. Similarly, the use of simple ethnic categories confuses and dissolves the real distinction between the landowning traditional elite and the landless masses in southern Ethiopia.

> (Markakis 1974:7-8)

This is not to say that class is real while ethnicity is epiphenomenal. These two

sources of identity are mutually constitutive in Ethiopia and its borderlands. Levine's

approach can then be fruitfully applied to unravelling the symbolic and social structural

processes through which class, ethnicity, power, and state formation are intertwined in

"Greater Ethiopia". In some instances, ethnicity and class may well coincide. However,

the fact that there *is* ongoing change in the system– that the meaning of "clan" is

continually and often violently contested, that the "Ethiopian nationalism" of the Derg

has now become the "ethnic democracy" of Ethiopia, that Eritrea successfully negotiated

secession on reasonable terms with Ethiopia[15] –indicates that the relationships among

class, religion, ethnicity, and other identities are complex. Markakis' emphasis on class

must be interpreted in light of the fact that despite (or perhaps because of) two decades of

"scientific socialism" in both Ethiopia and Somalia, the most powerful symbolic

frameworks for political and other activity remain ethnicity, religion, a shared history

(Eritrea), and, in Somalia, clan. Class consciousness has not proven to be nearly as

effective in mobilizing populations, even though class interests can clearly be identified

in such actions as the Mogadishu arms dealers/merchant elite's becoming vocal

peacebrokers in 1995 (Menkhaus and Prendergast 1995).

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[15]

These amicable relations broke down in the spring of 1998, leading to a state of war
declared between Ethiopia and Eritrea in June1998 and persisting through December
2000.

History, memory, and political practice

The roles of ethnic and religious identity in war zones are complex and are linked to local and regional histories and patterns of social and material practice. Malkki's work (1995) with Burundian Hutu refugees in Tanzania emphasizes the role in creating and mobilizing nationalist sentiment of what she calls mythico-histories - standardized, highly symbolic accounts of Hutu, Tutsi and Twa relationships and essential characteristics. Such symbolic and quasi-mythological histories were also recounted by my Somali interlocutors and can be found in anthropological, historiographic, and colonial writings , particularly in relation to clan genealogies, periodic attempts to mobilize Muslim solidarity against the infidels (Ethiopian or European), and correspondence in which Somali elders seek to influence various colonial authorities. However, most of the narratives told to me were particular and juridical, rather than general, nationalistic and ideological. This is consistent with Markakis' (1987) conclusion that the objectives of Somali pastoralists' frequent resistance to the Ethiopian state have been primarily local and limited: to maintain access to the material and political resources essential to the survival of a lineage, subclan, or other group. It is also congruent with Comaroff and Comaroff's (1997) argument that colonialism–and other political processes–must be examined in their specific material and symbolic practices as well as in general terms of power or political economy.

Nationalist sentiment has frequently been expressed, and indeed was the core of the vision of uniting all Somalis into Greater Somalia - the central platform of all Somali governments from independence in 1960 to the dissolution of the Somali state in 1991.

Nevertheless, collective Somali action that supercedes lineage or clan interests has been most sustained and successful when it has drawn primarily on religious rather than ethnic identity. As the debate over Gurgura ethnicity demonstrates, ethnic identity is fluid in the borderlands between Somalis and Oromos, and contested among Somalis themselves. The clan-based segmentary lineage system of Somali society continues to shape the kinds of historical memories available to individuals and groups engaged in political and other struggles, though other sources of identity–gender, local, class, political, ethnic, or religious–are also important. This pattern of social organization is also reflected in the ways in which memories and narratives are used.

**The Politics of Poverty and Drought**

The historico-political narratives I encountered in the field are also different from development narratives recounted to me by field staff or found in official reports. These development narratives address poverty, but seldom mention how politics or history play out in the lives of ordinary people. Nevertheless, they reflect both the daily reality of most Ethiopians and the narratives of suffering of Somali refugees and returnees more accurately than do trauma narratives. The patterns of social organization, political and narrative practice, and idioms of distress I encountered among Somali in Ethiopia must be interpreted in light of the precariousness of material subsistence. Kinship and clanship remain important to ensuring the survival of the poor and the political and economic success of elites. The "clan interests" so easily dismissed in critiques of "tribalism" are often a matter of literal survival and not simply the political manoeuvring of elites or

individuals for personal gain, though the latter dimension is what is most visible at the level of regional or state politics[16].

### Hunger: Numbers, Nature, Politics, and Structural Vulnerability

Ethiopia is among the poorest countries of the world. The 1996 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) rated it 168th out of 174 countries, based on the Human Development Index, a composite index of life expectancy, educational attainment and adjusted real income. Somalia was rated 172nd. Ethiopia's 1998 per capita GDP was US$102. In comparison, the per capita GDPs of Uganda and Kenya for that year were $339 and $342 respectively. Official development assistance in 1994 was the equivalent of 22.9% of GNP (World Development Report 1996, Statistical Annex). There is a small, extremely wealthy elite, but an estimated 60% of the population exists below the absolute poverty line. In Tigray and Wollo regions, food aid represents up to 30% of basic food security for poor households, even in normal years (FAO 1995)[17].

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[16]

On "the politics of the belly" in African state formation, and on ethnicity, see Bayart 1993.

[17]

The almost exclusive emphasis in the FAO/WFP Mission Reports, as well as in the Famine Early Warning Systems of the Ethiopian government and other agencies, on agricultural conditions, terms of trade, and nutritional status in the highlands supports allegations that rangelands and Somali populations continue to be neglected (van Brabant 1994; Yusuf Farah 1996).

The 1994 Population and Housing Census calculated the total population of

Ethiopia to be 53,477,265. Planning figures for food and other aid are based on

projections derived from this baseline and a population growth rate estimated to be

between 2.9% and 3.1%. These figures appear fairly precise and place Ethiopia second to

Nigeria in population among African countries. However, this apparent precision is

misleading: the population estimates for mid-1998, for example, vary by about 4 million

people (FAO 1997). This is of great importance to calculating the numbers of people who

might need food aid and the amounts of food that might need to be purchased to cover

shortfalls. While both the total population estimate and the growth rate are imprecise,

existing figures suggest that the population has tripled since 1950. The UN estimate of

the 1950 population was 18,434,000 (cited by the Center for International Health

Information for USAID USAID 1995). The U.S. Library of Congress estimate of the

1975 population, shortly before the Ogaden War, uses the 1975 Ethiopian Census figure

of 33,958,300. The 1987 Ethiopian Census estimated a population of 47,305,314. All of

these figures are approximate and should be interpreted with caution, as should frequently

cited estimates of the vast irrigation and farming potential that remains untapped in

Ethiopia (e.g. FAO 1997). The current reality is that this potential remains untapped, so

that the productive land available for a much larger population is not much greater now

than it was twenty or thirty years ago. The refugee accounts to be discussed in the

following chapters, and the likelihood of success of the attempts to restore a

mythologized past that many of these accounts represent, should also be interpreted in

light of the real land pressure that these approximate figures suggest. Somali returnees

are aware of these land pressures. My informants stated outright that they had no place

else to go, because other lands were full. To them, this was all the more reason to pursue

their claims with vigour. Internal tensions and conflicts could be dealt with when there

was at least a material basis for tensions and conflicts.

Excluding refugees and the internally displaced, millions of Ethiopians receive

emergency food aid each year. The numbers of beneficiaries of food aid fluctuate widely

from year to year and from region to region. In some years, crop surpluses occur in some

regions and pockets of starvation in others, reflecting both geographic variability and the

fragility of distribution of and access to food. The variation in numbers of beneficiaries

also reflects enormous changes in crop yields and grain and livestock prices from season

to season and highlight the extreme vulnerability of millions of people to even modest

changes in rainfall or pest infestations. The Food and Agriculture Association and World

Food Programme of the UN (FAO/WFP) undertake annual food and crop assessment

missions. These missions have provided the following estimates of the numbers of people

(excluding refugees and internally displaced persons) who would require emergency food

aid to prevent severe malnutrition or starvation in the year following the mission:

1996 - 3 million

1997 - 1.9 million

1998 - 5.35 million

1999 - 2 million (excluding pastoral areas)

2000 - 7.77 million[18]

The 1996 and 1998 harvests were excellent, allowing much food aid to be purchased within Ethiopia. Nevertheless, these bumper crops still left approximately 2 million people in need of emergency relief the following year. As economist Amartya Sen puts it,

> starvation is the characteristic of some people not *having* enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there *being* not enough food to eat. While the latter can be a cause of the former, it is but one of many *possible* causes    (quoted in Hansen 1986. Sen's emphasis).

The sharp increase in estimated need for 2000 occurred despite a fall of only 6% in the forecasted overall harvest (FAO 2000), but this modest decrease occurred after three years of drought conditions in pastoralist areas (C. Piggott pers. comm.). The FAO report indicates that this projection "masks very serious food shortages in specific areas" (p. 6). In the deceptively simple language[19] of development writing, the report asserts that the projected food shortages reflect

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[18]

In fact, the "estimate" for 2000 was very precise, to the last individual: 7,767,594. The report does not specify what methodology led to an estimate with so many significant digits.

[19]

A renowned anthropologist who does not spend a lot of time reading UN reports wondered what, exactly, the authors meant by "conventional", "shock", "unmet need", "coping mechanism", and "targeting". This could be the topic of a separate paper. However, the use of apparently neutral technical language to express what are in fact political choices or strategies is a theme in many chapters of this thesis.

...a combination of interrelated factors including:

1) conventional types of disasters/ "shocks" (both natural and man-made);

2) shocks over multiple years, sometimes followed by inadequate responses;

3) a partially unmet need for assistance from previous years, with cumulative

impacts over time;

4) the erosion of coping mechanisms for many rural households due to limited

income-generating opportunities, or the liquidation of household assets such as

livestock;

5) problems association with targeting, leading to the dilution of rations.

(ibid p. 27-28).

Within regions, the projected numbers of beneficiaries, as a proportion of the total rural

population, ranged widely for 2000: in Amhara region from less than 1% (East Gojjam)

to 42% (North and South Wollo); in Tigray from 10 to 49%; in Somali Region from 8%

(Jigjiga), to 26% in Shinile zone (where Hurso village is located), to 76 and 77% in Fiq

and Gode zones. Fifty percent of the rural population of Dire Dawa was projected to need

food aid. Of a projected July 2000 population of 3.7 million for Somali Region, 1.3

million were predicted to need emergency food aid in 2000 (FAO 2000:24-25). As in the

past, much of the need will be met by migration. Indeed, letters sent to me in the summer

of 1999 said that people had already started leaving Hurso and the area for Djibouti and

elsewhere[20]. Key donors were slow to respond to food aid appeals in December 1999.

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20

Tragically, the predictions were fairly accurate but did nothing to forestall the famine in
eastern Ethiopia in the summer and fall of 2000. Fiq and Gode zones were hardest hit.

A contributing factor to the numbers of Ethiopians at risk of starvation, alluded to

only in passing in the FAO report, is the range of effects of the war between Ethiopia and

Eritrea that started in 1998 and continued through 2000. The war had directly caused the

internal displacement of 349,000 Ethiopians by mid-2000. Government resources were

diverted from capital development investment to military spending. An informal

Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) study did not find any decreases in

recurrent development spending nor any diversion of food aid. Indeed, the government

purchased an unprecedented 100,000 metric tonnes of food aid locally. However, there is

some evidence that government-held assets were liquidated to fund military expenditures.

Such asset depletion and curtailed capital investment increase the structural vulnerability

to famine. In addition, some donors withheld foreign currency aid (balance of payments

support) in order to prevent the use of hard currency to purchase military hardware as

well as to apply pressure for a ceasefire. Indirectly, the war and the shifts in government

spending and aid have contributed to the erosion of coping strategies and depletion of

assets (loss of family income because wage earners or farm workers have been

conscripted or killed), especially in the highlands.


Famine, Refugees, and Political Capital in the Horn

Drought and periodic famine are facts of life in the Horn of Africa. These are

never purely (or even largely) "natural", as some have been caused and most exacerbated

by political or military action (Clay and Holcomb 1986; Duffield 1992; Lewis 1980:76-

77)[21], and all are significant in shaping subsequent action, by governments, pastoralists,

resistance groups, and various other interested parties. The prompt and generous response

of the Siyaad Barre government to the 1974-75 Somali drought bought it domestic and

international goodwill (Samatar 1988). The refusal of the Haile Selassie regime to

recognize and respond to the Ethiopian famine of 1972-1974 until 200,000 people had

starved led to student demonstrations in Addis Ababa and media attention. In this way,

the famine in April 1974 contributed directly to the success of the revolution of

September 1974 (Bahru 1991; Markakis 1987:101-3). This revolution marked the end of

the imperial and feudal era in Ethiopia.

The initial success of the Derg in engaging the Ethiopian population in a radical

process of land tenure reform and social change was partly the result of imperial

indifference to drought and famine in a context of increasing political dissatisfaction

among various parts of Ethiopian society. The 1984 Ethiopian famine was in many ways

a turning point for Western responses to Ethiopia, which had tried to separate

"development" assistance from the increasing political distance between the West and the

Soviet-supported Derg. While opinion was split on the responsibility and response of the

Ethiopian government (see Clay and Holcomb 1986 vs Jansson et al 1987), opposition to

resettlement and "villagization"[22] gradually grew, together with a marked donor

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21

For a recent collection of anthropological perspectives on "natural disasters", see Oliver-Smith and Hoffman (1999).

22

Forcing the population which traditionally lived in scattered households and small hamlets to move into newly created larger settlements. See e.g. Clay and Holcomb 1986.

preference for channelling aid through NGOs at the obvious expense of the government.

This increasing reliance on NGOs is a region-wide process, and the implications for

sovereignty, political participation, and the efforts of NGOs to do "apolitical"

development work in a highly political context are still under-investigated (Adam 1992b;

Duffield 1992; Massey 1987; Prendergast and Duffield 1994; Raven-Roberts 1994; see

also Ferguson 1994).

Refugees are an enormous problem in the Horn of Africa, from humanitarian,

economic, political, and environmental perspectives. However, they are also important

political and economic resources. Negussay Ayele (1984) provides a trenchant Ethiopian

view of the "Greater Somalia"/"Western Somalia" debate, seeing "Somali refugees" as

just one more disingenuous attempt by the Somali state to manipulate public opinion and

get more foreign aid. Scholars sympathetic to the Somali case nevertheless recognize the

political, economic and indeed military importance of refugees to the Barre (but also the

Mengistu) regime (Lewis 1990). Indeed, Lewis suggests that Somalis themselves were

perfectly aware of this importance:

> ...in 1974 (and up to 1986), the clandestine codename for the military regime was
>
> MOD. M stands for the patrilineage (Marrehaan) of the President; O for that of his
>
> mother - and this means the Ogaadeen people who live in the critically sensitive
>
> Ogaadeen border region of Ethiopia; and D for the Dulbahante, the lineage of his
>
> son-in-law, the head of the dreaded NSS [National Security Service]. The
>
> implications were succinctly expressed in a popular explanatory verbal formula:

"The Marrehan are drunk on power; the Dulbahante are drunk on pride; the

Ogaadeen are drunk on powdered milk."

(Lewis 1994:165)


The connections among ecology, civil society, and the state are also important in

foreign involvement in the Horn. The British Protectorate of Somaliland has been

characterized in terms of "benign neglect", based on the apparent lack of resources

(Sheik-'Abdi 1993). The British were concerned only with securing meat for the garrison

at Aden and preventing "hostile powers" from occupying this shore (Cassenelli 1982;

Lewis 1961, 1980; Abdi Samatar 1989). Permanent water and fertile soils in the South

contributed to the more interventionist Italian approach to its colony in the 1920s and 30s.

Italian involvement in the plantation economy has continued to be significant right

through to the downfall of the Barre government (Abdi Samatar 1994) and subsequent

civil war, where competition between Italian-allied Somalfruit and Dole has contributed

to the further militarization of the South as competing "security force" militias fight for

control of these potentially lucrative agricultural lands (Menkhaus and Prendergast 1995).

The massive arming of both Somalia and Ethiopia by the Soviets and the Americans has

been seen as part of their cold war strategies vis-a-vis the Middle East oil fields (via the

Red Sea and Suez Canal) (Gorman 1981; Lyons 1994; Rawson 1994).

The UN involvement and, more recently, its departure from Somalia has

highlighted these interconnections among ecology and politics. Within months of arriving

in Mogadishu, the UN had become a critical economic resource in the country, replacing

the collapsed state as the source of the patronage through which much of politics is

conducted and the loyalty of clan militias is acquired (Lewis 1997; Menkhaus 1997). This

involvement initially began in order to provide famine relief, primarily to the Digil and

Rahanweyn cultivators who were squeezed between and exploited by competing

Daarood- and Hawiye-based militias. In the end, however, these farmers benefited least

from the intervention (Middleton and O'Keefe 1998).

**Conclusion: History, Land and Politics in Somali Ethiopia**

Ecology, humanitarian aid, geopolitics, and regional politics are intimately linked

in the Horn. Political solutions are required to mitigate the consequences of "natural

disasters". The latter reflect the interactions between severe environmental conditions and

socio-political processes and conflicts. It would be a mistake to account for political

violence in the region by any direct appeal to ecological factors or population pressure.

David Newbury (1999:35) makes this same point with regards to the 1994 Rwandan

genocide:

> Equating ecological crisis directly to political violence is misleading. Such
>
> statements assume too much because they obscure the intervening steps by which
>
> rural distress is translated into political action. At the same time, they say too little
>
> because they neglect the fact that ecology is political, and that human
>
> relationships with the "natural" world are guided by questions of power,
>
> resources, markets, and prices - all politically charged categories.

In the Horn, the very importance of the physical environment to all political levels in the region has facilitated the creation of an arena for negotiation, in the absence of fully satisfactory political solutions. This space and its implications have been explored by some authors (Doornbos et al 1992; Wisner 1994). The regional institution considered the most promising as a focus for cooperation and as a site for political negotiation in the 1990s was IGADD, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Development, founded in 1986 (Saleem 1992). This is an indication both of the weakness of regional cooperation to date, and of the importance of the natural environment and its use to all parties. IGADD was the site of dialogue between Barre and Mengistu, leading to detente and an agreement to stop supporting each other's guerrilla movements in 1988. Paradoxically, this mutual non-aggression treaty allowed the rapid escalation of violence. Both governments had armed clan-based militias and supported these militias' incursions against other clans thought to be allied with the opposing government. For example, the Somali state created militias among Ethiopian Daarood refugees resettled in Isaaq lands for two reasons: (1) to mount periodic guerilla attacks against Ethiopian forces across the border, and (2) to assist the Daarood-based Somali government in its simmering conflict against Isaaq insurgents in the north. When the cross-border dimension of the conflict was decreased after the detente with Ethiopia, all of the resources were focused on the domestic conflict. The logic of escalating violence had been laid down through decades of intersecting clan, state, and international intrigues over resources and power (Lewis 1994; van Brabant 1994).

Neither the historical accounts nor current narratives of forced migration are

straightforward manifestations of underlying, "real" ecological or resource constraints,

but nor do they reflect uncomplicated conflicts between Somalis and Ethiopia or the

straightforward effects of colonialism. Somali refugee narratives cannot be understood

without reference to the complex politics of identity, state formation, and poverty in

Somali Ethiopia.

# Chapter Two

## CHARITY, DEPENDENCY, AND SOMALI READINGS OF "REFUGEE"

Humanitarian aid is based in historically contingent models and practices of charity. It continues to manifest the conflicts and ambiguities present in the practice of charity over the last two to three centuries. The increasing use by humanitarian agencies of mental health language about trauma or dependency syndrome, in place of a moral language of pity and charity, does not overcome the ambivalences and inequalities integral to older models of charity. Rather, it masks them. This ambivalence towards charity and its recipients is often eclipsed by the urgency of humanitarian crises and by the real transfer of resources and relief of suffering that occur through humanitarian aid. The ambivalence towards beneficiaries and the role of pity in maintaining, rather than erasing, inequality, are more clearly visible in the widespread concern and rhetoric over "refugee dependency".

The 1995 budget of UNHCR was $1.3 billion; of this, only one third was provided as core funding by the General Assembly of the United Nations. The remaining $864 million had to be raised through emergency campaigns. Core funding must be negotiated with donor governments every year (Zetter 1999; Stein 1991). NGOs must also raise funds. The suffering, helpless refugee is a central figure of fundraising campaigns, eclipsing the competent, resilient, valuable refugee (for example, in a UNHCR poster stating "Einstein was a refugee") seen in the lower profile public education campaigns. Pity is a central dimension of the perception among Western

audiences and donors of an obligation to help refugees (Boltanski 1993) and of the structures and practices involved in providing this help, from fundraising to the rhetoric of "refugee dependency".

## The Lexicon of "Refugee"

### Dominant definitions of "refugee"

The semantic network (Good 1977) around the word "refugee" has two dimensions or axes: 1) geopolitical, evoking words such as nation, borders, migration, sovereignty, denationalization; and 2) moral-experiential, having to do with rights and obligations, notions of the self, experience, and evoking words such as persecution, suffering, duty, charity, dependency, humanitarianism. The two axes are rhetorically and pragmatically interconnected. Both axes are important to the globalization of this word, to its institutionalization transnationally, and to its translation and practical manifestations in very different contexts around the world. An important strategy for all actors, from the UN to refugees in camps, is negotiation in terms of a shared moral and legal rhetoric of humanitarian aid. This shared rhetoric is differentially used to fit local situations and achieve competing goals. While the rhetoric is shared, however, it arises from the interaction of different understandings of human nature, social organization and history, emotion, poverty, charity, suffering, and obligation.

The specific meanings and stakes of "refugee" and other words in the lexicon of refugee relief are constructed and contested in concrete interactions or *language games,*

where participants bring in assumptions, memories, and expectations around words, ideas, and issues, and negotiate or hammer out new social realities and new networks of meaning (Ulin 1984:26-41). These interactions occur in many settings, including refugee camps, United Nations and agency meetings, research projects, therapists' offices, media reports, scholarly publications, and so forth. It is through these concrete language games that both "refugees" and the refugee relief system or refugee regime are made real and significant. It is also through these language games that dominant assumptions are naturalized, resisted, transformed, or rejected, by one or more parties to the interaction.

The concept of the "political arena" (Bailey 1969) is useful for understanding refugee relief, in conjunction with anthropological analyses of other institutions (e.g., Justice 1986; Keesing 1987, 1993). Rather than considering power and institutional interests in the abstract, the refugee relief process can usefully be approached as resting on a body of cultural assumptions and social institutions which, like other cultural and social systems, serves as a framework within which diverse groups act out and pursue their interests. More specifically, following ideas well explored in political anthropology, the refugee relief system can be viewed as a political arena, constituted by institutional rules and norms, within which political dramas are acted out and subjected to contested interpretations and rewritings. Various actors enter and leave this arena as it intersects with others, such as those of general domestic and foreign policy. This particular arena is constituted by rules and norms which take the form of a language game around the definition of legitimate refugees, human rights, humanitarianism, dependency, and state

sovereignty.

This arena arose out of specific historical, political and economic circumstances, yet it is now relevant to all nation states and millions of displaced people around the world. While each situation of forced migration is distinctive, there are aspects which all situations share, including the requirement to use a depoliticized discourse–the humanitarian rhetoric–and the procedural rules of the refugee relief system and the United Nations more generally, if any financial or political assistance is to be had by states or by refugees themselves. In order to understand the behaviour, strategies, and interpretations of refugees as individuals, as groups, or as categories constituted by the discourse and practices of the refugee relief system, one must take account of the articulation of meanings, practices and power in the system at a global level. The rhetorical and institutional framework of this international refugee relief system both shapes and is influenced by the specific practices which comprise it: the actions of individuals feeding or counting refugees, the acceptance or rejection of asylum claims, the apparently contradictory statements of UNHCR, the rhetorical, military, and administrative actions of governments faced with refugee flows, and so forth.

The dominant discourse about refugees is that of Western states and the UN and non-governmental agencies, through which donor interests are pursued and, at times, challenged. This discourse is based formally on international conventions and treaties defining rights and obligations, and it serves as an important political arena for various actors. The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was

created by the United Nations in 1951 to deal with the problem of refugee and displaced

populations from the Second World War and the post-War partitioning of Europe. The

formal definition of "refugee", according to the 1951 Geneva Convention Related to the

Status of Refugees, was any individual who:

> as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951, and owing to well-founded
>
> fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a
>
> particular social group or political opinion is outside the country of his nationality
>
> and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection
>
> of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of
>
> his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to
>
> such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (Office of the United Nations High
>
> Commissioner for Refugees, (UNHCR)1979:29)

In 1967 the UN agreed on a Protocol Related to the Status of Refugees, which

deleted the limitation to events occurring prior to 1951 as well as deleting the option for

signatory states to limit their activities to European refugees. In 1969, the Organization of

African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of the Problem of

Refugees In Africa extended the basis on which African states would recognize claims for

asylum and refugee status to include

every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination

or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his

country of origin or nationality is compelled to leave his place of habitual

residence in order to seek refuge in another outside his country of origin or

nationality (UNHCR 1979:197).

The refugee determination laws of most European and North American states are

based on the narrower, UN definition, and both law and practice seek to limit the

admissibility even of persons who could demonstrate "a well-founded fear of

persecution" on the grounds specified in the UN definition. The practice of UN and non-

governmental agencies, and the common use of "refugee", are more in line with the

broader, OAU definition quoted above. Over the past several years, popular Western

usage of "refugee" and research about "the refugee experience" and refugee mental health

have increasingly focused on the psychological effects of trauma and displacement. The

institutional settings of refugee research and the political and economic interests at stake

in refugee relief are not emphasized.

Refugee producing and receiving countries are connected to the world system

through trade and aid. In the early 1990s, significant proportions of the gross national

product (GNP) of several such countries came from official development assistance

(ODA): 31% in Tanzania, 43% in Somalia, 70% in Mozambique (Gorman 1993).

Twenty percent of the Malawi government's revenue base in 1991 came from the $110

million refugee relief operation, half of which was administered by UNHCR and half

supplied by the World Food Programme (WFP) (Zetter 1999). In the 1980s, when there

were some 600,000 Ethiopian Somali and other Ethiopian refugees in Somalia, the

World Health Organization (WHO) considered completely taking over the Somali

Ministry of Health and contracting out services   (Godfrey and Mursal 1990). With so

much of the economy driven by development assistance, the autonomy of the state is

limited. Populations, such as Ethiopian Somalis, with histories of conflict against a state

can attempt to bypass or constrain the actions of the state through appeals to development

agencies. However, the agencies themselves are constrained by the donors.

Intergovernmental bodies such as UNHCR, WFP, the UN Development Program

(UNDP) and Northern NGOs stress the importance of collaborating with local

governments and local NGOs, and of consulting and empowering refugees (Forbes

Martin 1992; Keen 1992;UNHCR 1990, 1991). However, most decisions about both

immediate and long-term refugee assistance are made by Northern agencies, with little or

no consultation (Allen and Turton 1996; Harrell-Bond 1986; Zetter 1999). This does not

reflect deliberate exclusion but rather arises from a combination of ideological and

administrative factors. These include:   a) assumptions about the nature of poverty,

vulnerability, or conflict; b) unequal access among agencies and governments to funders

and policy makers; c) bureaucratic inertia; d) the social consequences of initial technical

interventions[1] (de Waal 1995; Duffield 1997, 1999; Ferguson 1994; Summerfield 1999b;

Zetter 1999), and e) the protection of domains of influence by individual NGOs. For

example, over 200 NGOs were active in Congo-Zaire in the aftermath of the 1994

Rwandan genocide. Four hundred NGOs arrived in Kosovo with the cessation of NATO

bombing in the spring of 1999, 150 of them health-related. Few of them were willing to

cooperate with WHO attempts at coordinating their efforts in a common health care

policy (Dr. Ismet Lecaj, Regional Public Health Advisor, WHO Mission in Kosovo; pers.

comm., March 2000).

### Somali readings of "refugee"

The rhetoric of refugee dependency and more broadly, refugee suffering and

refugee mental health, tends to situate political and social processes in individual

psychopathology. The ways in which Somali refugees and returnees discuss refugee

issues do not privilege individual psychobiology or individual suffering. Rather, Somali

refugee rhetoric emphasizes social relations, politics, and duty.

The Somali word for refugee, *qaxooti*[2], is relatively new. While I have not traced

its genealogy in detail, older informants stated that it was not used or did not apply before

---

1 For example, establishing emergency water supply systems subsequently influences
the social organization of getting and distributing water; eliminating food aid in parts of
Sudan may have forced displaced Southerners into bonded labour or other exploitative
patron-client relationships (Duffield 1999).

2 Pronounced "koHOti".

the wars of the 1970s and possibly the 1960s, while younger people simply use the word

as part of their vocabulary. Historical research might reveal whether *qaxooti* was used in

discussing the nineteenth century wars of the Somali leader Mohammed Abdille Hassan

against the British and Abyssinians[3], or indeed the sixteenth century war of Muslim

expansion of Ahmed Gureh, known by Ethiopians as Ahmed Grañ (see Trimingham

1965:85-91). The general sense among my informants, at least, was that this was a

relatively new word referring to the relatively new phenomenon, in Somali experience, of

wars between states or cities. Its meanings are shaped both by Somali notions and

experiences of flight, war, justice, and need, and by outside notions and social

organization; specifically, by the UN Convention definition of refugee, and by the

experience of refugee camps and refugee relief agencies.

The word *qaxooti* in its strictest Somali sense may be glossed as "people who flee

before the mouth of a gun"[4]. Among poor refugees and returnees with whom I interacted,

the most salient dimensions of the category *qaxooti* were related to poverty rather than to

the underlying cause, migration forced by war. The poverty that *qaxooti* often experience

is beyond the scope of the customary framework of mutual assistance or the possibility of

recovery through mechanisms such as livestock raiding. The core connotations of *qaxooti*

---

3 Apropos of the discussion of political action and the attribution of mental illness in this
thesis, Mohammed Abdille Hassan was known by the British as the "Mad Mullah" - see
Drake-Brockman (1912); Samatar (1982):182-4.

4 Sidney Waldron, pers. comm. Waldron is an anthropologist with extensive field
experience among Somali refugees (see e.g. Waldron and Hasci [1995]).

connotations of *qaxooti* in Hurso were destitution and a right to protection and assistance

from outsiders. The latter aspect reflects the fact that the civil and other wars in which the

category *qaxooti* evolved, from the 1960s on,  also featured highly visible involvement by

international relief agencies. Nevertheless, the first choice of most Somali refugees was to

avoid international or government agencies and to seek help from kin or clan sources (see

also Holt 1996; Holt and Lawrence 1991; Yusuf Farah 1996). In addition to war and

forced migration, the term implies social rupture. When I asked one man whether he

would be *qaxooti* if he were forced to flee at gunpoint but sought refuge with relatives, he

replied: "No. I would be a guest (*marti*)".

Both implicit and explicit meanings of *qaxooti* indicate the close relationship to

Western notions of refugee. *Qaxooti* is a political arena as well as a definition. Affective,

political and moral aspects are variously emphasized, depending on context: who is

participating, to what ends, with reference to what history.

## Refugee Dependency

Refugee dependency is one of the central preoccupations of many actors on the

donor side of the global refugee relief system (von Buchwald 1994). "Dependency" in the

refugee literature is a negative psychological state, somewhere between demanding

laziness and learned helplessness. This condition is said to arise when refugees are unable

to pursue gainful employment or subsistence activities because decisions and survival

needs are controlled by the governments or agencies controlling refugee camps, or when

generous refugee aid acts as a "pull factor" to drag refugees across borders (Murphy 1995 [1955]; von Buchwald 1994). The idea that refugees are lazy is linked to the idea that refugees cheat and manipulate the food aid system. Census operations to limit false registration for food aid include unscheduled night searches of refugees. In one such operation, teams of flashlight-bearing census-takers entered every sleeping household to count individuals. In another, the camp population was herded into enclosed areas known as "corrals" so that individuals could be counted and daubed with gentian violet (Harrell-Bond 1999; Harrell-Bond et al 1992; Hyndman 1997). Manuals have been commissioned and written to fine-tune the monitoring of food aid distribution; they emphasize techniques for identifying and marking individuals (Stephenson/RPG 1992). Agencies and governments alike are preoccupied by numbers. These numbers, and the strategies followed to arrive at specific numbers, tell interesting stories.

### Somali Refugees in Ethiopia

Refugees and returnees are economically and politically important in Ethiopia as a whole, and in the Somali National Region in particular. Based on official UNHCR and Census figures, the population of Somali refugees in the eastern camps is equivalent to about seven percent of the regional population. Since the fall of the Derg regime in 1991, the UNHCR and Ethiopian government estimate that over 900,000 Ethiopian refugees have returned from asylum in Sudan, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, and elsewhere (UNHCR 1998). Approximately 40,000 Ethiopians, mostly Somalis, were repatriated from Djibouti

in 1995 and early 1996 (UNHCR).   The budget for Somali refugees ("Care and Maintenance") was US$2,419,397, which did not include the much greater costs of provisioning the refugees, covered by the World Food Programme. The total budget of UNHCR in Ethiopia for 1998 was US$5,031,750 (UNHCR pers.comm.).

The number of registered refugees in the eastern camps in October 1994 was 630,000, but "the total number was brought down to 184,900 after the revalidation exercise on the ration cards in September and October 1994" (UNHCR Sub-Office Jijiga 1995).   In May 1998 the official number of refugees in Ethiopia was 304,436. Of these, 233,338 were Somali refugees, all but 8,000 of whom were in refugee camps and reintegration areas in the Somali National Region (UNHCR 1998). The remaining 8,000 were in Addis or other towns, or along the border with Kenya. These numbers do not include refugees who did not approach the government or the UNHCR for assistance.

Scholars and critics have challenged the basis on which refugee numbers are calculated, arguing that the political and economic interests of host and donor countries take priority over the needs of refugees and that techniques to count refugees are both coercive and likely to arrive at inaccurate estimates (Harrell-Bond et al 1992). The working assumption in Ethiopia was that the ratio of cards to refugees was six to one.   In Ethiopia, recount exercises reflected the suspicion among donors and agencies that numbers were inflated both by "genuine" refugees registering several times, and by false refugees getting and keeping or selling registration cards which entitle them to rations and protection. The recount also reflects changes in agency policy and declining

availability of food aid. One of these changes relates to policies regarding "false"

claimants. There has long been a debate among field and head office staff about how to

address the problems of local populations who feel the effects of refugees and who may,

in fact, be subject to some of the same environmental or political stressors that brought

refugees to camps, but who are not eligible for assistance. As a study for Save the

Children Fund - UK (SCF-UK) demonstrated (Holt and Lawrence 1991), Somali refugees

are often hosted and supported by local populations. Agency fieldstaff are generally

aware of this. Consequently, false registration was tolerated as a way of injecting aid into

the local economy–until the food reserves available for Somali refugees began to shrink

in 1993-94[5]. Staff hired after the recount exercise were often unfamiliar with previous

tacit or official policy regarding false registration.

This conjunction of moral considerations (perceived obligation to help *versus*

suspicions of cheating and fears of dependency), practical imperatives (insufficient

supplies to continue meeting existing commitments), policy changes, and the implications

of rapid staff turnover and short or non-existent institutional memory is typical of relief

and development programme activity in Ethiopia, and elsewhere. It is not that all, or even

most, development and relief workers are merely looking out for their own economic and

professional advancement, as some critics have charged (Hancock 1989). Nor are they

simply naive pawns in the machinations of global capitalists, neo-colonialists or local

---

5 Refugees in one of the eastern camps asserted that the United States cut back aid to
Somali refugees in Ethiopia as a punishment for the debacle of the US-led intervention in
Somalia, UNOSOM. This perspective was shared by some agency staff.

dictators. Field staff of large and small relief and development agencies in Ethiopia were,

as a rule, aware that various political and economic interests were at stake. They were

also aware of the implications of their own short postings and relative lack of knowledge

of local and regional history and politics. They felt that doing something was better than

doing nothing, hoped that local development projects or relief efforts would at least save

or ease a few lives, and found it impossible to ignore the cultural logic of their own

agencies as well as the contexts in which both they as individuals and the agencies

worked. Nevertheless, as van Brabant (1994) has documented, relief agencies have

worked in eastern Ethiopia with little reference to local or regional histories, social and

economic dynamics, or even their own institutional histories.

Two surveys done in the eastern camps (Abdulkadir 1994; Yusuf Farah 1994)

support the view that Somalis–refugees and non-refugees–perceive and use refugee

camps and food aid as a part of their socio-economic world that becomes particularly

relevant during times of drought and extensive warfare (see also Waldron and Hasci

1995). The towns around which camps arose are similarly used as places of refuge for

vulnerable populations. The camps generally developed next to small towns on the

territory of one or another clan. Movement into and out of the camps followed clan

logics. For example, the Aware camps (Daror, Rabasso, Camabokor) primarily housed

Isaaq from the Gerhajis group of clans, who were fighting the government of Somaliland.

Pro-government refugees went to Hartisheik camp (Yusuf Farah 1994). The lands and

lineages around one or another camp would be considered a second home to clansmen in

need from across the border. Conversely, impoverished local residents would have moral

claims on benefits obtained by kinsmen registered in a camp. As one regional government

official put it, "When Somalia sneezes, we catch a cold."

Many of the refugees who came to the Aware camps were traders and

professionals from urban areas with a legitimate fear of persecution on clan grounds.

They returned to Somaliland spontaneously once conditions in Hargeisa had improved.

Both Abdulkadir and Yusuf Farah found that some of the remaining camp residents

continued to face significant political risks should they return home. The majority,

however, stayed because they were destitute. The economic and social infrastructure on

which they had depended prior to flight had been sufficiently damaged during the

fighting that their prospects of finding even casual employment were negligible. The

1994 Ethiopian Census did not investigate the camps, but it did count the residents of the

adjacent towns such as Hartisheik and Aware. Reproductive-age women were

overrepresented in most of these towns, although the overall sex ratio in this region was

strongly skewed in favour of men. Some of these women were petty traders from

Somaliland or local areas, but others reflect historic patterns of responding to drought and

uncertainty: women go to towns either as a last resort, when their kin-based rural

networks have failed; or temporarily, while men travel in search of new opportunities

(Cassanelli 1982; Mohamed Saleh, pers. comm.)[6].

The census data, the camp surveys, and the ethnographic research presented here

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6 Amina's story, in Chapters Five and Eight, illustrates this pattern.

supports other research on the region that stresses regional processes and indicates much

closer economic and social ties between the Somali Region and Somalia than between

Somali Region and the Ethiopian highlands (Hogg 1996; Holt 1996; van Brabant 1994;

Yusuf Farah 1996;). The camps and food aid are a resource among others–pasture, water,

towns, government, trade, wage labour, cultivation[7]. All resources are differentially used

by more or less vulnerable groups and individuals. Once on the general market of the

Somalia/Somaliland/eastern Ethiopia region, food aid becomes indistinguishable from

other sources of grain, and the market and people who use it adjust to and come to expect

its presence. The refugee camps themselves, however, with the wheat grain and

occasional oil and sugar that constitutes the only ration available in the eastern camps, are

not an attractive alternative to herding, farming, or living in a peaceful town. Refugee

ration cards become one more vehicle for patronage among the wealthy and well

connected. But refugee rations allow thousands to survive, though barely, as nutritional

surveys in camps have found (Christensen 1982; Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs

1994; Toole and Bhatia 1992).

## The Deserving Poor

The idea that refugees or other recipients of aid are lazy is rooted in historical

assumptions about the "deserving poor". Similar ideas were central in the debates over

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7 To speak of "dependency" on refugee relief makes no more sense, in this view, than
speaking of "dependency" on a job or land.

charity in England since the seventeenth century (Cowen and Shenton 1996; McBriar

1987; Cunningham and Innes 1998) and justified the existence of the hospitals and

workhouses of Britain and the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

(Harrell-Bond et al 1992; Risse 1986; Rosenberg 1987). The prevailing idea of

"Christian charity" was understood to oblige the wealthy to help the poor, but the poor in

turn were expected to work. While the practice of charity in Europe in the late eighteenth

and early nineteenth centuries was marked by "a widespread emphasis on the need to

individualize and moralize the donor-recipient relationship through domiciliary visiting"

(Cunningham 1998:6), a distinction between the destitute and the poor, and among the

impotent poor, the able-bodied poor, and those refusing to work, was evident as early as

1601, with the formal codification of the English Poor Laws (McBriar 1987). A bulletin

of the Charity Organisation Society, an umbrella group of private charities formed in

London in 1869, outlines the moral concerns central to charity debates in the nineteenth

century and still visible in debates about welfare and refugee dependency today:

> The working man does not require to be told that temporary sickness is likely now
>
> and then to visit his household; that times of slackness will occasionally come;
>
> that if he marries early and has a large family, his resources will be taxed to the
>
> uttermost; that if he lives long enough, old age will render him more or less
>
> incapable of toil - all these are the ordinary contingencies of a labourer's life, and
>
> if he is taught that as they arise they will be met by State relief or private charity,

he will assuredly make no effort to meet them himself. A spirit of dependence,

fatal to all progress, will be engendered in him, he will not concern himself with

the causes of his distress, or consider at all how the condition of his class may be

improved; the road to idleness and drunkenness will be made easy to him, and it

involves no prophesying to say that the last state of a population influenced after

such a fashion will certainly be worse than the first.  (Quoted in McBriar 1987:83)

Proponents of harsh deterrent measures assumed that the allure of evil and sloth

posed grave threats to will and character (McBriar 1987:57) . These concerns also

characterized philanthropic endeavors in the United States. Individuals who were thought

to have come upon hard times through moral error or sin–such as becoming pregnant out

of wedlock–were expected to do additional and overtly penitential work in exchange for

receiving charity. For example, in the mid nineteenth century both Massachusetts General

Hospital and the Pennsylvania Hospital reduced the weekly charges–which were often

paid through labour–of individuals initially admitted as venereal patients in cases where

physicians discovered that they had been mistaken in the admission diagnoses

(Rosenberg 1987:29).

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century debates over Poor Law reform led

to the formation of the welfare state in Britain. These debates included many of the

divergent positions evident today in the humanitarian field.  Then, as now, some parties

were strongly opposed to the characterization of the poor as lazy and ungrateful and of

the charity provisions as excessive . Liberals and Socialists argued that a decent wage and

livelihood were a right, but the majority view was articulated in the COS statement

quoted above (Cowen and Shenton 1996; McBriar 1987) . Other characteristics of

modern humanitarianism were also visible over the past two centuries: the increased

moralization and individualization of charity already mentioned; a view that at least some

categories of the poor could be rehabilitated; and "evidence that rivalry between

denominations was increasingly fought out, among other places, in the charitable

arena"(Cunningham 1998:8). From the 1880s on, the terms "deserving" and

"undeserving" were increasingly replaced by references to the "helpable" and

"unhelpable" poor, the latter being the proper object of Poor Law relief. While these

references reflect an Enlightenment discourse of the potential perfectibility of all humans,

they are more directly and explicitly rooted in Victorian Christian emphasis on self-help,

and their use was explicitly moral. Key actors in the welfare debates stressed the presence

or lack of sufficient character and will among the destitute to draw themselves out of

poverty.

In the refugee context today, this moral discourse is usually covert. However, the

emphasis on work and its salubrious or protective effects against the development of "DP

(Displaced Person) apathy" ( Murphy 1995 [1955]) and "dependency syndrome" (von

Buchwald 1994) remains. It is now couched in terms of offering refugees the possibility

to "regain control" (von Buchwald 1994) or to be "consulted" in the planning of their

care and activities (see Allen and Turton 1996 for a critical view). Though the moral

discourse is less obvious today, it is so pervasive in the culture of refugee relief that

critics of this notion from within the refugee regime do not cite specific examples in the

literature but rather seek to disprove the general assumption (Wilson 1992). The explicit

model of refugee dependency is psychological. It is based on Seligman and Maier's

experiments on "learned helplessness", in which dogs in a metal cage receive electric

shocks from which they cannot escape. Eventually the animals no longer try to escape,

even though an exit is opened in the second part of the experiment (see eg Sternberg

1995:258 for one introductory psychology textbook's treatment of this topic). "Refugee

dependency" is thought to occur as the almost inevitable result of receiving rations and

other forms of support from UNHCR and other agencies in refugee camps or settlements.

Von Buchwald, writing on behalf of the Association of Red Cross and Red Crescent

Societies, cites Seligman's own views of the relevance of learned helplessness:

> uncontrollable and unforeseeable trauma seems to lead to a style of attribution of
>
> learned helplessness. This implies a cognitive, emotional and motivational
>
> disposition which favours the appearance of a passive reaction rather than
>
> initiative or a search for a solution to stress and danger. Learned helplessness,
>
> once established, can become a constant personality characteristic. (Seligman
>
> 1975:13, quoted in von Buchwald 1994:233)

However, von Buchwald is not referring to the repeated traumas which refugees may

have experienced in the course of their flight, but rather stresses that

> refugees who are beneficiaries of assistance programs are often "over-
>
> institutionalized" and deprived of personal control over their circumstances. ...
>
> Because of the lack of activities to fill their daytime hours, they may begin to lose
>
> self-confidence, and this eventually gives way to numbness and apathy. The
>
> refugees may begin to feel that there is nothing they can do to make a difference
>
> in their lives (von Buchwald 1994:232-3).

Thus, observations of animal behaviour following physical injury are translated into evidence that refugees develop psychological helplessness. The apparent passivity of encamped refugees is interpreted as lack of initiative caused by the "trauma" of being given too many goods and too little work. Individual refugee psychobiology is the level of causation and of analysis. A psychobiological mechanism is implied, in place of the more expressly moral concerns of philanthropists of the past century, but the same moral concerns are implicit in this modern model as well.

### Charity, patronage, and pity

Harrell-Bond et al (1992) and Wilson (1992) address the notion of charity, which is central to the humanitarian dimension of the global language game of refugee relief. Harrell-Bond and colleagues refer to traditional anthropological notions of "gift", namely,

the creation of a particular relationship of debt and reciprocity between the giver and the recipient. They argue that understanding humanitarian aid in terms of gift exchange would lead to a better understanding of the dynamics of the refugee system. In particular, the relationships among refugees and various levels of donors would be recognized as having attendant role expectations, including the expectation by donors of gratitude, compliance, and a certain degree of obsequiousness from recipients. Such a recognition might reframe both the dependency discourse, and condemnations of "demanding" or "dishonest" behaviour by refugees. However, gift theories stress that a debt is created when a gift is not reciprocated; gift exchange implies cycles of reciprocity (Mauss 1967[1906]). Reciprocity is impossible in the refugee relief system. The only "gift" that the refugee can offer in exchange for humanitarian aid is the expression of gratitude and acknowledgment of indebtedness. This suggests that gift exchange may not be a useful framework for understanding the dynamics of the refugee relief system beyond drawing attention to the fact that there are culturally determined behaviours expected from the recipients of gifts in any society[8]. "Charity" may be a more useful explanatory construct. Charity is understood here as a form of redistribution analogous to clientage but set in motion by personal pity and altruism rather than by obligations perceived as structural.

LeMarchand (1968) and Foster (1967) stress that clientage is not primarily an interpersonal relationship, or in LeMarchand's terms a "lop-sided friendship". Rather, it represents the enactments of recognized structural differences and culturally defined

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[8] Margaret Lock explores this issue with respect to organ transplant (pers. comm.)

obligations by individuals from groups with differential access to resources. The models

of Christian charity in Late Antique and Medieval periods emphasized almsgiving as

obedience to the law of God and did not imply criticism of the poor (Kozlowski 1998).

This view of charity as a duty of the rich to secure the right of the poor to sustenance

remains the formal position of Muslim scholars today, although the practice of charity in

Islamic societies is often experienced more ambivalently and more hierarchically (ibid).

By the late nineteenth century in England, this charitable form of patronage was not seen

as a structural obligation on the wealthy, but rather as a gesture of generosity and

kindness on the part of the donor. This vision of charity remains prevalent today.

An important component of the modern practice of charity is the emotion of pity

and the mutual recognition of inequality that this emotion marks. The discourse of pity

and charity invokes dyadic emotional ties, erasing the visibility of the structural

inequality which makes these discourses possible. However, the practice of pity is not a

private, interpersonal transaction. The long tradition of "Christian charity", of which

humanitarianism is an important modern version, developed in a stratified society. Pity

does not erase power differences, but reinforces them, by providing emotional and moral

valuation of patron-client relationships. In Ethiopia, open appeals to pity were almost

never made by even the poorest Somali refugees or returnees with whom I interacted.

Destitute Amharic returnees and beggars frequently made such appeals, which were

almost always accompanied by physical gestures of subordination such as bowing the

head and making whimpering noises. Amharic society is much more stratified and

hierarchical than Somali society (Levine 1974 ; Lewis 1961). The evocation of pity by

Amharic beggars and refugees was an attempt to obtain assistance precisely through

offering recognition, and reinforcement, of the stratification of Amharic society. The

appeals to pity and expressions of pity by Western donors, individual and corporate, do

the same thing on a global scale, but without the acknowledgment that this global society

is structurally, and not simply accidentally and temporarily, stratified.


## Structural inequality and theories of development

In addition to the perspective of the gift, the dependency theory sense of

"dependency" could shed light on both the behaviours and relationships at issue, and the

ways in which the rhetoric of refugee dependency is used[9]. The dependency theorists of

the 1970s, such as Gunder Frank (1988), argued that the requirements of capitalism led to

the inevitable and unequal relationship between the centre or core countries of Europe

and later the United States, and the peripheral countries of the colonies. While totalizing

models of "dependency" have been rejected by most theorists, including dependency

theorists (Leys 1996; Roseberry 1988), dependency theory nevertheless brings to the fore

a historical and economic relationship which liberal theories systematically ignore. The

invisibility of any structural economic relations between donor ("centre") and recipient

("periphery") countries in refugee discourse in general and the rhetoric of refugee

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9 I thank Linda Whiteford for pointing out the potential relevance of André Gunder
Frank's work to the discussion of refugee relief.

dependency in particular is striking. The absence of any economic analysis in

international agency rhetoric stems in part from the origins of the modern refugee regime,

which lie in state politics on the one hand, and theories of individual human rights on the

other. This history and the position of the HCR in the UN system as *not* a development

agency (Stein 1991) help to explain the reluctance of official spokespeople to accept

openly the development work which, in fact, constitutes the majority of its efforts in

countries such as Ethiopia.

The absence of any structural economic analysis, despite the existence of

documents stressing community participation and the empowerment of women ( UNHCR

1990, 1991), also reflects the dominant development paradigm within which much

refugee relief discourse remains situated, namely, modernization theory and its neo-

liberal avatars. Dependency theory emphasizes the logic and effects, at systemic levels, of

a particular mode of production. Modernization theories concur that the "conditions for

take-off" of an economy are largely systemic: rates of investment, transportation

networks, etc. ( Rostow 1971[1960]). However, modernization theories and programmes

also emphasize the need to foster individual entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviour to

replace the collectivist and kin-based cultures which are seen as major obstacles to

economic transformation and subsequent growth (Huntington 1968; Rostow 1971). The

macro-economic and infrastructural changes which early modernization theorists

promoted were aligned with models of "traditional" and "modern" societies. These

models referred explicitly to Talcott Parsons' reading of Weber's distinction between

"ascription" and "achievement", and "affectivity" versus "neutrality", as the basis of social organization (Leys 1996:9-10, 65ff). The ideal of human nature explicit in modernization theory and implicit in refugee dependency rhetoric is that of "Homo oeconomicus", a hard-working individual driven by internally generated needs and wants, who is independent of social context or influence (Douglas and Ney 1998). The focus on individual psychopathology in the discourse of war trauma and in the rhetoric of refugee dependency contributes to the invisibility both of structural economic and political relations, and of the interests of donors, experts, and other helpers (Bracken and Petty 1998).

### Refugee dependency?

While it is acknowledged that refugees often have little choice but to accept both basic survival supplies and the extreme control on mobility and enterprise characteristic of many refugee settings in poor countries, "dependency" is nevertheless stated to occur often, to be situated in the refugee, and to be a bad thing. Many social scientists have challenged this view. Kibreab (1993) states that refugee dependency has never conclusively been shown to occur in African refugee settings (see also Wilson 1992). Harrell-Bond (1986) documented how refugee relief was provided–in her words, imposed–in southern Sudan, leading to a structured relationship in which refugees were required to accept what was given. Nevertheless they sought to avoid this "dependency", primarily by avoiding camps or settlements whenever possible. In studies of self-settled

versus scheme-settled Angolan refugees, Hansen (1990) acknowledges that

"psychological dependency" did occur in scheme-settled populations. He felt this

reflected an accurate assessment of the real power situation faced by refugees.

In her study of Burundian Hutu refugees in Tanzania, Malkki (1995) found two

radically different modes of being a refugee. In the first, the label "refugee" and the fact

of being together in a camp were critical to a population's efforts, through mythico-

historical narratives, to define itself and to bring coherence as well as the possibility of

collective restitution to the experience of attempted genocide. In the second,

characterizing the "town dwellers", the label "refugee" was actively avoided in favour of

more diffuse, cosmopolitan identities, in an effort to bring closure to the past and to

facilitate the possibility of a better life in the future. The first, encamped community may

be described as "dependent" in the sense that the camp and its structures and practices of

control were critical to the mobilization and maintenance of a collective identity and

collective project. This dependency, however, was very different in its characteristics and

its possible effects from the individual psychopathology of "refugee dependency

syndrome". The outcomes of "refugee dependency" as discussed above would seem to be

more likely to fall into two groups: 1) despondent helplessness, isolation, and lack of

initiative, often leading to depression (von Buchwald 1994) or 2) organized demands for

continuing support from UN or other agencies. Somali refugee experiences and rhetorics

also shed new light on the discourses and practices of pity, charity and refugee

dependency.

**Those who have nothing except Allah**

I spent several months working in and around one village, Hurso, about 25 km northwest of Dire Dawa. Hurso is home to about five thousand[10] people - former fruit farmers and agropastoralists of the Gurgura clan, intermingled with and surrounded by Gurgura and 'Issa clan pastoralists and Oromo farmers. The village population fled almost in its entirety during the 1978 Ethiopian-Somali Ogaden War and the subsequent confiscation of extensive orchards and farmlands by the Derg for a military base. Some families were offered compensatory lands at Sodere, hundreds of kilometres away, but the majority refused. A few individuals stayed in the area, living in the acacia scrub forest or staying with pastoralist kin, returning to their lands and facing repeated beatings until, according to the villagers, the army realized these individuals were mad and harmless. A few families were allowed to stay, to service the military base and the train that stops in the village. These people faced very strict controls on travel, visiting, and other activities during the period 1979-1991. The majority of the displaced population fled to Djibouti,

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10 The 1997 census calculated the population of Hurso town itself at 2,226 (FDRE 1998:15), with 510 households averaging 4 residents each. I based my calculation on a count of housing units, multiplied by 6, and also including local informants' estimates of the population of surrounding hamlets. The average number of residents per household in the Somali Region as a whole was 6.6; in Shinile Zone, where Hurso is located, the average was 6.5 (FDRE 1998:24). I did not conduct a complete formal census. I was unable to locate detailed descriptions of how the Ethiopian census was conducted. After working in Hurso for several months, I still found it extremely difficult to determine how many people "usually lived" in a given household. My estimate is certainly approximate, and likely reflects, in part, a desire on the part of Gurgura informants to maximize the reported size of their community. The census count, though more precise, must also be considered approximate.

where they stayed in UNHCR camps and, increasingly, in Djiboutiville itself, until 1988

or 1991-95[11]. The journey to Djibouti took between five and ten days on foot, traveling

by night to avoid bombing raids by the Ethiopian airforce. Refugees made their way with

the assistance of Gurgura and 'Issa clan pastoralists in the area, who shared food and

lodging and indicated the way to Djibouti for those travelers with no history of

transhumance, trading or smuggling on which to draw for knowledge of the terrain.

Villagers say that they were at risk from the Ethiopian military and from natural hazards,

but not from the pastoralists residing in the area. At a time of war between Somalia and

Ethiopia, interclan rivalries, which in other circumstances might lead 'Issa pastoralists,

say, to prey on traders from another clan or lineage, were suspended in favour of the

higher level solidarity which the flexibility of the Somali segmentary lineage system

allows (see Lewis 1961). Although rape of refugee women is very common and has

become an increasing international concern (Callamard 1999; Hyndman 1997; WHO

1996), it was not spontaneously mentioned by my informants. When I asked directly,

both men and women indicated that it did occur, and one woman in particular was named

by several respondents as having been raped. Rape by non-Somali officials or soldiers

was said to be a problem in Djibouti, and not along the way. How much of a role is

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11 The first attempts at repatriating Ethiopians from Djibouti occurred in 1986.
Significant pressure was exerted by the Djibouti government on camp residents following
the entente negotiated by Mengistu and Barre in 1988. However, few refugees believed
that conditions in Ethiopia were safe simply because the governments of Ethiopia and
Somalia had agreed to a formal peace. Ethiopians did not begin to leave Djibouti en
masse until the fall of the Derg in 1991.

played by Somali ethnic solidarity in these assertions - downplaying the danger to women

when traveling through Somali occupied lands - is uncertain. However, women

frequently travel alone over great distances in this region.

With the fall of the Derg in 1991 came promises of the return of the farmlands,

and most of the refugees returned. In 1999 the population is still waiting, negotiating,

and trying to survive. Villagers identify the land around Hurso as "Ahmed's garden",

"Amina's garden", and so on, and express their impotent anger at watching the military

"eat their lands", selling crops from expropriated orchards while allowing other orchards

to become unproductive through neglect. This, then, is a community which has been

"repatriated" and "reintegrated", for whom, in the eyes of the refugee relief system, the

identity of "refugee" has been extinguished. In the eyes of the community itself, however,

the war is not yet over.

In my early contacts with this community, individuals would often refer to

themselves, collectively, as *qaxooti*. Responses to my asking respondents to explain what

*qaxooti* means included:

> the people who leave their home, and those who [lose] their property. Their
>
> homes are burned or [destroyed]. Those who have nothing else except Allah.

> Hurso was a big village, with many, many kinds of fruit - lemons, oranges,
>
> papayas, mangos...We have a proverb: "Hurso, the Rome of the Gurgura [clan]".

Today the people are returnees and refugees; women sell firewood, the life of the children is so hard... *Qaxooti* means this kind of people.

*Qaxooti* are a forced people. There was war, a bad situation was forced on them; they left their home and their property to save only their life.

According to my informants, not all wars produce refugees. Former conflicts between clans, such as those celebrated in Gurgura songs recounting wars between the Gurgura and 'Issa clans, are not considered to have produced *qaxooti*. In small civil wars, said the elders, you might lose your animals, then after a few months you might take another group's animals, or the elders may sit down and negotiate a peace and restitution. The wars between countries, or those in Mogadishu and Hargeisa, are different. They are city wars, or wars over land instead of animals. "War over land is hard", I was told; "if you have no land, where will you graze your animals?"

Poverty, powerlessness, and forced flight are central to the experience of *qaxooti*, and in this community, poverty is the dominant aspect most of the time. However, *qaxooti* was distinguished from two other situations characterized by poverty: '*aid*, or destitution, and '*abaar*, or drought. *Qaxooti* is also explicitly distinguished from the situation in which a person flees before the mouth of a gun, and becomes a "liberation fighter". The liberation fighter has transformed his or her imposed powerlessness into power.

*'Abaar,* like *qaxooti,* implies forced migration, poverty, and an expectation of

government or agency assistance from outside the clan or local society, but it is not

considered the consequence of war and is expected to resolve in one or two years, at

which point agriculture or animal husbandry can resume[12]. The expectation of short-term

government assistance is relatively new, but is now a taken-for-granted component of the

semantic network around "drought".

Poverty, say these elders, can happen to anyone in any society. In the case of

Gurgura Somali, "We have a culture. If someone loses his animals, he can go with his

relatives to other relatives and get new animals, one by one." Relatives in the paternal

line are expected to assist unexpectedly impoverished kinsmen to restock their herds. On

the other hand, *qaxooti* is not about simple poverty: sudden forced flight and the

destruction of the social safety net, often in its entirety, make it impossible to resolve the

crisis internally to the community. As one elder put it:

> [*Qaxooti* are] not only poor, but [there was] war, or some people died, or [their]
>
> home [was] destroyed. *Qaxooti* is a sudden situation which makes both the poor
>
> man and the rich man flee.

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12 Local skirmishes over water during times of drought would be assimilated into the
category of drought. Starvation resulting from the influx of large numbers of war-
displaced refugees into fragile environments would be attributed to the war. The
combination of serious drought and full-scale civil war that occurred in the relatively
densely populated south of Somalia in the 1990s was an unprecedented catastrophe.

Poverty, then, is understood to be a condition whose resolution is internal to the society. In these conversations, *qaxooti* was seen to be worse, because the conditions necessary to make resolution possible have been eliminated. However, *'aid* in the strict sense–utter destitution, and not just poverty–was emphatically stated to be worse than *qaxooti* by some elders, perhaps *because* it is internal. It does not traditionally include an expectation of outside assistance as an implicit dimension of the concept. What is new and not yet naturalized in Hurso is a discourse of poverty that attempts to make moral claims on outsiders. Somali base these claims primarily on justice, secondarily on human solidarity and compassion, and only thirdly, angrily, on appeals to pity: "*Qaxooti* is not like a beggar; there is no shame to *qaxooti.*"

Overall, however, the general gloss used in Hurso to explain *qaxooti* to me was not "those who flee before the mouth of a gun", but rather, "those who have nothing except Allah". The Geneva Convention definition would fit the former gloss more closely. This emphasis on emergency–reflected in Western legislation as well as in media reports and mental health programs which focus on the extreme, the sensational, and the horrific–masks the more widespread reality: poverty and chronic insecurity regarding basic needs such as food, without the drama that sells newspapers and relief programs. In the absence of teachers' salaries, clinic supplies, and, most importantly, the material and political conditions of livelihood–land, tools, seeds, livestock, and effective political representation or channels through which to press claims–Hurso residents exist, for all intents and purposes, as *qaxooti* - people who once fled before the mouth of a gun and

now have nothing except Allah. It is in this sense that Hurso residents say that the

families that accepted compensatory lands near Sodere were not *qaxooti*: "They changed

their homeland [and did not lose it]". Now, after being evicted from those lands and

returning "home" to their expropriated holdings in Hurso, these people are as close to

being *qaxooti* as to make no difference. It is also because forced flight is the direct cause

of their poverty that the villagers consider it justified to demand assistance from

outsiders. They are politically and materially this poor because they are *qaxooti*.

Dependency is part of this community's understanding of the refugee experience.

One woman, a tea seller, defined *qaxooti* as follows:

> People who are gathered in one place and are dependent on government and the
>
> UN...
>
> When you don't have a farm, or animals, or money, and when you are resettled
>
> and depend on the United Nations or government, that is *qaxooti*.

These definitions in terms of dependency, as well as the shifting among the terms

*qaxooti*, '*aid*, and simple poverty (*miskin*), are at once statements of fact, and implicit

moral judgments. They are not judgments, however, of the psychological condition or

degree of entrepreneurship of refugees or the poor. Rather, they are judgments of who

should bear collective responsibility for the existence, and hence for the resolution, of a

life which they describe as "the last poverty".

Having said that, it must be added that the *rhetoric* of dependency was also used

by Gurgura. When I asked what they thought of the comment that Somalis are lazy and

just want to sit and eat rations, one elder said:

> There is a tribe that is very interested in getting rations. Ogaadeen [people]
>
> like to be *qaxooti* because they don't have farmlands, they only have
>
> camels. Nomads all want rations. If nomads hear there are rations, they
>
> will go and get rations. Ogaadeen were offered resettlement. They didn't
>
> take it. We have returned here and no one has given us rations or
>
> resettlement and we are surviving. We believe in work and Allah only.

This statement was delivered in a rhetorical style that was different from the

general tone of our interview. It was a praise-song for the sedentarized Gurgura. More

importantly, it was a political salvo in an ongoing struggle for power and representation

among Somali clans in Ethiopia. The Gurgura elder's statement, even though intended to

be disparaging of another clan and mode of subsistence, nevertheless suggests

pragmatism more than an unenterprising dependency. It is also a sophisticated use of

refugee relief system rhetoric, demonstrating the domestication of this global discourse

into a new tool of local politics.

The semantic and pragmatic networks around the Somali word, *qaxooti*, show the

influence of important aspects of post-World War II Euro-American discourses of

development and refugees. They also draw on indigenous notions of justice, need, and duty. More importantly, the rhetoric of *qaxooti* attempts to articulate a wider base of responsibility for formerly internal problems such as poverty, which are now inextricably linked to both the promises and the failures of development. Attention to these alternative meanings suggests a new reading of "refugee dependency" and of its remedies.

# PART TWO

# REPATRIATION AND DISPOSSESSION

## REPATRIATING: NEWLY ARRIVING RETURNEES

**Repatriation, Legitimacy, and the State**

Ferguson (1994) has argued that development is a deliberately depoliticizing discourse, one of the effects of which is the dramatic expansion of the bureaucratic presence and power of the state. An apolitical development discourse was frequently used in a "reception centre" or holding camp in Dire Dawa for newly arrived returnees (returning Ethiopian refugees) from Djibouti. It was used by representatives of the Ethiopian state, by development agency staff, and by the returnees themselves. However, the respective frames of reference of these various parties are quite different. Both "development" and the meanings of "refugee" and "returnee" are political arenas, the sites of numerous language games with different stakes and affective, moral, and political loadings in different settings. In this chapter, I present returnees' accounts of their experience as refugees. These accounts reveal a range of experiences and trajectories intersecting briefly at the returnee camp. Development discourse is used by many newly arriving returnees from Djibouti in an attempt to secure material resources, both directly and through asserting political and moral legitimacy. The key target of these assertions, however, is not the newly refederated Ethiopian state - seen by returnees as fragile and not really worth depending on, but important not to alienate for fear of punitive consequences - but humanitarian and development agencies. In the conversations and interviews presented in this chapter, governments are only peripherally involved - the

relief agencies are considered the relevant sources of assistance. Agencies are the de facto

state in refugee camps, in both the state's coercive and distributive roles. This is

particularly the case where the state itself is in question, as in the civil wars in both

Somalia and Ethiopia. They appear to remain so in the eyes of returnees. Nevertheless,

one of the larger frames of reference for the language game of development is the

construction of a new Ethiopian state. National and ethnic politics and divergent views of

history are important though muted counterpoints to the dominant discourse of relief,

humanitarianism and development. These subtexts are more clearly visible in other

settings.

The repatriation of refugees plays an important political role in the construction of

a post-Mengistu Ethiopia. This role, however, is primarily played out not in the explicitly

political domain, but rather in the domain of development. Development provides a

partially neutral discursive space where the continuing poverty and social and political

inequality perceived by, in this case, Somali Ethiopians, can be reframed as problems of

national economic development rather than as manifestations of centuries of ethnically

based political oppression and economic exploitation. It is not surprising that the national

government and international development agencies should support ethnically apolitical

models based on collective development or individual human rights. What is more

intriguing is that, in some circumstances but not in others, minority nationalities such as

Somali also support and appeal to this discourse.

The fact of repatriation is seen by the government as a vote of confidence in the

new Ethiopia. The repatriation programme through Dire Dawa, coordinated by the Jijiga

Sub-Office of the UNHCR, repatriated and assisted an official total of 11,682 families

with 39,038 members between September 1994 and November 1995. A further 2,000

Ethiopians were to be repatriated in 1996 (UNHCR Sub-Office Jijiga, 19 December

1995). The returnees concurred that conditions in Ethiopia had improved significantly,

and this point was emphasized in interviews and conversations in the returnee camp itself.

Neither the setting of the holding camp, where the dominant institutions were those of the

state and the UN, nor interviews with me—a white foreigner usually assumed to be

working for an agency—or with friends on my behalf, were conducive to an open and

critical discussion of repatriation or the state. Nevertheless, returnees did frequently

express criticisms, this being one relatively safe way of expressing ambivalence towards

the state. Perhaps more importantly, this setting and the returnees' ability to talk about

repatriation in terms of development allowed returnees to represent themselves as insiders

in the new Ethiopia, with legitimate claims on any benefits that might accrue to citizens.

Discussions with Ethiopian Somalis in other settings were no longer framed solely in the

language of "development" and "humanitarianism" and revealed a much more ambivalent

and pragmatic relationship to the new government and the possibilities it represented.


**The Returnee Camp**

The Dire Dawa "reception centre" is a three to five day holding camp in a soccer

field belonging to the Djibouti-Addis Ababa Railway. On most Monday and Thursday

nights a train arrives in Dire Dawa between 9 pm and 2 am, carrying about a thousand

refugees who had registered for repatriation in Djibouti. After a twelve to fourteen hour

train ride across the semi-desert, returnees are met by representatives of UNHCR, the

World Food Programme (WFP), and the Ethiopian Administration for Refugee and

Returnee Affairs (ARRA)- the Ethiopian implementing partner of UNHCR. The returnees

make their own noisy, chaotic, and fearful way to the parking lot where large trucks,

contracted by UNHCR, wait to take them to the stadium. At the train station and over the

following days at the stadium, complaints about thieves on the train and at the station are

frequently heard, and indeed I saw number of scuffles on the three nights that I went to

observe the arrival of returnees.

On arrival at the stadium, families and groups of returnees set up makeshift tents

with the blue UNHCR tarps they had received in Djibouti along with US$30 as part of

the repatriation package. A few hundred people also lay out mats  in the large tent hall

that had been set up by the agencies and left standing semi-permanently. Local vendors

sell tea, biscuits, and snacks, and families cook what they had brought with them or could

buy in Dire Dawa, over kerosene stoves or fires fuelled by wood purchased from other

vendors. These domestic activities are often interrupted by thunderstorms, as the most

intensive repatriation effort was undertaken during the rainy summer months.

The next morning and for the following days vendors and family groups continue

their business, but the dominant organizing institution is no longer the returnees'

domestic units, but the distribution of repatriation packages by representatives of

UNHCR, WFP, and ARRA.

First, one or two aid workers begin registering returnees, checking their names

and photos on the Djibouti refugee cards against the list of returnees which had been

faxed from Djibouti.

Next, heads of households go to collect their ration–50 kilograms of wheat and ten of lentils per person registered on that household's card–and to collect an additional US$5 cash payment intended to defray the cost of transportation to the final destination. The food distribution is checked against the lists of returnees and against the inventory in the storage sheds, and was carried out by local young men hired for the job. This distribution is noisy and chaotic, with frequent complaints that the agencies are holding back goods and occasional fights as individuals are accused of theft. Returnees had been promised nine months' rations. The agencies decided to give three months' worth in Dire Dawa, and the remainder later at the destination sites, in order to encourage people to leave the city. Many returnees are furious, as the grain and lentils are clearly insufficient for nine months, and there is no oil or sugar. Local merchants who purchase rations from many returnees for subsequent resale on the open market wait and negotiate openly in the immediate vicinity of the food distribution site.

My attempts to trace the market in rations were largely unsuccessful. I was able to determine local prices for the wheat (75-85 birr[1] per sack, and a resale price about 15-20% higher), but rumours began to circulate that I was a spy. Dire Dawa was an important centre for contraband electronic goods throughout the Mengistu years and potential new vendors had faced significant barriers to entry into the informal market since that time. Furthermore, although official World Food Programme and UNHCR

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[1]

In 1995 the exchange rate was 6-7 birr per US dollar, and approximately 4 birr per Canadian dollar. The cash advances were calculated in US dollars and disbursed in birr.

policy in 1995 was to allow or even encourage refugees to sell their monotonous rations

in order to purchase other essentials, this had not been the case even a year or two earlier.

In fact, a senior WFP official who visited Ethiopia from Rome during the time I was in

Ethiopia was reported by another frustrated aid worker to have complained about

refugees' selling rations, saying that this proved that they didn't really need them.

Refugees and returnees were often charged by local and foreign aid workers with being

suspicious. This was borne out by some reactions to my attempts to learn about this

supposedly legitimate market in rations. However, in view of frequent and radical

changes in official and unofficial policies, this "suspiciousness" looks more like simple

prudence.

The distribution of cash to cover transport costs to the final destination of the

returnees occurrs on the terrace in front of the stadium cafeteria. Two officials sit at a

table under the large acacia tree, while returnees line up according to destination, under

the supervision of guards armed with clubs or guns. At the table, the name is checked

again, and then one of the officials takes the hand of the returnee to make a fingerprint

and stamp this signature next to the name, indicating receipt of the cash. Eye contact is

almost never made. When I asked why the individuals could not do the stamping

themselves, the officials explained that the returnees couldn't read, the lines on the paper

were narrow, and time was short. Sometimes cash or food would run out because of

problems elsewhere in the food aid pipeline, and people would have to wait. Explanations

circulate by rumour.

After receiving their package, returnees arrange their own transport to their

destination, with rumour or local middlemen supplying information about renting trucks

or other vehicles. A small number of families remains after each distribution; they claim

to have lost their cards, or to have been omitted from one or another list. There is no

formal complaint mechanism - individual appeals to whoever looked official (or white)

are the norm, and individual reconsideration and resolution occur on an ad hoc basis.

Some individuals stay because they had spent the cash on food or other goods and could

not afford transport to their destination. Individual appeals from these people also

continue.


**Returnee Accounts, Part 1**

How did returnees participate in this language game where their needs were

allegedly primary but the structure was determined by donors? Here is an excerpt from

one interview, the tone and content of which are illustrative of the dozens of group

discussions and individual interviews held with different train loads of returnees over the

summer of 1995. The discussion is quite candid, but the men do not allow it to stray

beyond a few key points which they wish to emphasize – and neither does my Somali

interpreter, Rosa.

The following are excerpts from notes I took during the discussion held primarily

between Rosa and a small group of returnees. Where I indicate "the men" as speakers,

one or more individuals were speaking on behalf of the group as opposed to clearly on

their own behalf. I have named the three key speakers Ahmed, Jama, and Mukhtar.

Ahmed: They are giving me only 30 birr and a bag of wheat.

Rosa: That's enough

Ahmed: I want more. Can she help me? *(gesturing at me)*

Rosa: I don't think so.

Ahmed: How can I start a living? Before, I had a shop [outside Dire Dawa], but it was destroyed under Mengistu. How can I start without money? I need money to start my living.

Rosa: Thirty birr and a bag of wheat. The NGOs decided that will be enough. Later you'll get oil. With that you should start.

Ahmed: No, no! I need help.

Rosa: All those people we see are given 30 birr and a bag of wheat. You can start a farm.

Ahmed: To be a farmer you need instruments.

Rosa: The government is not going to give you instruments. You can sell or you can keep these 30 birr and the bag of wheat, but with that you have to start a living.

Jama: First they said they'll give rations for nine months, and now they're giving us nothing. Why did they lie?

Rosa: Thirty birr and a bag of wheat - you have to start with that.

Jama: What do we eat?

Rosa: Eat the trees! *(They all laugh)*

Later in the conversation:

> Men: We're telling HCR[2] to give us instruments to start farming, but while
> the crop is growing we need to eat.

At this point I enter the discussion more directly and confront the men in order to try to
"get past" the repeated requests for assistance.

> Christina: Why should HCR and the government give you anything?
>
> Men: It's not the government, but the NGOs stand for human rights. It's
> very human. When we face a drought or problems, they can help us.
>
> Ahmed: I had a shop. It was destroyed, now I need help from HCR.
>
> Mukhtar: Don't speak only for yourself, speak for others in your situation
> as well.
>
> Christina: If you'd heard you'd get 150 kilograms of wheat and five litres
> of oil, would you have come back?

(Now there are five men.)

> Men: No! *(they laugh and shake their heads)*

Later:

> Jama: I was a farmer. For three years I didn't farm, I was a refugee but you
> can still see the scars [from farming]. *(shows calluses and scratches on
> forearms)*.
>
> Men: No one wants to be a refugee. Everyone wants to work, but there

---

[2] "HCR" is UNHCR.

was drought and war so we had to leave. Now we are back in our country,

the soil is good, there is no war....now if NGOs and UNHCR can give us a

hand - seeds, instruments, oxen, water - and if they give us a ration to wait

while the crop is growing...

Mukhtar: The people will be divided into two: those who work, and those

who just want to lie down and eat, but those you see [here] I don't think

will just lie down. If you give us a hand we'll work and won't be refugees

again.

Christina: Do you think most people here are like this?

Ahmed or Mukhtar: Most are like me. We want to work, we are refugees.

Christina: Who should be responsible for helping? themselves, family,

government, NGOs, the UN?

Men: What we think, is UNHCR, because they're standing for human

[rights]. They're working with the government, but its HCR and NGOs.

Christina: Where do you think HCR gets money?

Men: They [HCR] have a lot of things, [including] machines. Even if

there's a drought they don't suffer and can get something from the earth.

Christina: So you think HCR and NGOs have a lot of money.

Men: You see, when a person can help himself, then he can help others. So

HCR has helped themselves[3], and now they can help others.

---

3

The implication is that HCR and NGOs are economically comfortable and therefore should
share their wealth.

> Christina: Who's responsible for there being refugees?
>
> Men: Because of war; and also because we are a very poor country, so if you can give us a hand...

At this point I asked the men again to identify who was responsible for causing their flight and asked Rosa to discuss the idea that this party should also be responsible for helping refugees. Rosa replied, "It's politics, they don't want to talk about politics", and she refused to continue this line of discussion.

> Jama: We need your help. We are talking a lot, but we need your help.
>
> Christina: Do you think you need more help than people who stayed?
>
> Men: We've had big problems, and that's why we *had* to leave. We need help.
>
> Christina: In other refugee situations, local people get angry because they think refugees are getting special treatment. What do you think about this?
>
> Men: We don't know anything about this.
>
> Christina: Any message for HCR?
>
> Men: We need help.

The conversation illustrates the men's familiarity with the rhetoric of UNHCR and other relief agencies . It likewise illustrates the extent to which "spontaneous" initial conversations between a white researcher and Ethiopian Somali returnees are determined

by the roles–"donor" and "beneficiary"[4]–and expectations around which this language

game is organized. This highly structured form of interaction tended to be the norm in

group conversations in settings officially dedicated to refugee relief. One on one

interviews in these settings showed more variation, as did both individual and group

discussions and formal interviews in other settings.

Nevertheless, the variety of histories and experiences within this population of

returnees is visible even in this highly rhetorical conversation, as are returnees' attempts

to manoeuvre within this framework to present and protect their particular interests. Such

differences of experience and interests also emerged in people's responses to questions

posed in a short survey on reasons for flight, return, and means of subsistence in Djibouti.

**Flight and Return**

In addition to several dozen informal interviews and about 35 semi-structured

interviews, I conducted a more formal survey, asking every third person in line for the

UNHCR/ARRA cash payment to complete a brief verbal questionnaire[5]. The findings

---

4

The first draft of an introduction and invitation to participate at the beginning of a longer
semi-structured interview guide, attached in Appendix 1, highlights this even more clearly.
In the introduction (which I decided, on reflection, not to use), I present myself as a
researcher affiliated with McGill and Addis Ababa Universities and state that I am not
working for any government or aid agencies, but that I want to learn about people's
experiences in Djibouti so that programmes can be improved if necessary. I was saying, then,
that in the absence of an offer to help I had no right to talk to them, and that what they had
to say was only of value or interest because it might improve assistance programmes.

5

These short interviews were conducted primarily by two local research assistants. I was
present at some of them, on several separate dates. We interviewed every third person in

discussed below cannot be said to be representative of the total universe of 11,682

repatriated households. However, the range of responses is consistent with evidence I

obtained from other sources (key informants in the Somali community and among aid

agencies, as well as written records at ARRA and the municipal government). I discuss

some descriptive findings based on 119 completed interviews with cardholders, assumed

by the UNHCR and ARRA to be the heads of households.

In addition to demographic information including ethnicity and the age

distribution of people accompanying the cardholder, we asked four open-ended questions:

when did you go to Djibouti? Why did you go to Djibouti? How did you make a living there? Why are you returning to Ethiopia now?

The respondent characteristics and responses are

| Table 1: Repatriation Survey: Demographics, Heads of household (N=119): | | |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | Female | 38% |
| | Male | 62% |
| Ethnicity | Somali | 49.6% |
| | Amhara | 21% |
| | Oromo | 19.3% |
| | Gurage | 3.4% |
| | Afar | 1.6% |
| | Harari | 1.6% |
| | Other | 3.4% |
| Age | Mean female: | 32.5 years |
| | Mean male: | 30.5 years |
| | Range | 12-75 years |
| | 16 and under: | 6% (N=7) |
| Unaccompanied | Female: | 18% |
| | Male: | 61% |

order to decrease the likelihood of one interview affecting the next, but it must be said that the hustle and tension of even this relatively orderly part of this stage of repatriation precluded a truly systematic - let alone formally random - sample and survey. This methodologic point raises questions about both the validity and reliability of survey research, which relies on rigorous statistical assumptions that are difficult to meet in this type of field setting. Even cluster sampling (Vaughan and Morrow 1989) is not possible in the transient setting of the reception centre, although for the longer interviews we attempted to find respondents from among various family groups camped out in the soccer field.

summarized in Tables 1 and 2[6].

| Table 2: Repatriation Survey: Responses | |
|---|---|
| Q1: *When did you go to Djibouti?* | |
| Range: | 2 weeks - 20 years |
| Less than 1 year: | 31% |
| 1-4 years: | 60% |
| More than 8 years: | 27% |
| Q2: *Why did you go to Djibouti?* | |
| War, famine, drought, persecution, "to be a refugee" | 29% |
| Personal reasons (marriage, medical care, family reunification etc) | 13% |
| Better job | 3% |
| Family death or divorce | 7% |
| To find work | 40% |
| Q3: *How did you make a living?* | |
| Waiters, masonry, teaching, mechanics, etc | 17% |
| Domestic servants | 17% |
| Informal (porters, sorting garbage, begging and selling bread, selling plastic bags | 33% |
| Begging | 16% |
| Supported by relatives | 12% |
| Other | 5% |
| Q4: *Why are you returning to Ethiopia now?* *(More than one response possible)* | |
| Wanted to come home | 32% |
| Told to go back | 26% |
| Promised help to come back | 22% |
| Life hard in Djibouti | 17.6% |
| Peace and rain in Ethiopia | 16% |
| Fear of arrest in Djibouti | 11% |
| To get the repatriation package | 11% |
| Heat unbearable in Djibouti | 5% |

These responses reveal not the operation of a nefarious "pull factor" dragging people

across borders to sit in refugee camps and demand rations ( for a critical discussion, see

Kibreab 1987:269ff), but a pragmatic readiness to exploit any available source of

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[6] Respondents answered in their own words. I subsequently categorized their answers.

livelihood. Indeed, these and other findings support Cassanelli's drought response model

(1982). According to this model, a key characteristic of Somali responses to adversity is

to maintain a range of options. Having no economic options– dependency– is strongly

devalued, particularly when it involves social or political subordination.

Less than a third of respondents explicitly offered war, famine or persecution as

the reason for having left Ethiopia. Most of these interviewees would thus be considered

"economic migrants", based on this cursory survey. However, only about 15% could be

thought to have "chosen" to go, that is, to have had the choice of staying and surviving.

There seemed to be a clear distinction between those who wanted to improve their socio-

economic status, and those who felt that they could not survive in Ethiopia, and had heard

that life was possible in Djibouti. This is reflected in the answers to the question, "How

did you make a living in Djibouti?" A third of the sample found regular jobs - half as

domestic servants[7], and half as mechanics, waiters, teachers, masons, and other skilled

jobs. Two thirds survived on the margins of the productive economy, relied on relatives,

or survived by begging. Only 11% claimed that repatriation assistance was their reason

for returning to Ethiopia.

Five out of the 119 said that they had gone to Djibouti to get ration cards and the

repatriation package. Four of these individuals were unaccompanied men: a merchant and

---

[7]

 In the longer questionnaires, young girls who had worked as servants said that they were
often paid only part of the agreed salary, and sometimes nothing at all. The proportion of
refugees who secured "regular jobs" – with the implication of some stability of income –
is therefore probably less than the one third suggested in the survey.

a student who said they went to "observe the repatriation"[8], a former smuggler who had

been robbed and decided to go to Djibouti to collect the rations as a way to rebuild his

capital base, and one who did not offer further reasons. The one woman was a pastoralist,

a mother of four, whose husband had recently died. Acquaintances in Dire Dawa told me

that they could recognize individuals from the city among the returnees, confirming the

suspicions of UNHCR employees that some individuals were doing the repatriation

circuit. One woman I knew admitted to having given some money to her milk supplier so

that the latter could go to Djibouti to get the rations. She defended her action, which

seemed to contradict earlier disparaging remarks she had made about some "so-called

refugees", by explaining that this milk seller was a poor widow with many children to

support and no local clan contacts. The small repatriation package was therefore an

acceptable last resort for supplementing her income. However, such cases would seem to

be only a very small minority of the tens of thousands of returnees.

Only two respondents identified themselves as "UNHCR refugees". This does not

mean that hardly anyone was ever in refugee camps in Djibouti – tens of thousands

were. Since the mid-1980s, however, Ethiopian refugees in Djibouti had actively avoided

these camps, which were seen as putting major limitations on people's economic and

social possibilities. All of my informants in Dire Dawa independently said that refugees

will first go to family or clan members. If they did not have specific names or addresses

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8

I asked other Somalis to interpret what "observing the repatriation" might mean. They said
it probably meant they were scouting out the prospects of doing the repatriation circuit:
traveling back and forth to Djibouti to collect the rations for subsequent resale.

of relatives in a given town, they would inquire in the markets where such and such a name or subclan could be found. (Indeed, the initiative does not necessarily come from the refugee. During one interview that Rosa and I conducted together, Rosa asked the respondent what his clan was. She then suggested that the respondent contact his "family" in Dire Dawa, and told me that one of the wealthier families in the city was of the same subclan as the respondent.) Only as a last resort would most Somalis turn to relief, development, or government agencies. The family with whom I was closest in Dire Dawa had strangers–unknown relatives or members of the wife's or husband's subclan in the Isaaq clan family–dropping in at least every ten to fourteen days, unannounced, looking for a meal or a place to stay for a few days or longer.

**Returnee Accounts, Part 2**

I return now to more returnee accounts, this time from the thirty-five longer semi-structured interviews conducted over the summer of 1995 with a convenience sample of returnees in the holding camp. I present three of these interviews, including the standard questions. I do not imply that these interviews are illustrative of some generic Somali version of "the refugee experience". On the contrary, I quote them because they reveal – even in a narrowly focused interview with a specific interest in official repatriation programmes–the extent to which particular experiences are shaped by the position of individuals and families in a range of social and environmental contexts. In the transient world of the returnee holding camp, fragments of life histories of individuals, families, and communities are glimpsed through the rhetoric of need, obligation, humanitarianism,

and legitimacy.


**Khadija, a 28 year old pregnant woman.**

This Ogaadeeni woman was accompanied by five children and was six months

pregnant at the time of the interview, in July 1995. She had left her home town of

Dagahbur, in the Ogaden, four months prior to the interview and had gone to Djibouti

with her husband and children.

> Christina: Why did you go to Djibouti?
>
> Khadija: The livestock died in a drought - we went to Djibouti to get some
>
> money.
>
> Christina: Why did you leave Ethiopia?
>
> Khadija: In Djibouti, even if you live like a beggar you get something to
>
> eat; here everyone is poor and you get nothing.
>
> Christina: Why Djibouti?
>
> Khadija: In Somalia to get anything I have to work; in Djibouti I don't
>
> have to do anything. I heard that children grow well. People come from
>
> Djibouti and they look rich.
>
> Christina: How did you go to Djibouti?
>
> Khadija: By car. From the Ogaden we went to Hartisheik; from Hartisheik
>
> to the Somali border; from the Somali border to Djibouti. It took five days.
>
> Christina: With whom did you go?

Khadija: With my husband and children.

Christina: What did you do when you first got to Djibouti?

Khadija: I made brooms out of sticks. Then I started to sell vegetables,

then stopped because the government threw away everything we had, then

got back to broom making.

Khadija did not contact relatives or a government or relief agency in Djibouti until

they decided to come back. At that point they met with a government agency, but she

didn't know which. They were helped to return to Ethiopia. Prior to this point, neither

individuals nor any relief agencies had contacted her in Djibouti, but the police did.

Christina: How?

Khadija: They came and bulldozed our shack as soon as we got to

Djibouti. Then we slept by a wall for a few weeks, then we built a small

house by the sea for three months, then the place was burned by the

government because we were told that the land had been bought by Arab

agencies. Then there was an announcement to go register yourself and go

back. They made an announcement telling Ethiopians to leave. Since we

didn't have Djibouti cards we went to the stadium to go home. We were

there for six days. This was decided between the governments.

Christina: How did you make a living in Djibouti?

Khadija: Brooms and vegetables and brooms. My husband was a

shoemaker.

Christina: Were you ever in a refugee camp?

Khadija: No. When the announcement was made we went to the stadium

for 6 days, [for UNHCR] to collect us to go to Shabelle camp for one night

waiting for the train to Dire Dawa. We couldn't stay any longer in

Djibouti.

Christina: How were you treated in the stadium?

Khadija: The first time they gave us anything to eat was in Shabelle camp.

Before that we ate what we had - we were allowed to leave the stadium to

buy food.

Christina: How is it that you are returning at this time?

Khadija: We couldn't live in Djibouti anymore – [because of] the

announcement.

Christina: Is anyone expecting you at your final destination?

Khadija: No. They think we are still in Djibouti.

Christina: What are you intending to do in the next few days?

Khadija: Wait for the ration, then go back to Ogaden.

Christina: What do you think you will do over the next few months?

Khadija: I want to go back to my town and just sit and stay there.

Rosa: Do you want to work?

Khadija: No, I just want to stay put.

Christina: Do you have any animals left?

Khadija: No. If I'd had one sheep or goat I wouldn't have left Ethiopia for

Djibouti.

Christina: What is the best way to use the repatriation package?

Khadija: There (in the Ogaden) there is nothing. We were farmers, but now we will use the rations.

Christina: What do most people do with the repatriation package?

Khadija: I don't know. Some may use it now, some may sell.

Christina: Will you use it now or save it in case of another drought?

Khadija: I will use it now. I have children.

Christina: In your opinion, what is the purpose of the repatriation programme?

Khadija: I don't know, but what they said is everyone should be in his own country.

Christina: What do you think of the repatriation programme?

Khadija: It's good. The weather is very hot [in Djibouti]; we can't even urinate because of the climate. I came here and feel freshness and can urinate.

Christina: What do you think of the people running the repatriation programme?

Khadija: The NGOs help us a lot. They give us money and something to eat, both in Djibouti and here.

Christina: How important is the repatriation programme for making a living?

Khadija: What they give us helps us. With the money we can buy some

cloth or a goat and start again. The food is very important - there is

nothing waiting for us, because of the drought.

Christina: How important is the refugee identification card, for example

for identification, schooling, voting etcetera?

Khadija: I don't know.

Christina: How do you feel about coming back to Ethiopia?

Khadija: Very happy. The weather is the biggest thing. There the heat is

terrible. Even if I suffer a lot I will be happy.


The interview with Khadija raises a number of issues. Her husband is mentioned,

but is most noticeable in his absence. What the interview suggests is that Khadija herself

is now responsible for decision making and for supporting herself and her children.

Another theme is localized droughts and their effects. The rains had failed in certain areas

during this period. Both clan distribution and active fighting among clan and government

militias in the Ogaden made it problematic to move to a nearby area with rains, even

temporarily. Khadija also identified herself as a farmer, but said that it was the loss of

livestock--and not crop failure, for example--that triggered her flight. This indicates the

importance of livestock as insurance, and the precarious position in which she lived prior

to flight since even a relatively minor and localized drought could trigger destitution. The

political context is not mentioned at all. Neither are local networks of support, but the

interview suggests to me that they were scanty. She left with her immediate family only,

and not with a larger group of drought-affected families. In Djibouti, she did not contact

any relatives. Although other clans live in Djiboutiville as well, the vast majority of

Somalis in Djibouti are of the 'Issa clan. Indeed, one respondent who was himself 'Issa

from Ethiopia insisted that it would be impossible for him to be harassed by the

authorities or thrown out of Djibouti; he felt that he was a citizen by virtue of being 'Issa.

When I asked why every refugee did not claim to be 'Issa, I was told this was impossible,

as they would be asked who their fathers were. To the question of whether people made

up genealogies, the answer was that it was extremely rare: "We recognize each other",

explained my non-'Issa friend Djamma. Finally, this woman's reasons for choosing

Djibouti at first seemed capricious, or at least naively optimistic about the good life to be

had in Djibouti: had she gone to Somalia, she would have to work. In Djibouti she

wouldn't have to do anything. People look rich when they come from Djibouti. Her

description of life in Djibouti paints an entirely different picture.

### Osman, a 13 year old boy

Osman was travelling with his father and sister. He had never gone to school and

identified himself as a shoemaker. Osman was born in Hargeisa, the capital of the self-

declared republic of Somaliland, but he grew up in Dagahbur. He had gone to Djibouti

two years prior to the interview. Osman went to Djibouti by train, with about ten relatives

- he mentioned his aunts and grandmother. When they arrived in Djibouti, he did nothing,

but his father became a barber. They did not contact family, government agencies or other

organizations.

Christina: Why did you go to Djibouti?

Osman: Dagahbur became like a desert, so to get some money we went to Djibouti.

Christina: Why did you leave Ethiopia?

Osman: All over Ethiopia it's the same, but in Djibouti you can get something.

Christina: Why Djibouti?

Osman: We didn't know about anywhere else to go. To go to Kenya we need money.

Christina: Did any relief agencies contact you?

Osman: Yes. First, those who took us from where we were sleeping. Then HCR took us from the stadium to Shabelle.

Christina: Did any security or police agencies contact you?

Osman: Yes. The police.

Christina: How?

Osman: We were sleeping by a wall and they came and took us in the "raff" [i.e., sweep].

Christina: Why?

Osman: Because they want to throw out those without papers. They took us to the stadium.

Christina: How did you make a living in Djibouti?

Osman: My father was a barber.

Christina: Did you beg, or steal[9], or shine shoes?

Osman: I cleaned shoes.

Except for two nights at Shabelle camp while registering for repatriation and waiting for

the train, Osman had never been in a refugee camp. At Shabelle they slept in a tent or tarp

given by UNHCR and were given water and bread, but during the five days at the

stadium they weren't given anything.

Christina: How is it that you are returning at this time?

Osman: The Djibouti government and police decided.

His father's sister was expecting them at Dagahbur. Osman said that they would wait a

few days in case they were given something or provided with transport to the Ogaden.

Over the next few months, he planned to try get work for his family, and his family

would farm. With respect to the repatriation package, Osman said that the best thing to do

with the rations was to use them (i.e., to eat them immediately instead of selling them or

saving them as a fall-back ration in the event of future hunger), and that most people used

them in this way.

Christina: In your opinion, what is the purpose of the repatriation

programme?

Osman: Those without papers have to get out of Djibouti.

Christina: What do you think of the repatriation programme?

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9

Petty theft was frequently, and openly, mentioned by returnees–especially adolescents–as
one survival strategy, so I began to ask about it directly. This did not appear to evoke any
discomfort or dissimulation. In general, Somalis were tolerant of direct, even confrontational,
questions and styles in both formal and informal settings.

Osman: It's a good programme, they [the organizations] are OK.

Osman thought that the package was important for making a living, and answered in the

negative when asked if the family had other sources of food or income at this time. He

thought that the ID card was important for school.

Christina: How do you feel about coming back to Ethiopia?

Osman: I am happy to be back. They were trying to "raff" us. Every day

they were beating us, sometimes they'd put us in jail and give no food,

only hot water. So I prefer to come back.

Christina: When you left for Djibouti with the drought, was this the first

time you had moved like this?

Osman: This was the second time.

Christina: When was the first time?

Osman: Four years ago, because of drought.

Christina: How do you feel about moving like this, is it normal, or a

problem?

Osman: It's a big problem. I'm tired of moving.

Christina: Do you think you'll have to move again?

Osman: No, I think it'll be OK.

Osman, like many returnees, spoke of the "raff", a systematic harassment of

foreigners by the Djiboutiville police. The origin of this term apparently dates from the

period prior to the referendum on Djiboutian independence from France, which included

the question of whether residents wanted to unite with the Somali Republic.

Demonstrators and activists from the Somali Republic were expelled from the then

French territory. Many returnees mentioned the "raff":

> The police would come up on the way to work or on the street at night.
>
> Sometimes they'd ask for papers, sometimes [they would recognize us] by our
>
> accents. For one night they made us sleep in the jail and clean the jail, then they
>
> let us go. This happened two times, once when I first got there, then again now. (a
>
> 37 year old married man)

> The police. You can't go to the central place, where they ask for ID cards. [They
>
> recognized us as refugees by our] physical appearance - poor. I was jailed for
>
> three days in my fourth month there, in 1991.        ( a 25 year old single man)

Between the ages of eight or nine and thirteen, Osman had twice traveled long

distances to escape drought and impoverishment. He recounts economic hardship,

beatings, and arrests. He does not glamourize his migrations–"It's a big problem. I'm

tired of moving"–but he is optimistic about the future. Though he says he will wait to be

given something or given transport to the Ogaden, he has a history of actively

contributing to his family's survival. He speaks of governments, police, UNHCR, the

need for papers, the repatriation package, his hopes for the future – school, work. He

does not talk about trauma. His experiences of displacement, violence, homelessness and

poverty are organized around themes of survival and building a future–at the age of

thirteen he identifies himself as a skilled tradesman, a shoemaker–and not primarily

around a refugee identity or psychological distress.

**Bedel, a 40 year old widower**

This final interview addresses the issues of development and politics,

"dependency" and resourcefulness and despair, false registration as a refugee and what

that might mean. It is both an account of Bedel's experience and, at the end, a rhetorical

plea for assistance in the form of development. It also offers an unusual and poignant

perspective on family life and gender roles, putting into question some common

assumptions about these in Somali societies.

Bedel was traveling with his brother and five of his seven children. They were

returning to the town of Babile, which he had chosen as his destination. His wife died in

Djibouti, and he gave up three of his children for adoption by ''Issa Somali in Djibouti.

He does not say so, but his reference to twins and his baby lead me to believe his wife

died in childbirth. One of the three children was subsequently sent back to him because of

"bad behaviour", not further qualified. Bedel is from the Hawiye clan. His occupation in

Ethiopia was farming and pastoralism, but after his wife died in Djibouti he stayed with

the baby and the other children begged. He had attended Koranic school as a child. He

had gone to Djibouti in 1993, two years prior to our conversation. Before going to

Djibouti he had been living in Babile for three years, where he used to gather and sell

wood. He had gone to Babile in 1990 from his drought-stricken home area, as there was a

refugee camp in Babile.

> Christina: Why did you go to Djibouti?
>
> Bedel: Before, I had a farm and cattle. We lost everything because of the
> drought. There was a camp in Babile and they used to give us something
> to eat. After they said there was nothing, so we decided to go to Djibouti.
>
> Christina: Why did you leave Ethiopia?
>
> Bedel: There is no work in Ethiopia, you can't get rice; sometimes I think
> there is a curse on Ethiopia!
>
> Christina: Why Djibouti?
>
> Bedel: You can survive without even trying. To Kenya we can't go without
> a passport. In Somalia there is a war. In Djibouti there is peace and you
> can get something to eat.
>
> Christina: How did you go to Djibouti?
>
> Bedel: From Babile to Dire Dawa, by car; from Dire Dawa to Dawanleh (*a
> town on the Ethiopia-Djibouti border*); then on foot to Holhol. In order not
> to be seen in Dikhil (*the refugee camp)* we went by foot to Holhol at night,
> so as not to be sent back because we had no papers; then by train to
> Djibouti.
>
> Christina: With whom did you go?
>
> Bedel: Twelve families, all from the camp at Babile.

When he first got to Djibouti, Bedel worked in construction. He did not contact any

relatives but did contact government agencies - he doesn't know which.

Christina: Why [did you contact them]?

Bedel: I said, "We need your help. Give us shelter".

Christina: With what result?

Bedel: [They said,] "We don't have a place for the real refugees who are in

the camp, so go away". When we had stayed for a few months we went to

Jabod prison and asked them to give us rice and they told us to go away.

Christina: Did you contact any other agencies or organizations?

Bedel: Yes. First, UNHCR, with the same result. Then Saudi agencies, [to

which] I went for help with the funeral when my wife died. They said,

"We have nothing to give you".

Christina: Did anyone contact you?

Bedel: Yes. Those who adopted my children. 'Issa families. I have three

girls. They asked me to give all three but I couldn't.

Christina: Why did they want them?

Bedel: I don't know. If they'd asked for the boys I'd have given them.

Christina: Did any relief agencies contact you?

Bedel: No.

Christina: Did any security or police agencies contact you?

Bedel: No. When I heard the announcement that people had to leave I

started to pack my things to go to the stadium. The next day I saw that

people who hadn't gone had their houses bulldozed.

Christina: How did you make a living in Djibouti?

Bedel: Before my wife died I tried to work in construction. After she died

I couldn't do anything; I can't leave my children alone so I took the place

of my wife. The children begged and brought it home.

Christina: Were you ever in a camp?

Bedel: Yes, at Babile. I was not a true refugee. I had bought the card from

people who were refugees and then I lived at the camp for three years.

They were going to Djibouti.

Christina: What is a "true refugee"?

Bedel: You had to come from Somalia.

Christina: So if you're Ethiopian and lose everything, there's nothing?

Bedel: That's right.

Christina: What did you think of the camp?

Bedel: Not good. They faced a lot of problems at the end of the Mengistu

regime - sometimes there wouldn't be food.

Christina: How is it that you are returning at this time, now?

Bedel: [The announcement and] because of the weather. If it weren't so

hot I would have stayed.

Christina: What about the police?

Bedel: We could hide, go to some friend's house.

He continued:

Bedel: What I think about most of them [the returnees] here, when the

weather gets a bit cooler, they'll go back to Djibouiti.

Christina: Will you?

Bedel: My baby is there, so I have to go back. I don't know when.

Christina: Is anyone expecting you at your destination?

Bedel: No.

Christina: What are you intending to do in the next few days?

Bedel: I'm waiting for what UNHCR will say. If they tell us to go to a camp I'll go; if they say to go back to Babile I will. I'm waiting for their orders.

Christina: What do you think you will do over the next few months?

Bedel: To make my children grow up I will try for any kind of work - they have no mother so I have to be both mother and father. I will take any job, but I'd like to start my farm. But I need instruments. But if I can't get something to start a living here, I will stay here since no one tells you you can't be here. But if not, I may have to go back to Djibouti. When I used to see people going from one place to another, I would think, "They don't know how to farm, why don't they use what they have, why are they going as refugees out of their country?" But when I faced the drought, I left my country.

Christina: What is the best way to use the repatriation package?

Bedel: I will use it. I have the food they gave me at Shabelle camp, my children need it.

Christina: What do most people do with the repatriation package?

Bedel: The refugees are in two groups. One group is single, like

Ethiopians [Amharas], most of them are single. I think they will sell the

ration. The others are in families, and they will keep them.

Christina: Do people keep the food as insurance or use it now?

Bedel: I start now. When you have something else you keep for the

drought, but I don't have anything else so I'll use it.

Christina: In your opinion, what is the purpose of the repatriation?

Bedel: What I think is, those who have no shelters make the city very

dirty, we have no toilets, and the other thing is we make them fed up with

us always begging, begging. So I think it's because of these things.

Christina: What do you think of the repatriation programme?

Bedel: I have no idea if they're going to give us something to start our

living when we get to our town, or if they're just leaving us now, giving us

this much ration and this much money. In Ethiopia I don't think we'll get

what we had in Djibouti.

Christina: How do you feel about coming back to Ethiopia?

Bedel: It's nice to be in your motherland, but if we're going to face the

same problems we had before, I'll have to go back to Djibouti. But it's

nice to be back.

Christina: Do you have anything else to say about the subjects in the

interview, or about other issues?

Bedel: Ethiopia is a very old country compared to other African countries,

but we are very backward, so if you can help us it would be good. We

need education for our children. It's a rich country - we could farm, and so

on. Djibouti has nothing. Ethiopia has a lot of rain. We don't have

equipment to develop the countryside. If the farmers can get good

machines or instruments we could even help other African countries. We

have rivers we're not using. If you try to bring farm implements they say

it's contraband. We can't bring anything from Djibouti. You have to have

permission from the government and pay a lot of taxes. For example if I

have a plow or other farming machine for myself I can help the people

around me in the place where I am. From [1984[10]] onwards there is always

war in Ethiopia. There is no full peace. From that, the people of Ethiopia

are suffering a lot. From [1984] up to now the Ethiopian people are

refugees - at first it was Mengistu, then sometimes the Oromos, and then

the war in Somalia.


**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented findings on one phase of the repatriation of

Ethiopian Somali returnees from Djibouti. These findings are based on several kinds of

data: structured and semi-structured interviews, conversations, observation, and agency

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[10]

1984 C.E. Bedel used the Ethiopian Orthodox calendar date, 1977. The Gregorian calendar
is seven years ahead of the Ethiopian calendar, but because Ethiopian New Year is in
September, the correspondence with the Gregorian calendar will vary from one part of the
year to another.

records. They are interpreted in the light of findings from other phases of my research, conducted in other settings.

Only twelve percent of the respondents to the short questionnaire indicated that they had been supported by relatives while in Djibouti. Other surveys in the Ogaden and Somaliland indicate that the vast majority of ethnic Somali refugees in this region are absorbed by clansmen (e.g., Holt and Lawrence 1991). Their experiences are generally invisible to the refugee relief system. Conclusions and generalizations about "the refugee experience" must therefore be made with caution.

Observation and interviews at the returnee holding camp in Dire Dawa revealed the centrality of the identities "refugee" and "returnee" and of the attendant benefactor/dependent hierarchy in this setting. Almost all the individuals who approached me or whom I approached asked for help, citing their need and agencies' concern for human suffering as reasons. In contrast, although virtually all of my interlocutors in Dire Dawa had been refugees themselves or had immediate family members who were or had been refugees, the discourse of need, humanitarianism, and suffering was conspicuously limited in these situations where other institutions–family, friendship, occupation–provided structure and meaning. This is not to say that when the "refugee relief system" was the central institution individuals lie or exaggerate. Nor does it mean that people's "real" feelings are apparent only in one or another setting. Rather, such conversations and their significance can only be interpreted in light of the specific context in which the interaction occurred.

In the context of the returnee holding camp, the Somali returnees emphasize those

dimensions of *qaxooti* (refugee) that are likely to contribute to a better material outcome while safeguarding political and other options. Politics is not addressed, and people are careful not to say anything that might jeopardize their position - "We don't know anything about that" was the response to my queries about relative claims of refugees, returnees, and local populations. The similarities with the publicly sanctioned meanings of "refugee" are offered back to the donors: "These are *your* values, so put your money where your mouth is."

In this setting, psychological trauma is not salient, neither for the agency personnel distributing repatriation packages, nor for the predominantly Somali returnees receiving the packages. Nor are politics drawn on in this context, even though the reasons for flight and for return were both political and economic - the war between Ethiopia and Somalia in 1977-78, the political chaos and violence plus localized droughts at the downfall of the Mengistu regime in 1991 and subsequently, and relative stability in Ethiopia plus diminishing economic opportunities and increasing political intolerance of refugees in the neighbouring country of Djibouti in 1995. In the camps of refugees from Somaliland in the far east of Ethiopia, almost every refugee with whom I spoke referred to the political situation in the capital city of Hargeisa as the determining factor for flight and future return. In contrast, returnees here drew almost exclusively on bureaucratic definitions and on the suffering caused by poverty to pursue their demands for assistance.

The ambivalence between making citizenship-based claims on the State and humanitarian-based claims on the international network of relief and development agencies is suggested by the disjunction between statements of how good it was to be

back in one's homeland on the one hand, and the absence of or refusal to engage in

overtly political discussion rather than in talk about poverty, suffering, humanitarianism,

and development, on the other. This absence of "politics" was striking, given the

circumstances of Ethiopian politics and regional history and the proverbial interest of

Somali in politics, an interest affirmed by interactions in other settings. However, the

refusal of the group of men and other respondents to engage in political discussion was

itself a political strategy. It reveals which sources of legitimacy and which discursive

strategies are considered appropriate for this audience and setting.

Both the data from the holding camp and other findings make it possible to

recognize that this particular language game, particularly well expressed in the almost

stylized conversation with "the men", is itself situated in other contexts. It is one part of a

moral economy of suffering, which is in turn one part of the lives of these returnees and

their multiple, intersecting social networks. Some of the other contexts within which the

interactions at the Dire Dawa reception centre are situated can be glimpsed from the

longer interviews, and, paradoxically, from the multiplicity of reasons for leaving and

returning that emerge from the 119 very short interviews[11]: neither refugee status nor

refugee relief are the central focus of these returnees' lives.

The interviews suggest that for these returnees, war is assimilated into a broader

constellation of disasters centered around drought and survival. Ideas about drought have

in turn been influenced by the experience of refugee and disaster relief. Migration per se

---

[11]

 One respondent said he went to Djibouti to visit relatives. To the question, "Why are you
returning to Ethiopia now?" he replied: "I finished my visit."

is not a rupture in the cultural fabric, in that it can be made sense of - sometimes to the

point of an apparent trivialization of its significance. Whether the social and cultural

fabric can sustain the circumstances causing and the consequences of

migration—recurrent warfare and drought, dispossession and destitution of entire

communities, changes in relations with the state and other political and economic

institutions—is another question. Finding an affirmative answer to this question seems to

be an important challenge for at least one population of returnees, the community of

Hurso.

# Chapter Four

## DISPOSSESSION

I am 45 years old. I was born in Turkaylo, near Hurso village. I had farmland in Hurso before 1977. After the Derg took my farmland I went to Serkama. Now I have two families. One is in Serkama, and one is in Turkaylo. I have a farm in Serkama and livestock in Turkaylo. Hurso! There was no better place! The poet Mohamed Ahmed sings about "the orange of Hurso and the Erer mandarin". This song was about the good life of Hurso. And anybody who knows how it was before will be in *wareer* [delirious; worrying and distressed] when he sees it now. When my oranges reached the first harvest, I sold only four truckloads and the rest was eaten by the Derg. And still now I think it is the Derg or those who remained from the Derg government who are eating our gardens. Now my morale is not good, because my properties are still in the hands of the enemy. Now it seems as if Hurso is getting some air, but unfortunately the Derg remainders are still present. Hurso people need to get a balanced life - food, health, education and so on. And to get their farmlands. I think if the government wants to develop Hurso's life, they have to give back their farms.

I wish to add: you asked me many things and I am asking you, what are you going to do for us?

Ali Yusuf

Hurso's lands were seized in the aftermath of the 1977-78 Ogaden War in which

Somalia invaded Ethiopia in order to annex the ethnically Somali lands that had been

incorporated into Ethiopia under Emperor Menelik II. Somalia lost the war. The

population in and around Hurso includes a majority of ethnic Somalis of the 'Issa and

Gurgura clans, and a large Oromo minority. The area around Dire Dawa was called *Terre*

*des Issas et Gurguras* on French maps dating from the early twentieth century, when the

French built the railway which links the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa with Djibouti

and is now Ethiopia's only rail link to the sea.

Central to the Hurso stories in 1996 is land, or its lack. The lack of land is seen

by villagers as the core problem, leading to hunger, disease, lack of social cohesion and

co-operation, and both individual and collective demoralization. However, while the

problems attributed by Hurso residents to lack of land are immediate, the origin of the

problems and the conditions for their resolution are presented in historical and political

terms. Hurso "refugee narratives" focus less on the twelve years most villagers spent as

refugees in Djibouti, than on justifying Gurgura claims to the land around Hurso and

explaining how the Ethiopian state was and remains implicated in the dispossession of

this community.

My life is not life. In the past it was meaningful, but now it is not a life at all.

There is no work, no animals or livestock. Why? Because we don't have land. If

we had land we could cultivate. Life will be back to normal the day we get our

land back. We can borrow a tractor from wealthy people, cultivate sorghum,

potatoes, and so on. Having land is better than having a shop because you are

producing things. With a shop you're only buying and re-selling, but with land,

you are producing.

Abdoosh Muusa


Most of my conversations and interviews in Hurso were with villagers who had

been farmers and who now survive by casual labour, petty trade, and gathering and

selling firewood. Ali Yusuf was one of the *baadhiya* (countryside) people - pastoralists

and agropastoralists who come to town to trade, shop, and exchange news and gossip.

Villagers and pastoralists alike consider that the economic situation and morale of the

latter are far superior to those of the villagers, but anger and sadness over the loss of the

farmlands are reflected in pastoralists' as well as villagers' accounts. Poverty and

dispossession are the organizing categories of the stories I heard in and around Hurso,

and survival is the central concern of the population. It is not simply physical subsistence,

however, that people want and expect, but rather a balanced life, the life of a human being

- *nolol adaaminiimo. Nolol* or *nolosho* is livelihood, and the root of the descriptor

*adaaminiimo*, "human", is Adam, the first human.

For Hurso Somali, a human life, a decent life, is a matter not only of calories and

clean water, but of justice, beauty, and belonging. This affective and aesthetic dimension

comes through clearly in narratives and in poetry. Development rhetoric offers an

additional vehicle for Hurso Gurgura to use in attempting to pursue their claims for land

and a decent life. Conversely, development rhetoric, and villagers' experience of

development and humanitarian aid projects, have also influenced their notions of what

constitutes a decent life and how it should be achieved.

## Survival, Land, and Identity

### From "the Rome of the Gurgura" to "empty land"

One man taken to Sodere who was living a very hard life,

In Djibouti's market and Somalia I was living this bitter life.

If my life reaches the depths of bitterness and I hear bad news,

I am a strong man who will infiltrate and get your secret,

I am like crocodiles and their children, who sharpen their teeth...

I am arrow poison and I am also the sword of the angel who takes life...

I am a person whose farms were taken by the Derg

My moans - you will think it's a lion coming to you.

Like a young camel when it's weaned, crying in the afternoon,

I am like that.

The owner must fight for his property.

From a poem (*gabay*) by Hurso poet Muusa Omar

Hurso is now known as the site of a large training centre for the military of the

newly refederated Ethiopia. It is recalled by its inhabitants as a place of permanent water,

good grazing, and bountiful orchards. Today it is a desolate stop on the railway from

Addis Ababa to Djibouti, where people eke out an existence running tiny shops and

teahouses, selling meager amounts of onions, potatoes, and bananas, and gathering and

selling firewood - considered one step above begging in the local scheme of things. One

elder described it:

> Hurso was a big village, with many, many kinds of fruit - lemons, oranges,
>
> papayas, mangos. We have a proverb: "Hurso - the Rome of the Gurgura".Today
>
> the people are returnees and refugees. Women sell firewood. The life of the
>
> children is so hard. I was born here and lived 25 years before I left here. Today I
>
> see only empty land.

The centre of the village lies along the railway which leads from Djibouti to

Addis Ababa. Here there are a few dozen mud and thatch shops and tea houses. Behind

them are the typical Somali dome-shaped huts, some built solidly of mud, sticks, and

cloth or plastic roofing, and others in varying states of decomposition as the wind and the

rains tear the scraps of plastic bags, rags, and remnants of blue UNHCR tarps which most

people use for roofing. On a typical day, twenty or thirty Oromo and Somali women sit

beneath two large acacia trees at one end of "downtown" (*magaala*, the city), selling

small piles of tomatoes, onions, and fruit, or a few gourds of milk. A train leaves once a

day in the direction of Addis, and in the opposite direction to Dire Dawa, some 25

kilometres away. Battered pick-up trucks drop off and pick up passengers sporadically,

depending on demand from traders or other travelers who board at the town of Malka

Jabdu, eighteen kilometres towards Dire Dawa. These pick-ups are "retired" from

smuggling *chat*[1] to Djibouti, or have been banned from Dire Dawa because they are too

decrepit to meet the standards of this provincial African city. They are considered full

when 24 passengers, with their goods, are aboard - in the bed, in the cab, and on the cab.

These trucks would also be the way that sick people, or women in obstructed labour,

would be transported to the hospital in Dire Dawa. The fare, one way, is seven birr (one

US dollar). The wage for a day labourer is five to ten birr. A firewood seller can earn five

birr in a day, after spending the prior day collecting and transporting the wood, usually on

his or her back. The trip to Dire Dawa, including transfer to another vehicle at Malka

Jabdu, takes between two and four hours one way.

Around the central village, some few hundred metres away, are other homes,

some in clusters of up to a dozen homes, and others the two or three huts of one extended

family, surrounded by thorn fencing. A clinic with intermittent supplies of drugs, a school

with intermittent supplies of teachers and materials, a new rural pharmacy, a private mill,

and the municipal offices–two mud and thatch rooms, recently expanded to three with a

galvanized steel roof–are also a few hundred metres from downtown. Oromo women

selling *chat*, as well as tea sellers, can be found near the municipal offices or at the edge

of the *magaala*. Behind the clinic, in the direction of the military base, is a string of some

two dozen mud and thatch houses, the brothels servicing the military base. The military

---

[1]

*Catha edulis*, more commonly known as *khat* or *qat*, a mild stimulant grown in the area
and chewed by Somali men and to a much lesser extent by women, on many social and
most ceremonial occasions. Use of very large quantities leads to social disapproval and
ostracism. It may be compared to alcohol in its social role and risks, though it is much
less intoxicating than alcohol and seldom leads to domestic or other violence.

base and these brothels are one of the main markets for the goods and services of Hurso

residents. The presence of dozens of prostitutes in a village of about 1,000 families is a

source of ongoing discomfort for other Hurso residents, as the local understanding of

Islam is that toleration of sin invites divine retribution. However, people's awareness of

the lack of options available, and relief that at least there are no Somali women who are

openly commercial sex workers, lead to toleration[2].

At the other end of downtown, immediately adjacent to the village and on either

side of the railway, are the farms. These lands extend for several square kilometers, but

villagers are not allowed to enter them as the lands have been expropriated by the

military. The lands are guarded by local people hired by the base. If livestock wanders

onto the lands, the owners are required to pay a fine. About 300 metres from downtown is

the river, one of three all-season streams in this area. This river is the reason for this

population having become increasingly sedentary over the past seventy years. From an

agropastoralist economy where a family might have small fields of sorghum in addition

to livestock, some of the population gradually shifted to planting orchards of citrus and

mango with the assistance of Haile Selassie and of the Italian occupiers in the 1930s. The

farms are held by families, and the individuals whose names are mentioned as the

"owner" of the larger farms, or "gardens" as they are also called, are in fact trustees of

---

2

A young man who worked as a research assistant with me recounted the following story:
he had told one of these women, known locally as "bar girls", that she should stop what
she was doing. She replied that she had no other way of making a living. She said she
would marry him *now* and stop prostitution if he could support her or find other work for
her. Otherwise, he should leave her alone. He said he felt ashamed.

land considered, in former times, to be available for the subsistence of extended families

or entire lineages.

**Establishing Claims to Land**

> Collective memory is a means of producing meanings which belong to a political
>
> field. Seen in this light, individual memory and collective memory are in
>
> dialogue. Collective memory does not signify facts about the past: it is above all a
>
> semantic code for retrieving memories, for making sense out of historical details
>
> in direct relation to political legitimacy.
>
> (Jewsiewicki and Mudimbe 1993:10)

Hurso residents readily offered justifications for Gurgura claims to the lands

around the village. In contrast to the "dispossession narratives"–standardized, almost

ritualized accounts describing the loss of the farmlands and exodus of the villagers–the

"legitimacy narratives" were more fragmented. These "legitimacy narratives" were taken

for granted. They formed part of the genealogical and historical background that children

would learn from songs, stories, and listening to the conversations of elders. They also

included more specialized knowledge, such as details of land grants and legal challenges,

that one or another elder might have. The story I eventually pieced together from the

fragments that individuals and elders' groups offered is complex. It draws on the full

range of possible sources of authority: traditional use, conquest, treaty, investment in

irrigation and orchards, and formal grants as well as practical assistance from the

Ethiopian government, Egyptian and Italian colonial administrations, the courts, and

development agencies.

According to Gurgura tradition, firm claims to farming lands can be established on two grounds: traditional use over several generations, and cultivation, especially of long-living crops such as fruit trees, by individuals or lineages. This tradition corresponds to the more widely known Somali pattern of pastoralist land use, where the two main sources of legitimate claims to territory–and of conflict–are traditional use of lands for grazing and wells dug and maintained by a clan or lineage (Lewis 1961).

Gurgura claim to have inhabited lands in the general area for at least seven generations, both as pastoralists and as agropastoralists cultivating sorghum and maize. About 100 years ago, I was told, the Gurgura formally occupied these particular lands when they fought and won a war against the Itto Oromo on behalf of the Nolo Oromo who had been invaded by the Itto. The terms of the alliance, according to both Somali and Oromo informants, were that the lands would henceforth be Gurgura lands. The Gurgura were victorious, and according to local accounts were offered 700 Itto women as brides in the peace settlement. From then on, Gurgura and Oromo intermarried, but the land was considered to belong to the Gurgura. Some Gurgura were formally given lands to use during the "Arab period", most likely the Egyptian occupation of the Emirate of Harar between 1875 and 1885 (Bahru 1991). A large portion of the land is said to be held in eight garads. These blocks of ten to fifty hectares, held on behalf of a lineage by an elder known as garada, were variously said to have been conferred on the garadas by the Italian occupiers of 1935-41, or by prior Ethiopian regimes. Much of the land was expropriated for a state farm after the expulsion of the Italians by Haile Selassie in 1941.

The farmer tenants pursued, and won, court challenges to have the bulk of the lands

returned. Villagers told me that the local community had dug twelve irrigation canals and

maintained them through locally organized and managed water committees. They added

that they had received assistance in building the irrigation systems from the Italians, Haile

Selassie, and Lutheran World Federation. Finally, they had planted extensive orchards of

citrus, papaya, and mangoes.

### The *garada* system

The post of *garada* or, as it is more commonly known, *balabat*[3], was conferred on

traditional leaders by the Ethiopian imperial government in order to establish more

effective control over the lands added to the empire in the nineteenth century[4]. Taxes

were collected through his office, and the *balabat* was responsible for maintaining

peaceful relations between his community and the state. The *balabat* was held personally

responsible for public order and the collection of taxes, under threat of imprisonment.

Some appointments were conferred on individuals who had not been traditional leaders,

as a reward for military or political service. In much of Ethiopia the *balabat* was

considered an oppressor by the communities to which he represented the coercive power

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[3] Bahru (1991:232) offers the following glossary definition:
"*balabbat* : originally hereditary owner of *rest* land [lineage ownership in the highlands];
since the nineteenth century, used to denote the hereditary chief of a southern people"

[4]

*Garada* is also one term for a traditional Somali leader, or "sultan". Such leaders held
authority primarily through persuasion(Samatar 1982), though wealth probably helped as
well.

of the Ethiopian state (Markakis 1974; Bahru 1991).

However, the Gurgura around Hurso, as well as other Somali communities, claim

that they saw the *garada* in a different light. They emphasized the access this post offered

to imperial power rather than seeing it primarily as a vehicle of oppression by the state[5].

To their way of thinking, the *garada* and his children had privileges which ordinary

Gurgura did not, such as permission to attend schools, but he was also an ambassador to

the Italians and Ethiopians. The *garada* was seen as a trustee of lands which the lineages

in the area claimed through use rights. The *garada* system offered the community

additional rights through legal title in a time when further encroachments by the state

seemed inevitable, hence best prepared for.  Gurgura had apparently been able to escape

taxation prior to the *garada* era. The lack of opposition to the *garada* in this area may

indicate that the state did not try as hard to collect taxes here as it did in the south, or

simply that the costs were outweighed by the perceived benefits.  I interviewed two men

whose fathers had been *garadas* - one an Ogaadeeni with over ten hectares of land

outside of Jigjiga, and the other a Gurgura with around 50 hectares for the Sannaya

subclan at Hurso as well as at Asebot, several hours by train to the southwest. According

to them, the *garada* was recognized by the clan as the owner of the land, but he was

supposed to take care of or provide for the clan with these lands - the clan or lineage

members farmed the land and consumed the harvest. In theory the *garada* could take

back the lands, but in practice it was difficult to do this, especially if the tenant had

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[5]

 This discussion of the *garada* system is based on interviews and conversations. I have
not examined archives to corroborate or complement these accounts.

planted trees. In this case, the *garada* would have to pay compensation. In Asebot, only

maize and sorghum were planted. If there were a disagreement between a *garada* and a

farmer, the *garada* would have to wait until the worker had harvested the crop, and then

the *garada* could take back the land. The farmer who worked the land paid the tax to the

government, but there were no tithes for the *garada*, who would work a portion of the

land or be supported by his sons or his livestock.

This positive perspective on the *garada* also supports the claims by some

informants that the system was instituted in this area by the Italians and not by the

Ethiopians. The Italians were generally seen by both Somalis and Oromos as allies

against the depredations of the Ethiopian state:

Menelik was a hyena: he ate alone. Haile Selassie was a monkey: he had no

friend. Mengistu was a rat: he collected all the property of the people in a hole.

These three governments took our land. The Italian government was good for us...

The civilization we got from the Italian government is the one we live with now.

- Hurso saying.

Establishing a "sustainable past"

Creating "imagined communities" (Anderson 1991) in the present entails a myth

of the past, often cast in terms of a golden age. Hurso narratives emphasized solidarity,

cooperation, and the sharing of abundant lands and harvests. By presenting themselves as

a cohesive community making productive use of good land, Hurso residents added a

further moral justification to their use- and title-based claims to the lands. In addition,

these stories helped to reinforce group identity with its implied reciprocal rights and

obligations. "Memories" of a "golden age" were codified in poems and proverbs and

referred to the land itself rather than to the community. The prose narratives alluded to a

"sustainable past"[6] rather than a perfect past. While difficulties and conflicts in the past

were seldom mentioned spontaneously, examples were readily offered in response to my

asking. The subtext of a publicly presented common front was the acknowledgment of

potential competition over resources, on lineage or other grounds - and the tacit

agreement to maintain a space for such conflicts in the future. The land claim stories,

genealogy myths, and poems and proverbs about the land counteracted a tendency for

fission. These rhetorical strategies were particularly important because the material

practices that required and rewarded cooperation were no longer possible.

One theme of the stories about Hurso's past was the emphasis on plenty and the

insistence that there would still be plenty of land to go around if the farms were returned

now, twenty years later. Some respondents identified mosquitoes as a problem in the past,

and this is consistent with high rates of malaria at the time of my fieldwork. (Records of

visits to the government clinic over March - August 1996 revealed that over 40% of all

visits resulted in a diagnosis of "AFI" (Acute Febrile Illness, a standard diagnostic

category in primary health care programmes around the world) and were treated as

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[6]

I use the term "sustainable past" to echo current calls in development circles for a
"sustainable future" rather than a utopia (on "sustainable development", see Adams 1995;
Crush 1995; Sachs 1997).

presumptive malaria. Febrile illnesses with more specific diagnoses, such as pneumonia or dysentery, were classified separately from AFI/malaria.) However, social problems in the past were not mentioned. None of the land claim accounts identified subclans or lineages, nor did they mention internal conflicts: the relevant identities for pursuing the goal of getting back the lands were a community identity (Hurso), and a Gurgura clan identity. When asked directly about prior conflict, respondents readily admitted that it existed, and no attempts were made to hide current conflicts between individuals or factions in the village.

A number of respondents spoke about building and managing the irrigation system that was critical to the productivity of the orchards. This irrigation system required ongoing active cooperation among the users of the land. In Hurso, irrigation had been managed by a committee which was chosen by "the community", most likely the men in a *shir* or elders' council. There were no special criteria for choosing the manager of the committee. As one man put it:

> People thought someone had good common sense and said "We accept Mr. So and So." He was the one responsible [for planning the water distribution], but a committee checked that he wasn't giving more water to his friends and relatives.

All of the *garads* through which water passed were eligible to use it, but it was the committee that decided who and when, during the day or at night. There was no specified term for the manager of the water committee; if there were problems, a *shir* could be called and he would be replaced.

I asked whether community structure and organization had changed since the population had fled to Djibouti. I was told that in theory the system of collective work still existed, but that people were no longer working together. For example, one man said, the water committee no longer existed. In the past, "people were farming together - everyone had his own land but people would help each other. Now everyone does his own job." The explanation for this state of affairs is that "the jobs that brought them together are not there. Maybe if we get the land back, [cooperative work] will start again".

Without tasks that require cooperation, both social organization and the emotional valence that arises from and reinforces personal and social ties become more difficult to sustain[7]. In the absence of land to be farmed, water to be managed, livestock to be herded or sold or stolen, disputes over each of these to be resolved, the only remaining focus of collective identity and action is claiming and fighting for the land. This collective dimension of identity is highly valued among Hurso residents and other Somali respondents: individual experience, loss, action, and identity were consistently presented in terms of social relations and ways of life, in this case, farming. Multiple and shifting alliances are possible, indeed the norm, but solitary life is not. Claiming the land and fighting for its return is not only an instrumental, economic action. It is a struggle for *nolol adaaminiimo*, a decent human life.

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[7]

See Loizos (1981:200-201) on "the duality of people-and-things". Greek Cypriot refugees spoke about their social losses in material terms: "The material interests which had accompanied their relationships had largely gone: parents had nothing to give their children; former neighbours no longer had tasks to share".

## The central story: dispossession

"Why did you return to Hurso?"

"What do you mean? Isn't this my soil?"

The central theme around which almost all narratives of loss, need, and suffering revolve is the loss of the farmlands to the government after the Ogaden War. The critical event is dispossession; the consequence is the destruction of "the life of a human being" in its material and moral senses. The ramifications of dispossession continue to arise and affect all aspects of people's lives. The loss of the farmlands is a "critical event" in the sense that Das (1995)[8], uses the term, a seminal moment or crisis through which multiple strands of experience, history, and conflict are crystallized and take on new form:

after the[se] events..., new modes of action came into being which redefined traditional categories...Equally, new forms were acquired by a variety of political actors, such as caste groups, religious communities, women's groups, and the nation as a whole. The terrains on which these events were located crisscrossed several institutions, moving across family, community, bureaucracy, courts of law, the medical profession, the state, and multinational corporations.    (Das 1995:6)

The stories of losing the farmlands are not simple chronologies. They are

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[8]

In this collection Das writes about ideologies of suffering, basing her analysis on the partition of India and the subsequent mass atrocities, as well as more recent catastrophes such as the chemical explosion at Bhopal

historical reflections and political tracts, economic analyses and morality plays. They also

incorporate changing notions of what constitutes a decent life, and who should contribute

towards it. Development rhetoric is assimilated into these narratives, but development in

the dispossession narratives has a political flavour, as Ali Yusuf's account demonstrates:

"I think if the government wants to develop Hurso's life, they have to give back the

farms." Nafisa, the chair of the local women's association or *jim 'aed*, listed the

"community needs": "One, get our own land. Then, get health care, and there's no

education. There are many things we don't have." In a survey of 25 households from the

various neighbourhoods of Hurso and 30 households of Ganda Hurso, a neighbourhood in

the town of Malka Jabdu to which many Hurso residents fled after the war and following

loss of farmlands, almost every respondent identified "getting the farmlands back" as a

major need both of the community and of their household, along with other standard

development goals such as pure water, a functioning clinic and school, and work. Some

respondents identified democracy and peace as primary needs, and as an example of

democracy they offered the return of the farmlands.

Halimo Muusa, a woman in her 50s, described how the farmlands were lost to the

Derg regime. The formal, rhythmic style is very different from the matter of fact accounts

of other historical material such as the description of the water committee, or even the

"legitimacy narratives". This account is a new foundation myth.


When the government took the farmlands, we [the people and the

government] weren't quarreling with each other. But the government has

power. We left as refugees, we went to other countries. The day the

government said "The farmlands must be in the government's hands and

you must leave", we quarreled with them. We said "We will not leave this

land". When we said we will not leave our farmlands, the government

insisted, and they said to bring all the kinds of leaves, any kind of leaves,

from every tree in the farming lands. We brought them, we brought the

leaves. At that time they said to us, "We will give you the amount of

money these kinds of trees give you at harvest every year. What you

harvest from the mango for example, if yearly you harvest a certain

amount of money, we will give you this amount of money, for

compensation. We will calculate [based on] these leaves and we will give

you that." After we brought the leaves, the government said to come for

another appointment. After another appointment, they didn't give us

anything. "If you are giving us some compensation money, we will say ok.

We will do as you ordered." [This is what] we said to the government.

"But where is our compensation? You said bring [the leaves], we brought

[the leaves]. What are you going to give us?" we asked. "But if you are not

doing as you promised, if you are not giving us compensation, we will not

leave our farming lands", we said. After we refused to leave our farming

lands, the government said: "You will not be given anything, we will not

give you anything." At that time it was harvest time. When people were

away from these farming lands, the government came and they took [a

sample of] every kind of fruit or vegetable, some of everything, and they

took it to Addis Ababa. ... Then, at that time, when the fruit was taken to

Addis Ababa, we were supposing that the government may give us some

compensation or something.

The government came and told us to gather, all the people in the

same place. And we came out. We came out, all the people. We came out

to that place, under that tree. At that time they came in military force. They

brought guns. They surrounded us. ...Not a child remained in any house.

The military forced us. We were surrounded. "And now what do you

think[9]?", they said to us. "Are you not terrified, standing like this?" And

even as we stood there, we had already left our farming lands. "Now say

that you are not happy [if you dare]. Or prepare [to leave]." We were

afraid, we were afraid that we would die. Because of dying, instead of

dying, we left the farming lands. "Put up your hands, if you agree to leave

your farming lands". We raised our hands, like this. Anyone who did not

put up their hand was taken away, and was killed. Our farming lands were

lost like that.

Some of our people, as they were standing there at that time,

became mad. And as for the rest of us, some have died. Some became mad

when their farming lands were taken. Even now I will show you, there are

some who became mad. The government took the farming lands by force.

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[9] The literal translation was, "Now what is in your interest?"

Goats, any goats, we kept. Some went to Djibouti, some went to Somalia. Those governments, in Djibouti and Somalia, they helped us. They gave us a settlement. International assistance came from Geneva, from everywhere, and they gave everything, what they give to refugees. We lived there for twelve years. After twelve years, we returned.

When we were migrating from Djibouti to our homeland, we applied for international assistance from other governments, to get our farming lands back. And still we did not get those lands. They said to us, you will get your farming lands, with this freedom [with the new government]. Still we did not get our farming lands, and they are with the government still. When we repatriated to our homelands, we didn't get our farming lands, and still the government didn't give them to us. We became and we remain refugees. The government or the United Nations who were helping us, we followed their instructions, we repatriated. But we did not get our farming lands, and we remain refugees. Our property is being eaten in front of us.

This is how you see our people. Some are demoralized, some became mad. They are demoralized. Because our farming lands have been taken by force and still the government is eating the lands in front of us, and because of the hard situation we endured, because of that we became very demoralized. That is the problem, that is our problem.

When the war broke out between Somalia and Ethiopia, some

people fled to Somalia. Some ran to Djibouti, some stayed in their

farmlands, some went to the countryside around here, and we supposed

that this war would stop in four or five months. After that, some came

back to the farming lands. And because of that war, the government took

our farming lands. Those who are living around here, were Somali, the

government was fighting with Somalia, [so they took our lands].

The area's representative in the Federal parliament insisted in an interview with

me that the farmlands were seized in retribution for the support that Hurso area residents

had given to the Western Somali Liberation Front or WSLF. (This was one of the two

militias fighting for the secession of eastern Ethiopia or, as they and the Somali

government called it, Western Somalia.) In Hurso itself, opinion was divided. Some men

said they did not think it was a punitive act so much as military strategy: the Ethiopian

government felt that the Hurso base would be important in the event of further hostilities

with Somalia, especially in light of its proximity to the key Djibouti-Addis railway. In

this case, according to my respondents, it would make sense to expand the base and clear

out the local population. Accounts as tolerant as this may also reflect the perspective of

one out of many factions within the community at the time of the Ogaden War. The area

around Hurso was an important site of Somali resistance, yet many, if not most, local

residents were not actively involved in or supportive of the war, on either side.

Most villagers fled into the countryside during the fighting and returned after

about seven months. The definitive exodus, the one recorded in poetic monologues such

as Halimo's, occurred not in the heat of active combat but with the seizure of their lands.

The village was bulldozed the day after the villagers were ordered to leave. A few

families were allowed to stay, mostly employees of the railway, but restrictions on

movement in the area were severe over the following twelve years. Permission had to be

obtained in advance of visiting what was left of Hurso village, and travelers along the

road "had to look straight ahead. If you looked left or right, you were accused of spying."

Some 500 Gurgura Liberation Front (GLF) fighters first came back to Hurso during the

instability at the downfall of the Derg and, through living illegally in empty barracks and

through maintaining military control of the area, opened the space for about 1,000

families to return.

     'Aasha, an older woman and respected midwife, blamed the influence of the

Russian soldiers and advisors who, along with over 16,000 Cuban soldiers, came to

Ethiopia to repel the Somali invasion.

> The Russian soldiers asked to whom this farmland belonged - did it belong to the
>
> government? They [the representatives of the Mengistu government] said it
>
> belongs to the people. The soldiers said, "So if this belongs to civilians, anyone
>
> can buy a gun and can be higher than the government." It was the first time the
>
> Ethiopians thought to take the land. The Russians said if people have all these
>
> lands, they may fight with you, they may fulfill whatever they need - buy guns and
>
> so on. They must work the farmlands, and the government must govern the land.

     'Aasha continued her account with the same story of negotiations over the value

of the land through calculating taxes and income, using as evidence "one leaf from every

kind of tree on our lands - mango, papaya, etcetera." When I asked a group of young men

what they thought of 'Aasha's theory, they strongly agreed. In light of previous

expropriations of land for state farms by Haile Selassie, it seems unlikely that, as my

informants claimed, "it was the first time the Ethiopians thought to take the land". One

account by another man suggests that attempts at expropriating land started earlier, in

1974, with the installation of the Marxist regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam and its

vigorous and initially popular programme of land reform. The experience of the land

reform and an education campaign emphasizing orthodox Marxist theory and rhetoric

may be the source of the purported Russian influence in 'Aasha's account. The

explanation put forward in 'Aasha's story is a good example of the organizing power of

the critical event in narratives of this community's recent history.

The key elements of Halimo Muusa's account– the war, the military base,

expropriation of lands, initial promises of compensation and negotiation over the value of

the crops, abandonment of the lands at gunpoint, flight to Djibouti or Somalia, years in

refugee camps, and the promise of return of the lands–were repeated by all of the people I

interviewed, even though individual experiences varied from the community's history.

This story was told by elders who had lived through the experience as adults, but also by

young people who had been infants at the time of flight.

People speak of the land in the present tense: this *is* Ahmed's garden, this *is*

Amina's garden. Although the lands were taken almost twenty years ago, intense passion

is still invested in them. People cling to the lands both because they are good lands, and

because they consider them to be their lands. I asked dozens of people why they had

returned to Hurso. They told me that the government had changed, they had been

promised that the lands would be returned; that there was no way to make a living in

Djibouti anymore; that surrounding lands could not support this many additional people;

that the original owners of the lands near Sodere where some Hurso residents had been

resettled had returned after the fall of the Derg and had thrown out the resettled Hurso

families; that these are, after all, *their* lands. Until there is an option for creating, over

time, ties of belonging to other lands or other livelihoods, both identity as well as survival

will remain tied to these lands. 'Aasha, the midwife, summarizes the passion towards the

land, and the bitterness, sadness, and contempt that characterize the current judgment by

Hurso of the state:

> "They are not careful of the land. It becomes hyenas' houses."

## Relationships with the State

The relationships among community members, "the Government", the military,

and the workers hired by the military to guard the expropriated lands from incursions by

the former tenants and their livestock are complex. Resentment against the base and the

workers was minimal. Soldiers from the base were steady customers at the shops and

tearooms, and interviews with several of them revealed support for the Hurso position.

Some Gurgura men from the village itself, former members of the Gurgura Liberation

Front, were also undergoing training at the base. The men guarding the farmlands

regularly chewed *chat* with the villagers. One of their motives was to maintain cordial

relationships and hence options for coexistence should the farmlands be returned to the

owners. Responsibility for the initial dispossession and the current poverty of the

community was placed on the government and the ministry of defense, who were felt to

be holding on to the lands out of greed - both for the revenue, which the member of the

federal parliament estimated at $3-4 million U.S. per year, and for simple possession.

However, the district and regional governments shared some of the blame because they

were felt to be mishandling the negotiations. Two trips by elders to Addis had exhausted

the funds that could be dedicated to direct negotiation by the community. Future progress

depended on action by district, regional, and federal officials.

I suggested in the previous chapter that the relationships between Somali

Ethiopians and the Ethiopian state were ambivalent at best. This ambivalence is clear in

Hurso. On the one hand, the current situation of Hurso is the result of acts by the

Ethiopian state against a predominantly Somali population. My informants were

unanimous on this point, whether they considered the expropriation of lands and eviction

of the residents to be a punitive action or simply preparatory to possible future wars

between Ethiopia and Somalia. The Ethiopian state was a fact of life that ranged in its

effects from disagreeable to deadly, but it could at times be useful. Loyalty and identity,

however, were invested in the clan, the land, and in Somali ethnicity. Identification as

"Somali" was relatively recent for many Gurgura. Many–perhaps most–identified

primarily with the Gurgura clan and their own subclan, whether they spoke Somali or

Oromo. Regarding Ethiopian identity, several respondents, mostly young men in Hurso

and in Dire Dawa, independently offered the same "negative identity" of themselves as

Ethiopians: "If I am being harassed by the police or the military, then I may say to them,

'What, aren't I Ethiopian? Don't I have the same rights as anyone else?'" The mutual

antipathy between Somalis and "Ethiopians" (which to Somalis means "highlanders" -

Amharas and Tigreans) apparently served to protect Somali youth–whether mythically or

otherwise–from one kind of problem during the Derg years: forced conscription. Many

young men from all ethnic origins fled or tried to flee Ethiopia, because at the height of

the wars on the Tigrean, Eritrean and Somali fronts, any boy who appeared to weigh over

fifty kilograms was at risk of being seized on the streets and sent to the front. However, I

was told that this was less of a problem for Somali, "because the government knew that

once they were armed and trained they would desert and fight against the government."

On the other hand, anyone who "looked Somali" or "looked Muslim"–by dress, by

physiognomy, by the way they walked, by neighbourhood– in the Dire Dawa area was

also at risk of being shot on the streets, and many were. Although most respondents

denied any overt guerilla or similar political activity based out of the camps in which they

lived in Djibouti or Somalia, all of the young men and women–who spent their childhood

and adolescence outside of Ethiopia–said that their parents and elders had told them about

the bad things the Ethiopian government had done.

On the other hand, most Ethiopian Somalis were cautiously optimistic about

their prospects in the new Ethiopia. Somalis could now speak and go to school in Somali,

had their own regional government (albeit corrupt and inefficient, in the view of many),

and were, for the first time, potentially equal to other Ethiopians as citizens. In Hurso and

elsewhere, among both men and women, politics was now seen as crucial to

"development". Politics now meant not only clan and regional politics but also national

politics. The views of the state could even be seen as rather patronizing, as the story of

Ali Giljeri suggests. This story was told to me by a group of young men to teach me about

"the culture of the Gurgura", about the farmlands, and about the government:

Ali Giljeri had a son. Ali was working for someone else, looking after camels.

But his son grew up with his father and with the camels. One day, after Ali died,

his son said , "I must go fetch my father's camels". He thought they were his

father's camels. The owners came and said "We want our camels. You have to go

now." The son didn't believe them. He said, "Why didn't you come before and

say 'These are our camels'? Now you want to take away the animals I grew up

with."

Mengistu is like the father. Meles [the new Prime Minister] is like the son.

He still doesn't believe this land belonged to the farmers.

## Contraband - Gambling Against the State

The issue of abuse of power by the state was omnipresent, as demonstrated by the

practices and discourse surrounding contraband. However, even contraband–perhaps

especially contraband– involves a complex and often humorous play along the boundaries

of legitimacy of the state and of resistance to or autonomy from the state. The Ethiopian

state is seen not so much as an oppressive and unitary force with respect to which one

must choose one of surrender, submission, outright war, or avoidance, but rather as a

feature of the environment, currently a powerful actor with a tendency to swallow all

other players, but with whom it is possible to make certain tactical alliances.

All along the border areas, people make a living through petty trade of

commodities such as cigarettes, coming from Djibouti or from the Arab states through

Somalia. Abdoosh Muusa made a living selling cigarettes for two years in Dawanleh, on

the Ethiopian side of the border with Djibouti. He and his family moved to Dawanleh

after the Djibouti government had insisted on two rounds of "voluntary" repatriation in

1986 and 1988 (see Crisp 1986 for an account of the 1986 repatriation), and after the

local 'Issa around Dikhil and Ali Sabiy also insisted that the Gurgura refugees had to

leave. In his life history, Abdoosh notes that the Derg government was better than the

new, democratic EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) regime, at

least in terms of survival at Dawanleh, because the EPRDF government seemed

determined to stop or control all cross-border trade. The Derg government was the one

that had taken his lands and forced his flight to Djibouti, where five of his children died

in a refugee camp over two years, but at least they left the people in the border areas more

or less alone after the war was over. This pragmatic and situational view of the state is the

rule more than the exception in Somali Ethiopia, where the state is approached on a case-

by-case basis, as it were: are they bombing us? Can we trade as usual? Can we arrive at a

*modus vivendi* both with the clans through whose lands we need to pass, and with the

customs officers at the border crossings we need to traverse?

Contraband, or trade across borders that attempts to evade taxation by the state, is

almost paradigmatic of the Somali perspective on and reaction to the Ethiopian state over

at least the last 100 years. The expansion of the Ethiopian empire was accomplished, in

the east, less through settler and feudal strategies than through ongoing efforts to tax and

to "pacify" the Somali and Afar nomads (Markakis 1984). "Taxation" strategies included

seizing entire herds of camels. Since the pastures of the "Haud" (rich grasslands east of

Jigjiga in the northeast of what is now the Somali National Region) were the primary

transhumance grazing areas for the herds of the Isaaq clan, and the Ogaden area in the

east of the Somali National Region was the main territory of the Ogaadeen clan, both of

these major clan families could expect their herds to be raided every year, to pay tax for

entering what both they and their enemy clans considered to be their traditional grazing

lands. "Pacification" included military campaigns and the construction of garrison towns

such as Jigjiga, now the capital of the Somali National Region. Both the British and

Italian colonial governments, as well as the Ethiopian government and army, were

variously involved in the contests among the colonizers (including the Ethiopians),

between the various colonizers and Somali clans, and between clans themselves (Drake-

Brockman 1912; Lewis 1988; Samatar 1982). While the contestations on the Somali side

cannot be understood as straightforward "clan conflicts", letters from Somali elders to the

British and Ethiopian authorities in the early twentieth century (Bhardwaj 1979) reveal

that neither is a simple African-European nor a Somali-Amhara dichotomous

classification of the conflicts adequate. Some groups of elders appealed to the Ethiopian

emperor for protection against what they described as the depredations of the British,

while others appealed to the British colonial administration for protection against the

Ethiopians. The letters also reveal a long history of sophisticated use of colonial rhetoric,

especially the dimension of trusteeship with its attendant metaphors of parent-child relationships, by non-literate (with the exception of religious leaders) Somali pastoralists. All of the letters stress the loyalty of the applicants to the government from which aid is being sought, and remind the government of its paternal duty to protect its subjects.

Similarly, despite efforts of the proponents of pan-Somali nationalism to portray Sayyid Mohamed Abdille Hassan, the poet and guerilla and religious leader who fought both the British and the Ethiopians until his death in 1920, as the first Somali nationalist, the views of my Isaaq interlocutors as well as scholarly texts (Samatar 1982) support a more complex picture, which includes considerable enmity between the Isaaq and the Ogaadeen clans.

The taxation and "contraband" picture is further complicated by the fact that, prior to the construction of the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway, all trade of Ethiopian goods to the sea had to pass through successive areas controlled by different Somali clans. Safe passage for Ethiopians, Europeans, or other Somali clans had to be negotiated and paid for, or gambled on. Much of the trade was done by Somali traders, and in the area between Dire Dawa and Djibouti these were 'Issa and Gurgura Somali, particularly the former. The word "smuggling" itself— *koontarabaan*—is new to the Somali language and reflects the influence of European notions of borders, their transgression, and taxation. While my interlocutors did distinguish between contraband and other kinds of trade, this distinction primarily marked that it was national borders and not clan, bandits' or other territorial boundaries that were being crossed or violated. It was not until 1954 that the eastern border of Ethiopia was finally settled between the Ethiopians and the British.

Until that time, the British had insisted on the rights of Somali, especially Isaaq,

pastoralists to travel freely. Although this Anglo-Ethiopian agreement was visible more in

the breach than in the observance, there was a long period of ambiguity, where trade went

on as usual and taxation tended to be sporadic and punitive rather than systematic and

bureaucratic. This, at least, was the view of my interlocutors, smugglers, traders, and

farmers alike. Thus, when more recent governments attempted to assert effective control

over the border and over their unruly pastoralist populations through taxing all trade and

imposing very high taxes on certain commodities, such as *chat*, Somali traders either

ignored the edicts, or sought to evade them, or felt affronted - or all three.

Throughout the Derg years, Dire Dawa was a *de facto* free trade zone, where all

kinds of goods, especially electronic goods, could be purchased. People came from all

over the country to purchase goods, for consumption or for re-sale elsewhere. Today the

volume of trade in Dire Dawa has decreased considerably, replaced in part by the thriving

market in Hartisheik, which is adjacent to the large refugee camp of the same name. On

the Harar-Dire Dawa road, *chat* traders pay tax on the *chat* coming from Harar (the

source of the choicest *chat* in Ethiopia) to Dire Dawa and thence to Djibouti. However,

the trade is not entirely according to the rules, according to my informants. The post of

customs officer on this road is one of the most desirable in Ethiopia, and an officer can

purchase a four wheel drive vehicle, which costs upwards of 200,000 birr with the 112%

duty, after only a few months on the job. Malka Jabdu, seven kilometres from Dire

Dawa, was known as the best place in Ethiopia to buy imported clothing - used clothes

from Europe and North America, sorted and graded by quality and country of origin[10].

The current regime seems determined to eliminate this trade through Djibouti, by

imposing what are considered exorbitant taxes. Because of this, and because much of the

formerly booming local trade in *chat* has been displaced by the daily flights between Dire

Dawa and Djibouti, the glory of Malka Jabdu has faded. Still, contraband remains one of

the primary bases of the local economy. As one man put it, those people who say they

don't have anything to do with smuggling, or "business" as it is often simply called, don't

know what they're talking about. "Who will buy their firewood or their tea, if no traders

are coming from Addis to buy in the Malka Jabdu market? Who will eat at the

restaurants?"

Although the start-up costs for entering the business as a smuggler are, at about

1,000 birr, too high for most people, contraband offers the best employment opportunities

for the very poor - as porters of the 50 kilogram bundles, as firewood sellers, as tea

sellers. The smugglers proper, who go into Djibouti or to the border, are mostly men, and

can make great amounts of money in local terms, at considerable risk of being caught and

imprisoned, or killed. The traders from Addis are predominantly young Amhara men and

women. Most of their stories are of poverty after the Derg years, and the arduous trips to

and from Malka Jabdu allow them to make an income of up to a few hundred birr a

month. Some traders are former soldiers. The smaller traders would buy a few suits and

dresses and layer them, wearing them on the train back to Addis in the 30 to 40 degree

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10

For a discussion of the legal Zambian market in used clothing, including a description of
the US, European and Canadian ends of the transactions, see Hansen 1994.

heat. The wealthier ones could buy several full bundles, and would hire teams of workers

to throw the camouflaged bundles on and off the train at the various customs checkpoints

between Dire Dawa and Addis. They would then re-sell the clothing at the large Addis

markets, at a profit of 200 or 300 birr per bundle (after their travel costs, but not including

the series of porters along the way. Porters in Hurso and elsewhere would generally be

paid two birr for carrying a bundle from the truck to the platform, watching it until the

train arrived, and loading it on the train). If traders are caught, their goods are seized, as

well as their camels or trucks if they are the Djibouti-side traders, and they may be

imprisoned. The risk of getting caught, according to my informants, was about one in

three.

There is considerable solidarity between the local population and the traders,

whether big or small, Somali or Oromo or Amhara. Nor is there much resistance to

paying a two birr tax per bundle to the municipal government, elected from among the

community. Within this domain, the significant line of social cleavage is not class,

ethnicity, or gender, but between a central government and populations that perceive

themselves to be exploited[11]. If customs officers are seen, traders will be warned by local

people or by other traders - normally their competitors. (It does occasionally happen that

the larger traders will inform on each other to Customs officials.) On a few occasions I

witnessed the seizure of small bundles. The traders, mostly women at the small trade

level, were standing by the side of the road sobbing, their entire savings having

disappeared with the goods. My fellow passengers on the truck were somber, shaking

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[11] Clan and personal contacts remain important along the route to and from Djibouti.

their heads, and when we arrived at our destination they shouted and chased another truck about to leave, warning them of Customs agents ahead. When I visited the town in 1998 I was told about a recent violent confrontation between customs officials and the population around Malka Jabdu, after the officials had attempted to close the market—which was not illegal in itself— outright, after a quantity of goods had been seized. Traders invent new ways of circumventing customs officials through masquerading themselves or their goods, and through developing new routes.

Historically, it was an exciting, if risky, game against the government. Now, however, the game is less fun, in part because the rules are unclear. People are perplexed at the enthusiasm which the new government is exhibiting in attempting to eradicate a trade in a useful commodity. Before, they said, Customs officials would stay at a post for several years and you could come to an agreement with them. Now, young soldiers are posted at the checkpoints, and they will not take any bribes, out of fear of punishment by their military superiors.

One man selling piles of loose clothing in Malka Jabdu was formerly a successful smuggler. He had lost 40,000 birr (about US$5,500) in one night, and was starting again from scratch. This man attributed his former success to the supernatural knowledge (*'ilmi baadhil*) which he had attained through his discipleship to a holy man and his strict observance of Islamic law and custom. He was caught and lost his savings when he strayed from the true way. When I asked him whether smuggling was not *haram*, forbidden, because it was stealing taxes from the state, he became angry:

No! It is the government which is doing what is *haram*! If they want to collect

taxes, let them set up a station on the border and collect a reasonable amount.

Here they are setting up a post on a small road between this village and the city,

and are oppressing us. It is simply about their wanting to show their power over

small and weak people, and *this* is *haram*!


It would be hard to improve on the local analysis of the stakes and the reasons for

the current crackdown. There is no domestic industry which is being protected by the

crackdown, and financially this trade is of far less importance to the state than the trade in

*chat*, coffee, or livestock. All of these, it must be said, are also under investigation and

reform, but the vehemence of the attack on contraband clothing, often from Salvation

Army or Goodwill stores in Europe and North America, seems disproportionate,

particularly considering the importance of this trade to survival in the area. It makes more

sense if seen in light of the benefits that can be obtained by customs officials from bribes.

The amounts are considerable and extend all the way up the customs bureaucracy in the

case of *chat* but are insignificant from used clothes. There is thus little incentive for

officials to establish agreements with smugglers at the risk of losing their position, or in

the case of young soldiers, facing military justice. It also makes sense in the context of the

history of cross-border trade in the Somali-populated border areas of Ethiopia, where

visible efforts to assert control over borders and populations are an essential component

of the dynamic of the state itself.

**Survival, Politics, and the Language of Development**

"The owner must fight for his property"            Muusa Omar's *gabay*


"I am asking you - what are you going to do for us?"    Ali Yusuf's history


The main point is to help each other. To talk is fine, but let's get to the main point.

You see our problems with your own eyes, as an eyewitness - they don't need

much explanation.                                         Haawa Omar


The newly arriving returnees discussed in the previous chapter recounted their

experiences in terms of survival and made appeals for assistance based on human

solidarity and compassion. They did not offer political interpretations of their histories,

nor did they criticize the Ethiopian state. Their use of the "depoliticizing discourse of

development", to use Ferguson's terms, nevertheless appeared to have a political goal:

establishing citizenship-based claims on the Ethiopian state by demonstrating patriotism

("It is good to be back in our motherland") and willingness to reframe a political history

of civil war and forced migration as a common problem of poverty. In contrast, Hurso

residents' explanatory narratives are almost exclusively political and lay the blame for the

past and current suffering of the community on the Ethiopian state. Yet as we have seen,

attitudes towards the Ethiopian state are ambivalent. Hurso residents' demands for

restitution can best be interpreted as attempts to establish the same citizenship rights that

returnees appeared to seek through a deliberately apolitical rhetoric of suffering and

common humanity. The final section of this chapter and the discussion of women's

development projects in Chapter Six explore some of the ways in which impoverished

and politically marginalized Somali communities deploy the depoliticizing discourse of

development to achieve both material and political goals. The changing ways in which

Hurso residents define a decent life support Ferguson's and other critics' (Escobar 1995;

Nandy 1997) contention that "development" can represent the appropriation of suffering

and the colonization of minds. The demand for and acceptance of development projects

by communities such as Hurso likewise provide an opening for increased state and aid

agency presence and influence. However, demands for "development" are also a way for

marginalized communities such as Hurso to establish claims on the state without directly

confronting state power, and to enlist national and international development agencies'

support for these ostensibly apolitical claims for human development. The difference

between development discourse in Hurso and the neoliberal populism of "community

participation" as a euphemism for cost recovery and deliberate erosion of the state (Bond

2000; Bond and Zandamela 2001; Gershman and Irwin 2000)[12] lies in Hurso residents'

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12

Humanitarian agencies focus on meeting immediate survival needs and many
development NGOs emphasize community empowerment. However, the impact of their
actions has been strongly shaped by the structural adjustment policies (SAPs) many
developing countries were required to implement since the 1980s in order to qualify for
World Bank and International Monetary Fund assistance. These adjustment policies
sought to "stabilize" and "adjust" national economies by encouraging trade liberalization,
currency and economic deregulation, and decreased fiscal deficits. An important aspect
of SAPs was an emphasis on "reforming" the state, primarily through decreasing the size
of the public sector, privatizing public services, and recovering costs of services such as
health care, education and water through imposing user fees. While the principal stated
objectives were fiscal and occasionally administrative (encouraging accountability,
transparency etc), the underlying and often explicit ideology was that the state should be

recognition of "development" as a way of conducting politics.

Current and former residents of Hurso see the encroachment of the state into their

lives in historical, political, and pragmatic terms. My criticism of "development" as an

imposed Western model was greeted by most Hurso residents with impatient dismissal.

Yes, I was told, there is plenty of corruption, abuse, and ineptitude of which we are well

aware, but we *want* schools, clinics, and a water supply. These material components of

"development" were now integral to their notion of what constitutes a decent human life.

Villagers admitted that they no longer had the skills – or, more importantly, the desire –

---

involved as little as possible in the running of an economy and social services because the
market could do it more efficiently ( Glover 1991; Kim et al 2000). "Community
participation" was widely promoted, but in practice it generally meant simply "user fees"
and thus undermined rather than strengthened communities' ability to make claims on the
state. Protection of the social sector has been official World Bank policy for SAPs since
the early 1990s (influenced by the publication in 1987 of UNICEF's "*Adjustment With a
Human Face*" and widespread opposition, including "IMF riots" (Seddon and Walton
1994), in developing countries) and many states have tried to protect social sector
spending in the face of worsening economic conditions (Chandiwana et al 2000;
Nougtara 2000; Yepes 2000). However, "cost recovery" and user fees continue to be
imposed even on poor populations and individuals (Bijlmakers et al 1998; Bond and
Zandamela 2001). These mechanisms of "taming the state" and building "sound"
macroeconomic structures are no longer presented in the same sentence as "community
participation" in most publications and this form of "community participation" is no
longer praised for being morally uplifting as well as efficient even by the Bank. Yet the
World Bank continues to identify an entitlement or rights-based perspective on services
such as health care or water as a problem that needs to be overcome: "... work is still
needed with political leaders in some national governments to move away from the
concept of free water for all... Promote increased capital cost recovery from users. An
upfront cash contribution based on their willingness-to-pay is required from users to
demonstrate demand and develop community capacity to administer funds and tariffs.
Ensure 100% recovery of operation and maintenance costs..."(World  Bank, 'Sourcebook
on Community Driven Development in the Africa Region: Community Action Programs,'
Annex 2, quoted in Bond and Zandamela 2001:5) . Until the intervention of US Congress
in the summer of 2001 the Bank continued to impose individual cost recovery for primary
health care as a condition for debt relief, even for such highly indebted poor countries as
Mozambique.

to live off the land. What was wanted, contrary to the predictions of "post-development"

writers (Escobar 1995; Rahnema 1997), was not less development, but more; not less

integration into the state, but more. The reasons for wanting more links to the state are

pragmatic. In interviews I inquired about the larger context of relations between people

living in the Somali Region (together with their regional government) and the Ethiopian

state. My respondents stressed the importance of the clause in the new constitution

permitting secession as a last resort. In the current circumstances, most people believe

that both union with Somalia and outright independence (the goal of the Ogaden National

Liberation Front) are decidedly inferior to active participation in the new Ethiopian

federation. Rather than simply reflecting the "colonization of minds" (Nandy 1997) by

development discourse and the state, these Somali views and actions seem to express the

simultaneous pursuit of multiple strategies to decrease economic and political

vulnerability. However, as the changing Hurso discourse on basic human needs

demonstrates, it may not be easy to opt out of new ways of thinking about identity,

survival, and what constitutes a decent human life.

Concretely, "development" in Hurso means both economic independence, to be

attained, ideally, through getting the farmlands, and a combination of standard

development and relief programmes. These include health care, water, education, Food

For Work, and Children's Villages - childcare and nutrition demonstration projects many

families had experienced in the refugee camps or resettlement communities. Some

respondents went so far as to say, in their responses to my queries, that "we don't know

how to feed our children", and that people needed "to be taught how to be self-

sufficient". These recitations of development rhetoric were, however, infrequent.

Criticisms by Hurso respondents of these same programmes were sharp. Two current

projects in particular were described with scepticism. One was the proposed resettlement

of "the 58 poorest families, selected by the community" (as the Dutch sponsoring agency

put it) to the nearby community of Halcho, where each family would be given a parcel of

land to farm. According to the destitute landless farmers who were going to be resettled,

Halcho needed extensive and expensive irrigation systems involving the drilling of deep

wells. They wondered what they were supposed to eat in the meantime. The second was a

microcredit scheme where poor women were loaned 500 birr in order to set up a small

business. Microcredit schemes were a great idea, said the women who had been involved

in the project, but there were a number of basic problems with this project. The market

was saturated with petty traders in milk and vegetables. There was no accessible market

for other goods at the moment. Cash, especially this small a sum, was problematic. In

Hurso, as in other poor Somali communities, there is tremendous social pressure against

refusing outright requests for financial assistance. If it were known that you had received

500 birr, then relatives and neighbours would approach you to repay small loans they had

made to you, or to ask you to "lend" them money to take a sick child to the hospital, or to

buy the day's *chat*, or to cover the rent of their house in Ganda Hurso so their family

would not be evicted. In short, the money would soon be gone. No, I was told, either the

participants in such a project should get enough money to start up a proper business right

away – so they could invest the money immediately and not have tempting amounts of

cash lying around – or they should get livestock. For example, I was told, some returnees

had been given a cash handout of about 200 birr at the time of an earlier repatriation in

1991, while other returnees had been given a couple of goats. Those who got the goats

were ultimately better off than those who got the cash. Best of all, of course, would be

land.

I returned to Hurso in the summer of 1998. The UNICEF water project that had

been ceremoniously inaugurated just as I left in 1996 was still functioning. Over a dozen

jobs had been created around the maintenance of the solar pump, the reservoir, and the

various taps, partially compensating for the jobs lost by water carriers made redundant by

the project. The town's restaurant and a couple of the shops had electricity, and there

were rumours of phone service in the coming months. The nomads were starting to use

the shops and the village as a trading and stocking centre, thus decreasing the economic

dependence of the village on the military base and the now precarious contraband

business. There was a new and more effective government in place, both at the district

and at the regional level. The mood of the community was noticeably more positive, and

the references to the loss of the farmlands were noticeably less frequent. As two people

told me, *"Hurso waa meel imminka"* - "Now Hurso is Someplace". With more ties to the

state and to the regional economy, the autonomy of the villagers was decreasing, and the

presence of the state and development agencies was increasing. However, the possibilities

for survival and for a "decent human life" were also increasing, ever so slightly. Other

economic options were slowly becoming available, although the majority of the

population was no better off.

The shops, water and electricity offered at least the possibility of direct material

benefits to the community. However, the opening of additional ways of making claims on the state was perhaps as important - the claim for justice was no longer the only framework for establishing enforceable networks of rights and obligations between the community and the state. While almost everyone insisted vehemently that their expropriated lands must be returned, many also expressed doubt that this would happen. "We don't believe [that we will get the lands back], but we hope." Although villagers were still forbidden, officially, to build houses and to plant anything, the existence of the water project was a sign of the government's recognition of the legitimacy of Hurso village. Ethiopian law requires that settlements of a certain size be provided with water, but there are many communities in Ethiopia without it. The fact that a major water project, with international and government funding and involvement, had been established at Hurso was an implicit acknowledgment of the legitimacy of Hurso's existence and hence, at least in principle, of its history. It was also a significant investment that would make it more difficult to expel the residents. Finally, since the project was funded by UNICEF, this important agency was now a potential ally in prosecuting Hurso's claims for "development", if not restitution. A water supply system, electricity, schools and other goods typically included under the rubric of "development" imply both material and political ties to the state. Once these ties are established and mutually recognized, they can be used by either partner. If justice was not to be immediately forthcoming for Hurso residents, at least some minimal security of livelihood seemed to be developing. The community could continue to use the new, "apolitical", development-based ties to the state for pressing their political claims.

**Conclusion**

Reflecting on the first five post-apartheid years in a black township, South African

Mzwanele Mayekiso (1996:266-7) writes:

> What of the psychological differences between now and five or ten years
>
> ago? There is, without doubt, pride in our right to vote, our new citizenship, our
>
> potential to shape our country politically and economically. There is also a
>
> widespread belief that with democracy, our lives will ultimately change for the
>
> better....Not even periodic warnings by the highest ANC [African National
>
> Congress] leaders can dampen people's spirits for what is reasonably within
>
> grasp, namely, the basic goods denied so long under apartheid capitalism.
>
> And here is a warning: *without* economic improvement that we can
>
> witness in our daily lives, faith in government will wane. Cynicism will breed,
>
> apathy will become widespread, internecine fighting will increase, and social
>
> unrest will reemerge on a wide scale. Without access to skills development, job
>
> creation, better education, and primary health care, comrades will feel increasingly
>
> desperate and become increasingly angry.

Far from wanting immediate handouts, the people of Hurso expected that

"development" should lead to a sustainable and decent livelihood. They considered that

the state was essential for this to occur. The ultimate goals are justice and restitution, but

survival is the immediate imperative. In order to arrive, once again, at a decent life, *nolol*

*adaaminiimo,* it is necessary to have avenues through which to press claims. Politics –

local, regional, national, and international – are the arena for pressing these claims. The

principal vehicle is political and legal representation, hence the importance of telling the

story of dispossession and its implied remedy, restitution. "Development" provides an

additional rhetorical strategy through which to diversify the range of groups and

individuals on whom one could make justice- or compassion- or rights-based claims.

There are risks inherent in such strategies, because the previously oppressive state is

being invited to engage with the community again. But an interpretation of the reality of

Hurso must take into account the limited options available to the community as well as

the sophisticated understanding its residents have of their history and current situation.

Critics who simply dismiss "development" as neo-colonialism and appeal to a

romanticized vision of a self-sufficient, communitarian, stateless past may ultimately

have the same impact as the neoliberal populists advocating "self help", "community

participation" and continued erosion of the state instead of equitable provision of public

goods. Observers who interpret these experiences and forms of self-awareness primarily

in terms of individual trauma and loss are even less faithful to the perceptions, goals,

rhetoric, and life-worlds of these people.

# PART THREE

# KINSHIP, POLITICS AND GENDER

## Chapter Five

## KINSHIP, GENDER, AND CHILD SURVIVAL

Some scholars have challenged the importance, or even the relevance, of kinship

and clan for understanding current social practice among Somali, in part in reaction to

simplistic portrayals of clan in media coverage of the Somali civil war (Besteman 1996;

Kapteijns 1994). The structures, meanings, and practices of kinship can be taken for

granted in "normal" circumstances, allowing increased attention to other sources of

identity (e.g. gender, class, occupation, citizenship) and social networks other than those

based directly on kinship. However, the survival of Somali individuals and communities

with whom I worked depended on a constant re-creation and re-enactment of social

networks which have kinship as the fundamental model. In this chapter I discuss two

cases related to women's and child survival. These cases highlight the importance and the

fragility of kinship networks, emphasizing the significance for subsistence of matrilateral

ties, especially those among women. They also reveal the importance of gender and the

centrality of women's kin and non-kin networks for family survival under conditions of

extreme social or economic threat. In contrast, medical services and medical decisions

play minor roles in the two accounts presented here.

**Child survival: Gender, love, duty and "health" in a kin-based system**

A central thesis of this dissertation is that a medical or psychiatric formulation of

the experience of forced migration–"the refugee experience"–misses the key issues at

stake for the Somali communities and individuals with whom I worked. A medical

formulation misses key issues even in the problems often thought to be iconic of

international health, namely child survival and malnutrition. No proponent of child

survival interventions would argue that targeted medical interventions are the sole

determinant of child survival and wellbeing. However, the scarcity of resources available

for health care – let alone generalized poverty reduction – has led to a triaging that

effectively keeps non-targeted approaches and broader pro-poor social policies

permanently on a back burner. This prioritization of selective vertical programmes is

reinforced by the political appeal for both donors and national leaders of measurable,

accountable, and photogenic campaigns such as immunizing or distributing Vitamin A

capsules to innocent children. Several authors have criticized the "child survival" or

"selective primary health care" approach ever since it was proposed in the 1980s (e.g.

Banerji 1988; Werner and Sanders 1997; Wiener 1988). Judith Justice reviews "The

Politics of Child Survival", noting

> the frequent shifts and increasingly narrowing focus in international
>
> priorities...[S]ince the 1980s health priorities have moved from primary health
>
> care, to child survival, to child immunization, to the eradication of polio by the
>
> year 2000.  (Justice 2000:33)

She quotes Wiener's critique of child immunization campaigns in comparison to the

Primary Health Care vision articulated in the 1978 Alma Ata Declaration calling for

"Health for All by the Year 2000":

> PHC was crystallized as an approach at a time when there was wide agreement

that the causes of poverty were non-natural and that social justice was a requisite

for health. UNICEF locates health action wholly outside the realm of

socioeconomic rights and responsibilities. Appropriate technologies have become

a substitute for social transformation. The Children's Revolution is a minimal

package in the face of the failure of parents to achieve a revolution in the power

relations determining health. (Wiener 1988:965, quoted in Justice 2000:28)

The increasingly narrow operational focus of child survival interventions is

accompanied by an increasingly narrow and bio-technical conceptualization of relevant

research questions. A laudable concern to save lives quickly may, in the long run, lead to

increased poverty, malnutrition and mortality because structural issues are neglected. This

chapter aims to reinsert some of the critical contextual determinants of child survival into

the conceptual framework within which both research and action are undertaken.

This section explores some of the ways in which decisions regarding child welfare

are made. I argue that access to resources through kinship and gender, and local

constructions of "love" (je'ayl) and "duty" or obligation (hil, waajib) are much more

important determinants of Somali child survival than existing "Maternal and Child

Health" (MCH) programmes. Research approaches based on "health seeking behaviour"

would miss these social and cultural issues unless they were grounded in social and

cultural analysis rather than focussing on factors facilitating or inhibiting the use of

allopathic health care services.

## Child survival: decision making, culture, and mother love

An important topic in the medical anthropology literature has been the process of

seeking health care, and one recurrent finding has been that individuals seldom manage

their own health care without the input of significant others. Rather, deciding whether

someone is sick, who is sick, and what–if anything–should be done about it, is often a

collective endeavour involving immediate and extended family, neighbours, specialists,

and other interested parties (Helander 1990; Janzen 1978; Kleinman 1980; Nichter and

Nichter 1996). This contrasts with other research approaches to "health seeking

behaviour", which often focus on the individual and his or her health-related "beliefs and

practices". The Health Belief Model articulates the premises of this approach (Rosenstock

1974; for a critical review see Good 1994:36-52).

Helander (1990) argues that the process of managing health care among Somali in

Somalia involves discussion and negotiation among the adults of the household, and that

a decision to contact an allopathic practitioner is strongly shaped by the existence and

quality of personal relations with the practitioner in question, (which may include the

positive or negative influence of agnatic or affinal ties), perceptions of indebtedness, and

the reputation of the practitioner or even the physical condition of the clinic:

> Others complain over the visibly low standard of health posts and that leaking
>
> roofs and cracking walls do not help to gain patients' confidence. "Everything
>
> they have there is expired", as one man phrased it. (Helander 1990:130)

However, Helander stresses the importance of situating a "cultural" interpretation of the

process of seeking health care in a structural and political analysis of the primary health

care system in Somalia. Such a structural analysis would include the demands and

implications of changing donor priorities (Justice 1986, 2000), the professional demands

and priorities of practitioners, and the implications of such infrastructural factors as

distance, roads, and the impact of weather.

Infant health and child survival programmes appear to be somewhere in between

the individual-oriented "health seeking behaviour" approach and the wider, "therapy

managing group" (Janzen 1978) approach. It is assumed that the sick person–an infant or

child–does not manage her own health care. Most infant health programmes in

developing countries are directed at other decision makers, specifically, mothers. Indeed,

many programmes to provide or to teach about health care to infants and children in

developing countries are called "Maternal and Child Health" programmes[1]. Occasionally,

the role of other individuals such as the grandmother is noted. Nevertheless, the mother-

infant dyad is central. In fact, the mother-infant dyad is assumed to be the central

relationship of the woman who is the mother. This assumption means that, in fact, MCH

programmes are much more individually oriented than they appear - the mother is

assumed to be more or less free of other, possibly conflicting, social obligations, and free

to act on behalf of her infant. Taking other individuals into account reflects an awareness

that decision making may not be exclusively the mother's domain, but the relationship to

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[1]

In line with Justice's (2000) list of narrowing international health priorities (from Health
for All to the Eradication of Polio by the year 2000), the dominant approach to child
health care has shifted from Maternal and Child Health (MCH) to Integrated Management
of Childhood Illnesses (IMCI) in the six years since my first fieldwork.

the infant is again privileged.

The two cases discussed in this chapter suggest that the role of "mother" – a woman who is responsible for the day to day care and welfare of a child – is critical, precisely because it is not obvious that an infant's wellbeing or even survival is the central concern of a community. An infant has to compete with other individuals and groups who have established relationships, claims, and obligations. These existing claims are very difficult to put aside in favour of an infant. The mother also has other relationships and obligations, some of which remain more important than the one with a new infant. However, she at least has a socially sanctioned space for privileging this newborn. In the first case, Amina's story, the infant is almost invisible: the story of his survival is the story of his mother's negotiating kinship ties in order to secure subsistence goods for herself and through her, for her son. The second case, Safia's story, is different, because the mother, Dehabo, had died in childbirth. Safia's story highlights some of the claims and conflicts that are implicit in Amina's account. Both cases reveal differences between official ideologies and actual practices[2]. However, although both cases in this chapter support the importance of kinship and mothers for child survival, in neither case was the problem of survival–of the mother or of the child–formulated in terms of health

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[2]

Such differences are also examined in Helander's (1990) paper, where one woman told the anthropologist that if her husband was not home and her child was ill, then she would just sit there until her child died. Given that women make and follow through on independent decisions all the time, Helander argued that her claim was clearly exaggerated, but that it did reveal cultural norms of male decisiveness and relative, or at least official, female dependence.

care, or even of health.

**Amina: "It's not good for our name."**

Amina is a 29 year old Isaaq woman who was born and now lives in Dire Dawa.

Both of her parents were Isaaq, her father from the Arap clan and her mother from the

'Idagalle. Her husband was also Arap, hence so are her children. She has been a refugee

three times. The first move occurred in 1977, when she went to stay with her aunt in

Hargeisa in order to escape the Ogaden War and subsequent Red Terror in Dire Dawa. In

1988, when she was 18 with an infant son, she fled again, during the protracted bombing

of Hargeisa by the Siyaad Barre government forces. She eventually made it back to Dire

Dawa, but left again for Djibouti because of political and family insecurity in Dire Dawa.

I will return to her descriptions of her "refugee experiences" in Chapter Eight. Here I

focus on what she identifies as one of the worst periods of her life, a stay of about two

months in the village of her husband's father's second wife during the 1988 flight from

Hargeisa to Ethiopia. The combination of a massive influx of refugees into the area

around this village, kinship- and clanship-based hierarchies of obligation, poverty, and

"trouble between the wives" resulted in her progressive marginalization in the family of

her father-in-law's second wife, but with an unexpected resolution that reveals the

complex interplay of gender, kinship, and clanship.

Amina:

> We walked and found a village. My baby started crying. One
>
> woman's baby died. People said "You are many, we can't feed you. Also,

if people come then others will come. Our houses are small. You can't

stay here." We said we would stay outside. We found some camel milk.

We stayed two days. The third night and morning we walked, and got to

Billigubelle, an Arap village. The family of the second wife of my father-

in-law lived there. My father-in-law said "I'll stay with my wife, and you

can stay in the village. It's not my responsibility." This was not the mother

or family of my husband Fuaad.

When I got to the village I found my husband [from whom I had

become separated in the flight from Hargeisa some four days before]. He

asked, "Where's my mother?" I replied, "I don't know." "Where's my

father?" "With his wife." He said "I'll go look for my mother on the road

back to Hargeisa, I'll start again. You stay here." He gave me two bottles

of gas and some carton to sleep on and said he'd come back. He had no

money - we'd spent it all on rations in Hargeisa [when we thought the city

would be besieged but we wouldn't have to leave.]

Several hours after he left, I found my mother-in-law. She asked,

"Where's my son?" "Gone to look for you." "Where's my husband?"

"With his wife."

She asked, "And you, did you eat anything?" I said no. She got

angry and went to buy milk for me. She was angry because her husband

was with his wife, and there was trouble between the wives.

My husband came back and said there was relief available in

Ethiopia, between Harshin and Hartisheik, and that refugees should go

there to get things. I said I would stay with the wife of my father-in-law.

Not with my husband's mother, she had gone to Harshin.

Just prior to this part of her life history, Amina had described the bombing of Hargeisa

and her flight out of the city. It was only when she began to describe her stay at

Billigubelle that Amina began to specify, repeatedly, the kin and clan connections

between herself and various interlocutors. The precarious position of a woman vis-à-vis

her husband's relatives, especially if her husband is not physically present, is made clear.

Amina suggests that she would have more solid claims on her husband's matrilateral kin:

she emphasizes that this was not the village of her husband's mother. The claims she and

her son make are based on clan. Because her son is Arap, he can make claims on the

Arap. The second wife of her father-in-law is likely to see her personal obligations

towards Amina as tenuous at best, but it is this second wife who controls the household

resources. Furthermore, the relationship between the wives is repeatedly characterized as

problematic, although the details and reasons for this "trouble" are never specified.

Although most men whom I interviewed in the course of my fieldwork insisted that

Somali men adhere to the Islamic injunctions not to remarry unless resources permit and

to treat all wives equally, most women insisted that this was the exception and not the

rule. The representatives of "the clan", who might and ultimately did insist on support for

Amina and her son, are men, who are largely absent from the day to day operations of the

household. The situation is further complicated by the large influx of refugees into the

area, as the introduction to Amina's narrative shows.

> Then they started to make trouble for me, because there were
> problems between the mother of my husband and the other wives. They
> started not to give milk, to take my things - there were lots of problems. I
> stayed about one month and fifteen days. It was a very bad month. The
> women started to say they had no milk for the baby. But they had many
> camels. My father-in-law was there, but it's the women who are
> responsible. I couldn't even get a toothstick. If I said I needed to go to the
> toilet, could they take care of the baby, they said "If you want to go, take
> your baby with you." It was one month and fifteen days, two months or so,
> [that I stayed there].
>
> Also, I had another problem. My sisters, they had all left Hargeisa
> and fled [during the shelling], and I was worried. Are they dead? Where
> are they? This village was an Arap village but a different subclan from
> ours. I didn't want to ask, because our clan and this clan are different. So if
> you ask, "How is my sister?", they will ask, "What clan?" If you tell them,
> they will say "We don't know."

Again, Amina's narrative indicates that both kinship and clanship are at play in

determining what kinds of support are available to an individual. She is anxious to learn

what happened to her own kinswomen but is afraid to ask, because she perceives this

information to be a politically problematic resource given the situation of civil war based

on clan lines (loosely, Isaaq versus Daarood). Even though the kinswomen in question

are patrilateral relatives, hence in the same clan of the same clan family, Amina was so

convinced that the situation warranted retrenchment to a more tightly obligated level of

sub-clan loyalty that she did not even ask. Her prediction that the answer to any questions

would be "We don't know" suggests that the risk she perceived was not of any direct

harm, but rather suspicion and silence, which might further attenuate the perceived

legitimacy of her own survival claims on this village.

> The wife of my father-in-law said "I'll give you a bottle [of milk
>
> for the baby] in the morning." The baby had grown big, and they gave one
>
> bottle a day. From eight in the morning until night - nothing. He cried and
>
> cried. I also ate nothing in the morning. When I told my father-in-law what
>
> was happening, he said there was no milk. There were people who knew
>
> my father, from Dire Dawa, and I went to them and they gave me milk.
>
> My husband came back. I got angry and said "It's the first time we
>
> come here, as refugees, and my little boy will die of hunger!" My husband
>
> argued with my father-in-law. My father-in-law said the problem was that
>
> there weren't any bottles or containers to give to Amina. So my husband
>
> said "OK, if there's a problem with bowls I'll get you some." He said,
>
> "Here's a bowl for Amina," and gave me some soap and a toothstick. The
>
> bowl had been repaired with a wooden plug. In the morning, he left for

[the refugee camp at] Harshin [to get resources and news], and they broke

the bowl. They took my soap and when I asked where it was, they said a

mouse took it! The soap was in a small handbag, and I asked if the mouse

could open the handbag to get the soap. There was also a kilo of sugar that

was gone. I started crying and crying...

The next morning I left the house and met a man - my mother's

cousin. I told him I was 'Aasha's daughter; had he seen my aunt? He said

yes, she was at Camabokor [refugee camp]. He was 'Idagalle [my

mother's clan]. I decided to go to Camabokor.

That evening Fuaad came. I said I wanted to go to Camabokor. He

asked why I didn't want to stay with his father's family. I told him. He got

angry, and asked his father why they had done such things. Then he went

back to Harshin.

Then I told Fuaad's half-sister that I wanted to go to my aunt in

Camabokor.... We were going to walk. The distance between the village

and Camabokor was like the distance between Dire Dawa and Babile

[about 100 km]....I took some water. I took some milk....She gave me a

little millet, without milk or sugar. I ate that and started walking.

I started at eight in the morning, and walked until two in the

afternoon. I thought I had gone far but I hadn't. Then I heard the sound of

a vehicle. I listened. I heard it pass me but I didn't see it. Then I started

walking on the road. I heard people talking - "We'll stop here. The engine

is overheated, we'll wait a bit." In the vehicle there were some people

wounded in the war, soldiers [of the Somali National Movement (SNM),

the Isaaq resistance army against the Siyaad Barre regime]. I came up and

said "Hello, how are you," and I started to give the baby some water. The

water had gotten hot. They asked me, "What do you want?" I said I was

going to Camharshin. Camharshin is next to Camabokor. Then someone

recognized me and said, "Ah! You are the wife of Fuaad! Why did you

leave your husband? You should go back to your husband!" I said, "It's

not that. I want to find my aunt," and I started to cry. They said "She's

crying, she's young," and they decided to take me to my aunt. Then I left

with them. We took the vehicle.

I went with them to Camharshin. I looked for someone I knew and

finally found a girl, a friend of my sister. I said, "Hi! How are you? I'm

hungry, can you give me something to eat?" She said, "There's nothing to

eat here. We've already finished breakfast." She gave me a few shillings.

The baby had started to cut his teeth. I bought him two biscuits. I asked

her, where was Camabokor? She said there were vehicles going there.

There were many vehicles, about 50, working. I asked if they can take me

to Camabokor. They kept going. I found a man who was praying and sat

down beside him. When he finished I told him, "My husband has died. I

have a small baby. Can you take me to Camabokor?" He said ok, and he

took me to Camabokor.

In her interactions with the soldiers and with people at Camharshin, Amina relies on a

general identity as a vulnerable woman. She is appealing not to clan or kinship

obligations, but rather to the claims that the weak have on the strong, claims which are

important in Islam and which also have a place in Somali life and Somali politics. These

appeals to pity reflect the alternative form of honour recognized by Somali, *sharaf*, the

honour of the weak but also the pure. Lewis (1961:256-265) discusses the power of the

powerless, singling out the (rare) use of witchcraft as an example, and Samatar's list of

types of curse includes *inkaar*, the curse of the weak against the misuse of power by the

strong (Samatar 1982:79). This portion of the narrative also indicates the importance of

information as a source of power and potential risk: Amina does not identify her actual

destination, nor the person she is looking for, but rather requests assistance to reach a

settlement near the refugee camp. As the concluding section of this narrative shows,

gender, matrilateral kinship, and international agencies are important, but clanship takes

precedence when it is openly invoked.


> When I got there, I asked people if they knew my aunt, my
>
> mother's sister. Someone took me to her house and said "There's a woman
>
> who wants to stay with you."
>
> "Who is it?"
>
> "I think it's Amina."
>
> They started to cry, my aunt and my grandmother. I also started to
>
> cry and I told them the whole story of what had happened to me, the

village and my husband's family.

I said "I'm hungry." They brought tea, milk, lots of milk for my

baby, and rice, and other things. The next day they started to build me a

house next to theirs. They said that the UNHCR people would come and

give me things, a card and other things.

They said, "You stay here. Don't go back to the family of your husband."

They said they would give me money to buy bread, meat, and so

on. I couldn't wait for it to be cooked and started eating a tomato. I got

sick and started vomiting.

Then my husband returned to the village and asked where I was.

They said, "The day before yesterday she said she was going to

Camabokor." He got angry and said, "Why have you done this? I'm the

one who's responsible for her, and she wants to go with the family of her

mother's sisters. I told her to say with me - why have you done this to my

wife and my son?"

Then his brother came to Camabokor and asked a woman if she

knew my aunt, and it was she. He asked if she knew where Amina was.

She recognized him and came to me and said "Someone wants to talk to

you." When she said "Someone wants to talk to you," I didn't want to see

him. I was afraid. I was afraid he would take me back.

He asked me, "Why did you come here?" I said I had a lot of

trouble in the village. They would cook and not give me anything to eat. I

was hungry, and my baby was hungry. That was why I came here. He said

"All the people are poor, and there are lots of problems. Also, this is the

place of the 'Idagalle. You must not stay with the 'Idagalle. If people hear

that your baby is Arap, if they hear that your baby who is Arap was hungry

and did not get milk [from the Arap], this is a bad thing. And that it is the

'Idagalle who are giving him food, it's not good for us, for our name. You

will come with me, back to Billigubelle. I will give you everything."

And my aunt said "Go with him. I'll keep in touch and I'll give

you money to buy things for yourself and your baby." And I left with him.


Amina's second stay in Billigubelle was much more secure than the first, in part

because of her husband's physical presence, in part because of the threat to Arap honour

that her journey to Camabokor, and the possibility of its repetition, represented.

Eventually she did return to Dire Dawa with her husband, to stay initially with

one of her brothers and then with her husband's aunt. This aunt made it clear, again

through the distribution of household resources, that Amina and her children, now two,

were not welcome. Amina left Dire Dawa again to join her mother in Djibouti. Her

husband did not accompany her, in part because of the risks incurred by a Somali or other

Muslim man merely by being out on the streets, or on the train. Amina had last seen her

mother just before the flight from Hargeisa - they had been separated during the bombing

and her mother had gone to Djibouti. Life in Djibouti was very difficult because her

mother was poor and Amina's husband did not support his family. Her younger child

developed malnutrition and was hospitalized. Eventually one of Amina's sisters, who had

first gone to Saudi Arabia and subsequently obtained refugee status in a European

country, offered to help her sister by fostering Amina's two children. Amina sees this as a

very generous act on her sister's part and as good for her children, but she feels very sad

and guilty at not being present to offer the emotional nurturing that she feels only a

mother can provide.

Amina now lives with her mother and other maternal relatives in Dire Dawa in the

remains of a house that was mostly destroyed by a bomb in one of the periods of conflict

during the Derg years . She sees her husband intermittently when he passes through Dire

Dawa, but he offers no economic support to her or their four children born after Amina's

return to Dire Dawa from Djibouti. Her mother sells butter in one of Dire Dawa's many

small markets, earning a few birr on a good day. Amina's paternal half-siblings support

her financially, but the resources are shared among the household members, as well as

with other relatives who still reside in and around Camabokor refugee camp in the east.

The money is managed and distributed by Amina's mother. Amina feels that her mother's

apparent miserliness, which precludes her remaining children from attending school, is

justified by the fact that she must share what resources come into the household among

the many relatives mentioned above.

Amina and her children have survived primarily because of informal, matrilateral

women's networks (especially her mother, full sister, and mother's sisters), and financial

support from patrilateral half-brothers and sisters. Amina's paternal half-siblings are in

fact substantially contributing to the survival of many of her–but not their–relatives. Her

husband and his relatives supported Amina either when their clan honour was threatened, or, in the case of her husband and her mother-in-law, when personal ties of affection were involved. These affective ties were at times highly significant, both materially and emotionally, but they were ultimately less reliable than her own kin ties. Among her own relatives, it was women in the mother's line to whom she has most consistently turned and with whom she lives, even though paternal relatives are currently providing for her material subsistence. While she speaks with gratitude of the refugee camps and UNHCR staff, the refugee relief system has been a peripheral player in her life.

Amina's story reveals some of the ways in which kinship and gender can interact to facilitate or threaten child survival. A case where a mother died in childbirth also reveals some these interactions, in the unravelling of social and economic support.

**Where There Is No Mother: Gender, Love and Duty in a Somali Child's Survival**

In sub-Saharan Africa, maternal mortality is between 500 and 800 deaths per 100,000 live births, compared to five to twenty per 100,000 in developed countries (Graham and Campbell 1992). What happens to the children of these mothers? What can the stories of these infants tell us about the wider contexts in which mother-child relations are embedded? Safia, an Ethiopian Somali girl whose mother died in childbirth, is one such infant. The course of Safia's first months shows how kinship and gender roles can be played out.

In this discussion I focus initially on what happened to Safia in the months after her mother died, and how some of the decisions related to her welfare were made. Safia's

survival is neither a matter of simple "mother love", nor a straightforward Somali kinship

calculus. Still less is it a function of child survival programmes, which have almost

entirely bypassed her - in part, perhaps, because there is no mother. I then turn to a

broader look at the implications of maternal death–and of motherhood, matrilateral

kinship, and women's networks–for family survival under conditions of extreme

deprivation.

Dehabo's husband had lost his land to the Hurso military base. At the time of his

wife's death, he was supporting his family by gathering firewood. Dehabo delivered her

tenth child, Safia, in November, 1995, in Hurso. She had been anemic during the

pregnancy and hemorrhaged after childbirth at home, dying while her husband was trying

to collect funds from villagers to transport her to the hospital in Dire Dawa. Her husband

was left with five children after the death of his wife - five others had died while the

family were refugees in Djibouti. After Dehabo's death, only his twelve- year old son

stayed with him; the other four children were taken in by various paternal relatives. The

death of Dehabo and the subsequent fosterage of four of his five surviving children made

painfully obvious how limited the actual "employment income" of such a man was. The

family had survived because of credit and meal-by-meal support from other women, a

network that a man could not access.

At this point, the first decision regarding Safia's future had to be made. In Somali

society, children become part of their father's clan and remain so. A woman keeps her

own clan affiliation when she marries, with attenuation but not extinction of rights and

obligations vis à vis her kin group. The children, however, are unquestionably in the

father's and not the mother's clan. Somali society places overwhelming importance on

relationship in the father's line, expressed both in terms of duty to assist and support

relatives on the father's side, and of a strong sense of belonging (Lewis 1961, 1994).

However, as Helander (1988) has discussed, there is also a complementary set of

relationships, primarily though not exclusively matrilateral, that are characterized by

tenderness, affection, and duty identified as imposed by Islam rather than by kinship. In

the case of behaviour and attitudes related to infants and children it is the relatives in the

mother's line that are critical, as Safia's story demonstrates. The paradigmatic relationship

for matrilateral kinship is the relationship of love and care (*illaali*) assumed to be natural

between a mother and her child. The love (*je 'ayl*) that is expected, and expressed, among

matrilateral kin is an extension throughout the kinship network of the normative

emotional valence of this mother-child relationship.

Safia's father was left with five children after the death of his wife. The death of

the mother made clear a fundamental assumption in Somali society: men cannot raise

young children alone.  According to local accounts of the teachings of Islam, fathers are

required to provide for their families, but care of infants is a mother's responsibility. In

case of a mother's death, the next best caregiver for a child, according to both Somali and

Oromo informants, is the mother's mother, and then other close relatives of the mother,

and thirdly relatives of the father. Other options are not in the usual repertoire - it is

almost unheard of for Somalis to give infants up for adoption, although fosterage is very

common, as Bedel's story in chapter three illustrates. Children may also be raised by a

grandmother. This was the case of one middle-class family I knew. The mother, who was

living in Djibouti, sent her two year old child to her own mother in Dire Dawa for several

months, as she was busy with work and a new infant. Poor children, or children whose

mothers have died, may be raised by other relatives to adulthood. The father remains

officially responsible, but my informants told me that if he tried to interfere with marriage

plans, for example, it would arouse great disapproval from both the relatives and the

wider community. In general the will of the woman who had raised the child would take

precedence. However, it was considered highly unlikely for the father to interfere if

poverty had forced him to send his children to be fostered, although he could legitimately

expect assistance from these children when they were able to offer it.

In Safia's case, there were no surviving maternal relatives. Instead, the children

were taken to live with various women relatives on the father's side, in Safia's case with

the mother of one of her father's paternal half-brothers. In Safia's case as in those of the

other children, women made the decision to take in a child. One of the father's sisters

took charge of coordinating this process. However, although actual decisions and the

control of resources related to infant and family survival at the household level are in the

domain of women, a man's social–if not physical–presence is essential for both the

woman and the child to have any social identity. (Properly divorced women and widowed

women, as well as their children, retain a social identity within their community.) In the

case of these children, a man's approval, if not his resources, was necessary for the

women's decisions to be socially acceptable and realizable.

The maternal relatives who would normally assume responsibility for an orphaned

child are not obligated by explicit kinship or clanship rules to take care of such an infant,

but are rather considered to be the ones who will "love" (*je 'ayl*, *wey je 'eshahay* - she

loves) the child more. This expectation of "love" can be seen as a different kind of

obligation, one which is less formally circumscribed and that is likely to be experienced

as natural and spontaneous rather than as a matter of duty and respect. The fact that the

behaviours expected out of "love" are less explicitly articulated than those required by

kinship and "duty" can lead to opposing scenarios. On the one hand, there is no formal

minimum standard which can be publicly demanded and enforced. On the other hand, it is

more difficult for someone to claim that because they have adhered to a formal minimum

standard, therefore they have fully met their kinship obligations. Individuals expected to

"love" others are expected to demonstrate "care" (*ilaalin*), that is, to pay attention to

small details as well as showing that they have met the basic physical and social needs, as

these are locally perceived, of the person in their care. People who do not do this are

considered "careless" and are subject to a range of reactions, from mild disapproval to

gossip. This expectation of "love" is not limited to maternal relatives, or even to

individuals who would be expected to "love" someone because of their relationship.

Individuals who take on a relationship where "love" is considered appropriate or who

undertake tasks requiring assiduous attention are also subject to censure for

"carelessness". This is the message implied in 'Aasha's statement, quoted in the last

chapter, that "[the military] are not careful of the land; it becomes hyena's houses."

However, the degree of censure is greatest for relationships–such as the mother-child

relationship–where "love" and kinship are felt to be indissociable.

     The uncle into whose home Safia was brought now had both the principal

responsibility and the authority for decisions in her regard. Thus far, the story is perfectly

consistent with the official model of Somali society. However, subsequent events

demonstrated that ideology and practice do not neatly coincide. The limitations of the

security offered to an infant by "duty", understood as such, became evident in the case of

the absence of one or more individuals who would assume that they should "naturally"

love this infant - and who would be expected by others to demonstrate the care that

indicates love. This is not to say that Safia's relatives did not feel or demonstrate

affection towards her. They did. But the absence of kinship ties in the mother's line

meant that the additional protection, for Safia, of duty – a duty not perceived as

obligation which it is possible to spell out, but rather a duty experienced as natural and

spontaneous, a taken-for-granted ideology akin to North American "mother-love" – was

lacking. This lack did not lead to her near-death by justifying or allowing deliberate or

semi-deliberate neglect. Rather, the absence of a socially sanctioned relationship in which

a core responsibility was to privilege the needs of an infant  influenced the way in which

countless small decisions were made. These decisions may not have been directly related

to Safia at the time, but they nevertheless affected the course of her first months.

Safia's first months were briefly described as follows by her grandmother and her

uncle's sister. After her mother died and before she was taken to her uncle's home she

was left virtually unattended, because there was no woman to care for her.  After her

grandmother took her, Safia was given goat's milk. She was reasonably well for about six

weeks but then suffered episodes of diarrhea and cough. The diarrhea was treated with

sugar water, but Safia did not improve, getting sicker and thinner over the weeks.  When I

first met Safia she was being fed black tea, a local remedy for diarrhea. She was not given

milk because it was felt that she was not hungry, and because it was believed that this

would worsen her vomiting and diarrhea. Safia had never been given formula because it

was too expensive. A week later, she was still coughing, vomiting, and having bouts of

diarrhea, and the family was waiting for her to die.

The women in the household and other nearby kinswomen were unable to do

anything more for Safia. Care and treatment decisions had been made by the

grandmother, with some help from the uncle's twelve-year old daughter. The

grandmother was old and sick herself; the adolescent girl was in school. The

"grandmother", furthermore, was not her father's mother, but rather she was the mother

of her father's half-brother Yusuf. When my Somali friends heard this information , they

nodded knowingly. This additional attenuation of kinship ties between Safia and her

caregiver represented a legitimate diminution of responsibility for Safia's welfare.

Yusuf's wife did not involve herself in Safia's care. She had a household and several of

her own children to look after. In addition, she was responsible for the orphaned son of

another of her husband's brothers. This child had earlier been taken in for care by her

husband. The uncle's wife's position was further influenced by the logic of kinship,

which shapes the network of behaviour/ thought/emotion. Safia was the female child of

her husband's half-brother, therefore very distant from herself, whether according to the

line of duty or the line of affection.

The absence of a mother meant that the usually taken-for-granted process of

taking care of an infant had instead to be based on many individual decisions about who

should do what, and at what cost to other obligations. The formal model of a patrilineal

society with mandatory obligations of mutual assistance, described and defended to me

by countless Somali respondents, proved to be important in practice. The term "Somali

patrilineal kinship system" implies an ideology as well as a code of rights and

obligations. Both the ideology and the code of obligations contain rules for dealing with

such classic Somali legal problems as deciding how much compensation to pay for what

offense. However, the problem of ensuring an infant's survival is not as clearly addressed

in these codes. The individuals involved had to come to their own conclusions about

which moral, affective and behavioural standards were relevant and should be followed.

The story of Safia is unusual as a "medical" story, in that "medical" decisions

played almost no part in the course of her early months of illness and malnutrition. The

key to ensuring her survival and well-being did not lie in making specific health-related

decisions, whether according to traditional or biomedical ideas about infant health and

nutrition. Rather, what was essential was (1) a man who would accept public

accountability for her welfare, and (2) one or more women who considered themselves

bound to her by both "duty" and "love". Further, these women would have to have access

to informal networks for material support. Thus, the survival of a Somali child is in part

dependent on the actions and decisions of men, without whose consent and authority both

the economic and social position of a child are tenuous. However, a child's welfare is

ultimately determined by the domestic decisions and actions of women. The logic of

kinship influences the actions of both, through a script of honour and duty for relatives in

the father's line, and through a script of affection for relatives in the mother's line. In

Safia's case, the threat to survival was exacerbated by the absence of matrilateral

relatives. However, the obligations imposed on both matrilateral and patrilateral kin are

often insufficient to ensure child survival in destitute communities. Women's networks of

support are critical.

**Conclusion: Women, kinship and child survival in destitute Somali communities**

Informal women's networks are important to family survival, particularly in

destitute communities. Women's obligations towards their children – clearly a matter of

"kinship" – provide the moral ground for claiming assistance from non-kin with whom

one has gender and age-based associations and friendships. Women help each other by

virtue of their relationships with one another. The lack of an acceptable basis for

relationship between Amina and her affines was revealed as the central threat to her son's

survival. In Hurso, I was repeatedly told that without a mother, young children will die

or, at best, be neglected. The death of Safia's mother, Dehabo, illustrates what happens to

a motherless family that is landless, jobless, and without livestock. It disintegrates.

While Dehabo was also engaged in gathering and selling firewood, it was not the

additional few birr a week that she earned that enabled two adults and five children to

survive together, but rather her access to informal and formal women's networks. Men as

well as women can claim assistance from wealthier relatives, as Amina's story shows.

However, in Hurso most people do not have wealthier relatives, and in this situation it is

women's networks that are critical to family and child survival. Women, I was told, have

access to credit that men do not. Women can go to a shop and purchase subsistence goods

"on credit", where both the purchaser and the vendor know that the bill will likely never be paid. Women can ask for or offer each other milk or food for children, but this transaction occurs only through the mother, and only infrequently. Children can go to other women's houses and, given ties of kinship or friendship between the mothers, they will be offered a snack or a meal.

If a child is orphaned the circumstances are much more difficult. In these cases, relatives should take the child in, but with older children in destitute communities it often happens that the child becomes a street child, begging meals or occasionally staying with one or another family for short periods of time. There were two such older children in Hurso during my fieldwork, and several others who had in fact been taken in by relatives despite the economic burden that this represented.

The mutual support that allows destitute families to survive is based largely on women's relationships with each other. This assistance may be more readily offered than the apparently "stronger" obligations on relatives, because it is claimed and offered on a case by case basis: a cup of milk, an egg, credit for a bit of bread or pasta, a few birr. It is "voluntary"in that it is not encoded in the conventions and expectations of matri- and patrilateral kinship – expectations that all adults could readily spell out to me. Such voluntary assistance does not, on the surface, imply a permanent relationship of potential obligation, as does kinship. What needs to be underlined is that these individually minute instances of assistance by women to women who are friends or neighbours can be cumulatively more significant to the domestic economy than the formal assistance that is claimed through either kinship or clanship.

These informal women's networks sometimes overlap with formal women's

associations, and through these associations, child survival begins a discursive move into

the traditionally male domain of public politics. The next chapter examines women,

politics, and development.

## WOMEN, POLITICS AND DEVELOPMENT

### Women, Men, and Politics

Women in traditional Somali societies exercised considerable economic and physical independence, the latter being a corollary of herding small livestock in a nomadic polygynous society where men traveled with the camels (Lewis 1961). Women have also been economically central to Somali societies, controlling important aspects of trade (Little 1994). Women were involved in political activities such as war preparations, goading warriors on with praise or shame songs, as both Hurso residents and the famous Dire Dawa poet Hurre told me. However, formal politics – the domain of the *shir* or elders council, of *xeer* or customary law, and of the politically crucial epic poems or *gabay* – was a male domain. With the increasing importance of "development" and of negotiations with the Ethiopian state to implement everything from land rights to handicrafts projects, this boundary between men and women is being eroded in several ways. This chapter addresses some of these changes.

Clan remains a powerful force in Somali politics and in providing a framework within which the experience of violence and dislocation can be situated (Lewis 1994). At the level of regional and national politics in Ethiopia, Somali politicians consistently avoid any mention of clan in communications that are not limited to Somali audiences, as well as in political speeches aimed primarily at Somalis but attempting to shape Somali National Region political organization. Instead, they appeal to the rhetoric of

"development" and against "corruption" (Interview with Sultan Ibrahim Hussein, The Reporter, November 26, 1997:7,10). While such appeals were often heard cynically by my informants, they were also made in good faith by community-level workers affiliated with local and international NGOs, as well as by young members of political parties such as the Ethiopian Somali Democratic League (ESDL). The latter expressed a desire to transcend the divisiveness of clan in a rhetoric that was reminiscent of that reported for the Somali intellectuals trying to construct a national ethnic identity for Somalis, transcending clan divisions, in the period around Somali independence in 1960 (Lewis 1982). These young Ethiopian politicians nevertheless acknowledged that clan was important and that achieving a perceived balance of power among the various clans in regional government was critical.

Women, I was told by both women and men, do not talk about politics to men, in public. The experience of elite women such as Fawzia Aden, former Somali diplomat and now UN official, contradicts this statement. Women do talk about politics, and, increasingly, do so in the public domain. This is the case not only for Western-educated women, whose experience in government and development organizations has offered numerous opportunities for participating in development and liberal feminist rhetoric. Women such as Sa'ada Aw Adem, living traditional veiled lives with no direct participation in "Western" organizations, have also become increasingly engaged in the debates about both development and politics. In Sa'ada's case, this engagement has been manifested through establishing women's organizations explicitly aimed at supporting the creation of a functioning Somali regional government. In Hurso, the shape of a women's

association has been strongly influenced by one woman's experience of the Ogaden War,

especially political education by the cadres of the Western Somali Liberation Front.

Interviews with men and women about men, women, and politics brought out

both stereotypes and play around gender and gender-specific roles. Interviews with

Western-educated urban Somalis, such as Fawzia Aden and Mahamud Imid, also show

how similarly a woman (Fawzia) and a man (Mahamud) engage with Marxist and liberal

feminist ideas and rhetoric. My participation in Dire Dawa women's groups and

interviews with Hurso women's group members revealed how these women

experimented with new ideas about women's involvement in politics, women's

traditional networks, and ways of explaining changing circumstances for women and their

communities. These associations demonstrate that "development" and the reconfiguration

of the Ethiopian state affect kin- and gender-based networks of rights and obligations

related to survival. Development rhetoric and development projects provide a new way

for some women to carve out an enlarged repertoire of survival strategies and new

domains of increased power through engaging development agencies and the state

(including local government structures, which only partially reflect traditional power

structures in the community). The women do not directly engage, still less confront,

traditional elders' councils, but rather approach new structures such as political parties

and local officials of both regional and national governments. Clan remains an important

dimension of Somali politics in Ethiopia and is used by both men and women in

explanatory accounts and implicitly, as Amina's story in the previous chapter

demonstrates. However, Somali women in Ethiopia are expressing political interest and

aspirations primarily by engaging the political process not through clanship, but through

the rhetorics of development and Somali nationalism.

As the discussion of the dispossession of Hurso shows, development and national

politics also provide a way for the bureaucracy of the Ethiopian state and development

agencies to permeate "traditional" Somali social and cultural structures and processes.

The ways in which this mutual engagement is played out are not the same across

communities or across women's associations, even in the geographically restricted area of

Dire Dawa and Hurso. Class – both literally in the case of the proletarianization of Hurso

residents, and as an index of the resources to which an individual or group has real or

potential access – emerges as an important factor for interpreting the significance of

formal and informal women's networks, as well as the shift towards a more openly

political shape for women's action.

Interview with Fawzia Aden, former Somali diplomat. At the time of this interview in her

home in Addis, Fawzia was an official with the UN Economic Commission on Africa's

programme on women:

> Christina: Do women care [about politics]? Are women as political as
>
> men?
>
> Fawzia: I would say women are more political, but they don't have the
>
> chances because they think about their husband....They want to construct;
>
> men want to destroy. So I would say this is more political, more advanced.
>
> Christina: How can they...what do they do, women? How can they express

themselves?

Fawzia: The only way that...the only thing they can do now is make sure that the family is tied together, the family survives, the family doesn't get destroyed. As you see now *(gesturing at people in her living room)*, all these people, they're not even my relatives. They're friends or distant, distant relatives. Or neighbours that I'm helping so that they survive. Men don't do that. ..If you study, if you do a study on the roles of women in the world, in conflict, in the Somalia case...Just check, just go to London and check how many women are there bringing families out: men, children, women relatives. And check how many men are bringing [families over]. It's twenty to one. Or fifty to one, you would say. Men get mentally destroyed easily. They get confused, whether it's biological or whatever it is, I don't know. They just...women are too strong for all these problems. It's like...I would say, like a computer. You know, the computer. You just, you put...you know, you type something and it gets all that information. You can print something. Also, while you are doing this, you can make changes and do the spell check. Well, you're doing so many things at the same time. Men cannot do all that at the same time. Women are...you'll see, here in the [refugee] camps...She's running to get water and then the child cries and she goes and helps him first and then somebody calls and she rushes and she's cooking and she's washing. She's doing so many things at the same time. At the same time writing to her relatives, sending

messages. He thinks about one thing at a time.

Interview with Mahamud Imid, officer of the ESDL (Ethiopian Somali Democratic

League - then the governing party of the Somali National Region) in Dire Dawa:

Mahamud: Well, we have a very big social problem. We have this refugee

culture. There was a lot of displacement in this region because of war, and

this displacement has created a cultural crisis.

Christina: For instance?

Mahamud: The work discipline is a very big problem here.

Professionalism is a very big problem here. People are...there is this

tendency of living day by day...Displacement, yes. This is the biggest

problem. Especially in the male population. The male population has

become a parasite on the female population. The female population,

because of, maybe because of biological reasons, or the maternity reason

and natural reasons, they tend to settle. They have children, they are the

breadwinners of the family. And usually they need a male figure in the

house and because of this many, most you could say, a lot of the male

population has developed this parasite nature on the female population.

And they meet a different woman in a different town, spend about two

weeks, go to another, spend about two months, and they're always

dependent on the female. [This is a problem] in the towns. The nomads

live their normal way of living, the farmers do the same. But the town...

Christina: Are there many women who are active in ESDL?

Mahamud: Yes, the women are supporters of ESDL. Women are against

war.

Christina: Traditionally, from what I've read about Somali politics,

officially it's the men that do the politics and women don't...

Mahamud: Yes. Well, politically...no, I mean it's not politics itself. [But]

that's not the end. The end is what the women are doing. Who gets, who is

moving the economic system - that determines everything. It has to be

recognized. It has to be recognized.


Mahamud is here adducing women's presumed pacifism to the ESDL, which presented a

platform of peace, reconciliation, and development, in implied and often explicit contrast

to armed groups within the Somali area, such as the ONLF - the Ogaden National

Liberation Front[1]. Furthermore, Mahamud is rhetorically situating the ESDL in

opposition to radical Oromo groups such as the OLF (Oromo Liberation Front), in the

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[1]

The ONLF was held responsible for numerous violent incidents in the area, both by
government and international agencies and, in some cases, by Somali - including
Ogaadeen Somali. It was also one of the main parties representing the interests of the
Ogaadeen clan, against what it saw as the thinly veiled efforts of the traditional clan
enemy, the Isaaq, to take over the government of the Somali National Region. The Isaaq
and other clans, in turn, stressed that " the Ogaden", the triangular eastern portion of
Ethiopia jutting into the area between northern and southern Somalia, was not the whole
of the Somali National Region, known as Region 5 at the time of my fieldwork, and
furthermore that the Ogaaden clan was not the majority group, despite its claims to the
contrary.

context of a political struggle for control of the important city of Dire Dawa[2]. Mahamud

is expressing a view about women and women's "natural" tendencies which combines

conventional Somali ideas, liberal modernist ideas, and, as his subsequent remarks

indicate, Marxist ideas. He is deploying these ideas about women in a political polemic.

While this interview excerpt is, in one sense, typical of a "traditional" role of women in

Somali politics as emblems of honour (Samatar 1982), it is also introducing new ways of

imagining gender, survival and politics - as well as honour. These new ideas emerge, in

part, from the discourses and practices of development and state formation, the larger

arena in which much local politics was now being played out.

While Mahamud was using these ideas about gender, politics, peace, and progress

rhetorically, there was no reason to think that he was making them up solely for my

benefit. These same ideas were naturalized in Fawzia's narrative. Motherhood and the

family, understood both relationally and biologically, are key tropes for this

naturalization of women's presumed political positions, among educated Somali in

Ethiopia as well as in the West (di Leonardo 1991; Lamphere et al 1997; Ortner and

Whitehead 1981; Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974). Tropes of motherhood are also used to

attempt to invert gender-based power relations. One Dire Dawa grandmother put it this

way: *"Nin iyo beybi waa isku mid."* (Men and babies are the same.)

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2

In 1995-1996, it was undecided whether this key city would belong to the Oromo
National Region (Region 4), the Somali National Region (Region 5), or become an
autonomous region like the cities of Addis Ababa and Harar. Ultimately, it became an
autonomous region, but in this interview – which was primarily about the ESDL and not
about women – its fate was still under negotiation.

These narratives are much more stereotyped and ideological than most day to day

conversations and interactions, which did not usually juxtapose politics, the economic

importance of women, and perceptions of men as helpless though politically and socially

essential babies, quite so directly. They could fruitfully be explored in terms of the gender

games that form one important context for women's and men's actions and discourses,

including a rich corpus of both men's and women's poetry. However, they also reveal –

albeit in an exaggerated way – the actual roles of men and women in some displaced or

impoverished communities, where the survival activities of women are crucial but where

the traditional political activities of men have been marginalized because of the

marginalization of the community itself. This shift in visibility of male and female roles

has been identified as potentially problematic among refugees resettled in the West,

because the increased visibility and importance of women is thought to lead to a

perception of threat among men, and to an increased risk of depression among men and

domestic violence towards women (Ager 1993; Desjarlais et al 1995).

Here, however, I wish to emphasize the connections made even in these stylized

accounts among the family and politics, economics and politics, and the domestic and

"public" spheres. These connections are evident in the two cases related to child survival

discussed in the previous chapter, although these cases involve kin, clan, and gender-

based networks more than explicitly "political" processes. Formal women's associations,

*jim'aed (jam'ayed, jim'ayed)* can be overtly political. Their overlap with informal

women's networks, the emphasis placed by some associations on "development", the

centrality of child survival and maternal-child health to development projects at the local

level, and the importance of development rhetoric in national politics in Ethiopia provide

a chain of reasoning and practice through which traditionally "female" concerns, such as

child care, enter the public, political, and traditionally "male" domain.

## Sharing Survival, Sharing Death: Women's Associations

The three formal women's associations discussed in this chapter draw on Somali

traditions of both kinship and contract. I return to the importance of contract after

describing the women's associations. Kinship is reflected not in the women's

relationships themselves, which are based primarily on friendship and neighbourhood,

but in the centrality of the role of mother and the emotional and obligational implications

of this role. It is largely by virtue of being mothers that women can claim assistance from

each other through the informal networks which are institutionalized in *jim'aed*.

The importance of women's actions and informal women's networks becomes

apparent through stories such as those in the previous chapter about the consequences of

Dehabo's death and Amina's efforts to find a safe and secure place for herself and her

children. These informal networks sometimes overlap with formal women's associations,

*jim'aed*. I attended numerous meetings and celebrations (weddings and funerals) of two

*jim'aed* in Dire Dawa, and spoke on a number of occasions with members of one such

association in Hurso.

In Dire Dawa, the two women's associations were chaired by Sa'ada Aw Adem.

Sa'ada is a 57 year old woman, the daughter of a prominent sheikh and the wife of

Ibrahim Jama, a respected community member and long-term senior technical manager,

now retired, at the *Chemin de Fer Djibouto-Ethiopien*, the Djibouti-Addis railway .

Sa'ada was married as a teenager to Ibrahim, whom she saw for the first time on her

wedding day. They have raised seven children together, and now enjoy their retirement.

Ibrahim hosts a large group of elders every afternoon to discuss politics and current

affairs over *chat*. Sa'ada runs the household, and keeps track of current affairs through

television, talking to her husband and children, and the meetings of the two women's

associations which she chairs. Most days she stays at home, but goes to the market or to

visit friends when she wishes, although early in her marriage she was much more

restricted in her movements.

One of Sa'ada's daughters is in a *jim'aed* in Djibouti. These women, all

professionals or married to relatively wealthy men, contribute a substantial amount in

dues and have created a revolving fund, where every few months each member gets the

entire pot to spend as she chooses. The two women's associations Sa'ada chairs have

partially overlapping memberships, and partially overlapping functions. The first, which

has been in existence for years, is composed of about a dozen neighbourhood women

whose husbands worked for the railway. All the women are all Muslim and middle class,

but not all are Somali. Sa'ada refers to this group as her friends and neighbours. The

meetings of this *jim'aed* are primarily social. The women meet at one of the member's

homes at least once a week. The women get together in the midafternoon, drink tea and

soft drinks, chew a few small branches of *chat*, smoke sweet tobacco and burn incense,

and talk - about their children there or abroad, their husbands, business, politics. What

differentiates these gatherings from informal get-togethers of friends is that the women

decided to create a *jim'aed*, with dues of a few birr a week and an obligation to attend and contribute to defraying the costs of betrothals and weddings, funerals, and family crises such as illness that affect any of the members. The rule that was emphasized to me was the obligation to attend funerals, which is also the central rule of one of the most important Amhara social organizations, the burial association.

The second *jim'aed* is different. This one was created by Sa'ada and one or two other women in 1991 or 1992, with an explicitly political and Somali agenda. Sa'ada's sons were actively involved in the promotion of the ESDL. Although all of Sa'ada's and Ibrahim's children knew where their respective parents' clan territories were, Ibrahim in particular had downplayed clan in their upbringing, stressing instead the importance of a united Somali voice for securing any rights for Somalis in Ethiopia. In the excitement of this new possibility for regional self-government and full Somali participation in Ethiopian political and economic life, women such as Sa'ada felt that it was important for women to lend their support to the cause. They were not interested in being politicians themselves, playing instead the supportive role that Mahamud Imid describes. However, they were supportive of other women being or becoming directly and actively involved in all aspects of politics, including the trend, popular with both government and NGOs, of creating "women's NGOs" around various localities or development projects. Sa'ada and her friends decided to create a *jim'aed* that would follow the traditional pattern – dues, funeral and other life transition support, regular meetings to talk – but that would have as its membership women who were Somali, identified with the cause of Somali regional self-determination, and would offer financial or labour support to the activities of the

ESDL.

This second association usually met at Sa'ada's home, as most of the members were too poor to invite the group to their own home and offer tea, soft drinks, tobacco, and *chat*. The meetings were more formal, with Sa'ada's leadership more recognized. There was less of the easy camaraderie and conversation that characterized the meetings of women who had been friends for twenty or thirty years, and also fewer of the sharp arguments – often ended by the other women breaking into chanted prayer – that occasionally broke out in the first group's meetings. The meetings were more strained, more literally formal. However, for some of the women in this second *jim'aed*, the resources that they could draw on by virtue of their membership, in the event of illness, death, or other misfortune, were far more significant relative to their circumstances than for the women in the first group, who seemed – and in fact were – much more intimate. While this material and social support was likely more important to most members than the political dimension, some of the women emphasized the political solidarity and their own, new, political action as the central characteristic of this *jim'aed*.

In Hurso, the most visible *jim'aed* was chaired by Nafisa, a woman who had been involved in the activities of the Western Somali Liberation Front during the Ogaden War. She attributed her own activism to the experience of war. Specifically, Nafisa attributes her political activism to (1) political education by male WSLF cadres emphasizing the need for pan-Somali solidarity and encouraging the involvement of women cadres, and (2) episodes of harassment by Ethiopian authorities, including her own arrest and brief imprisonment with a group of men and women. Nafisa was very knowledgeable about

business, politics, and local cultural practices, and we discussed *zar* and *wadaado* spirit

possession at some length, but in her conversations with me she situated herself firmly in

a modernist, development-based, but politicized framework. This was particularly the

case when I tried to tape-record our conversations. It was Nafisa who spelled out the

needs of Hurso, mentioned in Chapter Four: to get the land, to achieve good health, to get

education. She and nine or ten other women of varying ages but generally under 50

(hence not among the elders such as 'Aasha and Halimo) met with me to explain the rules

of their *jim'aed*. These rules included a one or two birr weekly due, which hardly anyone

could ever afford, attending funerals in each others' families, and providing tea for

funerals, which they similarly could not do because they could not afford the teacups. In

addition to the rules and formal meetings, however, this group of women also offered that

they supported each other informally, as discussed above and in the previous chapter.

They helped each other with food, they met together to talk and sing and try to forget

their many pressing problems at least for a time.

They had also become a political lobby group. In 1996, the group was pressing for

a room and a small allowance from the village and district administration, so they could

at least have a place to meet. They stressed that women and women's issues were

important in the new Ethiopia. When I returned to Hurso in 1998, the *jim'aed* was still

active. The three meetings of the group immediately preceding my visit, separated by

several weeks, were all focused almost exclusively on politics and development activities:

how to contribute to replacing the district administration, debriefing after the

participation of some members in a colloquium on women's development, and thinking

about ways to approach the new, more favourably perceived district administration to develop proposals for development projects in which the *jim'aed* might be involved. Development, politics and local well-being were seen to be tightly interconnected. In Nafisa's view, the group is as much a political organization as anything else, even though the proposals that may eventually arise are likely to be in the depoliticized language of development.

The older women in the community, such as 'Aasha and Halimo, were more likely to state that women did not directly conduct politics. Even they, however, discussed it among themselves and participated along the lines of Sa'ada's Somali *jim'aed*. Halimo, for example, mentioned that they were discussing the possibility of a mass demonstration of the entire community - men, women, and children.

Formalizing informal women's networks through the rules of *jim'aed* is the equivalent, among women, of the contractual ties which men invoke in calling on the assistance of the politically most significant grouping in traditional Somali societies, the *diya*-paying group or *jilib*, as it was locally called[3]. While this group is based on both kinship and clanship, it is the dimension of contract, or customary law (*xeer*) which makes it binding and enforceable. Indeed, Lewis (1961) often glosses *xeer*, which most of my informants used to refer to tradition and law in general, as "contract". Thus, the move of women into the traditionally male domain of politics is occurring not only through the

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3

The word *jilib* literally means "joint" and can refer to any segment of a lineage. In Hurso, the word was generally used to refer to a sublineage with which men most closely identified, and was the closest reference to "*diya*-paying group" that I came across.

overtly political demands which the association is making in Hurso, but also through the

structure of the association itself. The *jim'aed* also draw on Ethiopian and modernist

models of mutual aid, as shown by the similarities with Ethiopian burial associations and

by the emphasis on "development". Women's associations allow the interplay and

critique of ideas about tradition and modernity, culture and politics, identity and survival.

In Hurso, association members discuss the irony of formal rules and membership

dues when there is insufficient cash among the members even to fulfill the minimal "rule"

of supplying tea for funerals. Nevertheless, the actions of formal and informal women's

networks can be critical to child and family survival, as demonstrated by the

consequences of a mother's death: the family is no longer able to access these networks,

and disintegrates. The experiences and narratives of the women in the Hurso *jim'aed*

demonstrate the imperative of continuing to pursue individually minute resources such as

a cup of milk, and the serious ramifications of being unable to do so.

There was nothing exotic or mysterious about their accounts, which were realist

and blunt, but which were also infused with irony and anger and sometimes with

resignation. The accounts of Hurso's history and the explanations of the *jim'aed*'s

activities that were offered to me were both highly emotional and highly political.

Emotion talk to me in general was a way for my interlocutors to comment on their life

situation, and not on their private psychological condition. It was also a way of

incorporating me – often seen as a representative of and potential emissary to "white

people" and the aid system – into the political manouevres through which they hoped to

have their dispossession both recognized and amended. When I told the *jim'aed* that I felt

heavy just hearing about their life situation, they demanded, "And how do you feel if you see this every day?" They were not inviting me to a private exploration of the feelings that might be caused by contemplating the possibility of seeing "this" – hunger, sickness, poverty, death – every day, but rather to the moral outrage and personal and political action that should follow if emotional distress were not to be irrelevant, at best.

In the context of landlessness and consequent destitution, both formal and informal networks of support are emptied of the material resources essential to their effective functioning. The association's structure, rules and ongoing meetings become, in part, signifiers of dispossession, while simultaneously offering at least the hope of increased security through a new shape for women's identity and collective action. The *jim'aed* holds the social memory of reciprocal rights and obligations formerly played out through a variety of kin and non-kin networks. It creates a framework for forging and maintaining ties through which moral, affective, and material claims can potentially be pursued, even when obligations cannot be met. The frequent repetition of the story of losing the farmlands was another of the few remaining ways to maintain collective identity and action, in a society and environment where individual survival depends on the effective functioning of social networks.

## Empowerment?

Economic and political changes over the previous decades and especially since the overthrow of the Derg regime have significantly affected Somali communities in Ethiopia. These communities and individuals have engaged dynamically with the

changing environment, actively participating in language games such as those around

development, national politics, and "women's empowerment". Both official and

unofficial discourses and ways of formulating experience and action in these

communities have changed as a result of this dynamic and creative engagement. In the

post-Mengistu Ethiopia, women as well as men are expressing a tentative opening to the

state and to development. Whether this opening represents a deliberate engagement with

a recognized Other, or the hegemony of the state and conventional modernist ideas about

everything from infant care to women's and men's "natural" tendencies in favour of

peace or war, remains to be seen. Nevertheless, the changing discourses among Somali

about basic human needs and appropriate forms of women's organization and practice are

not merely the expression of conventional modernist ideas and structures in Somali

words. The ways in which both "development" and the modern are reconfigured express

the strongly politicized and historicized vision of poverty and survival found in

communities such as Hurso, rather than the individualizing and dehistoricizing tendencies

of neoliberal development discourse. The longer term outcome of such engagement,

given the current economic and political inequality between Somali returnees, the state,

and development agencies, seems less likely to be an open exchange and mutual

transformation (and see Escobar 1995).

In Dire Dawa, one of the associations serves as an incipient political organization

through which women begin to enter the traditionally male domain of politics, in this

instance through joining in the excitement of a new Somali national region with full

rights and considerable autonomy, for the first time, in the Ethiopian state. Women such

as Sa'ada and her daughter, whose livelihoods are as secure as could be hoped for in the

insecure environment of the Horn, can experiment with this new form of women's action

as an expression of the increased options available to some women. Their engagement

with the state and with development ideology and practice may well represent authentic

"empowerment", as their livelihood does not, at this time, depend on the responses to this

action. They are free to engage or withdraw, and engagement currently increases the

range of political and material resources to which they have access. The situation in

Hurso is different.

The rhetoric of "empowerment" currently popular among development planners

and workers has often assumed that the entry of women into traditionally "male" domains

by definition "empowers" women, both through increasing the economic resources at

women's disposal and by raising the status of women relative to men, under the

assumption that participation in the public or political domain automatically conveys

increased status. Women in Development (WID) approaches in the 1970s accepted the·

basic tenets of modernization theory and sought to include projects for women. Liberal

feminist scholars subsequently proposed Women and Development (WAD) models,

which sought to incorporate women, without discrimination, into development activities.

Critics argue that both of these models reproduced the class inequalities in which both

women and men are situated (Mosse 1994; Parpart 1995; Rathgeber 1990; Simmons

1997) . Enterprises such as revolving credit schemes or the incorporation of women into

income-generating projects such as handicrafts or other micro-enterprises often lead not

to "empowerment", but to increased indebtedness and decreased material and social

security both for women, and for their families (Ackerly 1995; Holcombe 1995;

Huntington 1998; Kabeer 1994). These critics argued that with respect to gender, what

was important was not so much to examine women, as to examine gender and gender

roles. The third wave of international development approaches to gender, the Gender and

Development (GAD) approach, attempts to do this. Although attention to "gender" may

in the first instance mean examining the often invisible actions and organizations of

women – as this and the previous chapter have attempted to do – "women's work" must

then be re-situated in the social, political and economic contexts in which it is embedded

(Lamphere et al 1997b). The importance of inequality, and of class in its traditional

understanding of a relationship towards the means of production, are evident in the case

of Hurso women's associations.

As Hurso women begin to demand recognition and funding of their associations

and needs from the men of the community and its council as well as from local and

international development organizations, child survival begins a discursive move into the

domains of local politics, development, and the state. However, it remains dependent on

women and their kin and gender-based networks of support. In very poor communities

the survival of infants and entire families can be literally dependent on the informal non-

kin networks which individual women can mobilize, but informal women's networks in

such communities concretely represent access to micro credit at shops and, eventually, to

meal by meal claims on other equally poor women. Individual social class or wealth is

not necessarily indicative of the security of a given individual or family, because relatives

can be and are called on to assist. Hence, Amina's position is less precarious than her

own or her household resources would indicate, because her and her family's basic

survival is insured by her middle class paternal half-siblings. However, the post-war and

post-Derg situation of agropastoralists and especially cultivators in the Hurso area is

much more precarious, because the lands at Hurso were the principal wealth of much of

the entire clan. The engagement with the state and with development organizations and

models is largely a deliberate strategy by both women and men. It represents an attempt

to enlarge the web of potential resources in a situation where landlessness and

proletarianization have emptied traditional kin-based networks of the material resources

to which they formerly allowed access. Thus, the increased importance of informal

women's networks for family and child survival and the active engagement by the

population with the state are both an indicator of and an attempt to compensate for the

impoverishment of kin and clan based networks caused by the expropriation of land by

the state.

Through organizing themselves formally, women increase their visibility and

political power in the eyes of men, the state, and development organizations, but this is

occurring in a setting where food security and economic resources are precarious at best.

Hurso residents were more optimistic in 1998 than in 1996, in part because they had

established more visible links with the state and hence felt that their chances of getting

land or other resources had improved slightly, and in part because of a modest increase in

trade with local pastoralists, which benefited shopkeepers and their dependents. However,

unless the new forms of women's and communities' interactions with the state and the

development system lead to the effective transfer of resources to women and to the

communities in which they live, these models of "empowerment" will merely highlight

the lack of any significant power to mobilize resources for anything but bare survival,

while providing openings for increased state and other bureaucratic power in the face of

continuing impoverishment of the population. With the continued decline of contraband

and the absence of other labour opportunities for this landless population, the outlook for

the majority of the population is poor, despite the optimism of the rhetoric of

development, nation building, and women's empowerment.

The community is not indifferent to this situation. While I have argued that the

apparent "empowerment" of women vis-à-vis both men and the state may be in large part

only apparent, it is significant that the shifts towards the "modern" that are occurring in

this community are in the direction of increased politicization of "private" or domestic

matters, and not, for instance, in the direction of increased privatization of the roles and

responsibilities of individual mothers. As both Amina's and Safia's stories demonstrate,

child survival is not a private matter of the nuclear family, even in "traditional", kin-

based systems. The accounts of Hurso's history, of women's networks, and of the reality

facing most families situate insecurity, suffering and loss in multiple intersecting

contexts, most of them openly political. The meanings and practices around emotion,

suffering, and "trauma" expressed by these Somali in Ethiopia are largely part of this

same process of collective memory, creating, in the words of Jewsiewicki and Mudimbe

(1993:10), "a...code for retrieving memories, for making sense out of historical details in

direct relation to political legitimacy."

# PART FOUR

# MORAL WEBS

# Chapter Seven

## "WHERE IS A POOR MAN TO GET HAPPINESS?":

## EMOTION

It was Wittgenstein's argument that the statement "I am in pain" is not a declarative statement which seeks to describe a mental state; rather, it is a complaint.

Veena Das 1995:194

If you lose your land by force, if you see the government eating your land, if you are hungry - what do you feel?

Halimo Muusa, Hurso

*Dhibaataysan*: "they are having troubles/problems/hardship";

*Tabaalaysan*: "they are fatigued/exhausted with difficulty surviving/getting enough to eat".

Translations of "suffering" offered by Somalis in Canada and Ethiopia. "Suffering" does not occur in Khorshel's (1994) English-Somali Dictionary

## Emotions in anthropology

Most psychological research and much early psychological anthropology

approached emotions as individual, psychobiological states, subject to some degree of

cultural influence but basically pan-human at the core (e.g. Izard 1983). This approach to

emotion tends to understate, if not altogether miss, the importance of emotion in creating

systems of value, meaning, and action, including action that influences the experience

and evaluation of emotion itself ( Abu-Lughod 1986; Levy 1983; Lutz 1988; Lutz and

Abu-Lughod 1990; Lutz and White 1986; Rosaldo 1980, 1983, 1984). For example,

personal introspection and self-report would be one way of learning about a

fundamentally internal psychobiological state, yet the language of emotion available to an

individual to describe his or her internal states is itself dependent on social interaction

and the structures of power and sociability within a particular community (Abu-Lughod

and Lutz 1990:3).

In contrast to these approaches, Abu-Lughod and Lutz (1990) identify three

alternative strategies: relativizing, historicizing, and contextualizing emotion discourse.

Each of these approaches emphasizes difference and change over time and across

cultures, and stresses the implications of emotion and, especially, discourses about

emotion, for social behaviour and social relations. Lutz (1988, 1990), for example,

explores emotion as moral judgment among Ifaluk in Micronesia and as a commentary on

social relations among Americans. Emotion and cognition are not everywhere seen as

basically in conflict. Michele Rosaldo's (1980) work on *liget* (anger, passion) among

Ilongot in the Philippines shows that this category is central to Ilongot life, linking

domains such as kinship, agriculture, music, gender, and headhunting. She views

emotion as "embodied thought". Abu-Lughod's work (1986, 1990) challenges a

dichotomous view of emotion as either "authentic"–that is, internal and private–or merely

the public expression of sentiment, ritual, and conventional values.

Abu-Lughod and Lutz emphasize a focus on emotion discourse rather than on

emotion itself. Such an approach can facilitate studies such as those of Good and Good

(1988) and Jenkins (1991) on the role of the state in creating and reinforcing particular

discourses of emotion. In focusing on discourse, Abu-Lughod and Lutz argue that "the

reality of emotion is social, cultural, political, and historical, just as is its current location

in the psyche or the natural body, [and such an approach] show[s] clearly how discourses

on emotion and emotional discourses are commentaries on the practices essential to social

relations" (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990:18-19). This position has been criticized by

Desjarlais (1992:100-101):

> No doubt these orientations...help us to better understand the social and political
>
> contexts in which all emotional experience and expression seems embedded. But
>
> it strikes me that the above approaches discuss everything save what poetic
>
> discourses themselves seem to speak about: most commonly, profound
>
> experiences of grief, sadness, and pain...[I]t seems to me that unless we develop a
>
> way of talking about the relationship between cultural forms and emotional
>
> distress we will continue to skirt what seems to lie at the heart of poetic
>
> expressions of grief, sadness, and despair: namely, experiences of grief, sadness,

and pain.

In this chapter I discuss emotional expressivity and rhetorics of emotion among

Somalis in eastern Ethiopia, particularly in the community of Hurso. Emotion and

emotion talk evoke complex individual and collective memories that situate individual

and local community experience within, or in juxtaposition to, other realities: competing

powers such as the Ethiopian and other states, war, dispossession, and the precariousness

of survival in a harsh natural and political environment. Identity and political legitimacy

are particularly important themes arising in relation to experiences of war and dislocation.

They are manifested, in large part, through expressions of anger and passion and through

rhetorics of demoralization. In these communities, rhetorics of emotion are an important

political and survival strategy. They are also closely connected to individual experience.

While Somalis do not appear to have as collective a sense of self as some of Adams'

(1998) Tibetan respondents expressed[1], individual experience is shaped in close

interaction with collective responsibility and collective–especially lineage–identity.

In contrast to the literature on war trauma, in particular on Vietnam veterans,

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1

Using the notion of *karma* as explanation, Tibetan medical theory holds that past moral
actions of all sentient beings combine to create the possibility for a particular
physiological event: the incarnation of a particular sentient being. An individual is thus
literally composed, at the physical level, of his/her own past actions in relation to others
and the actions of other beings in relation to one another. Adams (1998) argues that such
a perception of selfhood offers a different reading of "human rights" than those of either
Western liberals or the Chinese state.

shame and guilt[2] were almost never expressed or alluded to in the stories I heard or

interactions I observed, and anxiety related to immediate and long term survival rather

than to traumatic memories (O'Brien 1998; Weathers et al 1995; and see Young

1995:199-223). Nor is the emotional life of these Somalis consistent with Stein's (1986)

model of the refugee experience, which draws on H.B.M Murphy and colleagues' (1955)

work on post-World War II refugees and displaced persons in Europe and on Keller's

(1975) application of disaster research models to refugee experience. According to these

models of the refugee experience, widespread distress is the norm both acutely and after a

decade or more: guilt, anxiety, depression, invulnerability (from having been through the

worst and survived) and aggressiveness (from displacement of survivor guilt onto others

and willingness to take risks arising from a sense of invulnerability) in the short term, and

apathy, resignation, an embittered and alienated existence ultimately. While expressions

of distress and narratives of anger and bitterness are widespread among Somali refugees

and returnees, they do not carry the pathological connotations that Stein's discussion of

refugee experience and behaviour stresses. Referring to the works edited by Murphy,

Stein (1986:11-12) writes:

> Anxiety, fear, frustration, and emotional disturbance appear, and often the refugee
>
> regresses to a more infantile state, loses his or her willpower, and becomes
>
> apathetic, helpless, or manic and aggressive. The refugee loses structure, the

---

[2] Neither survivor guilt nor guilt or shame over past actions

ability to coordinate, predict and expect, and his or her basic feelings of competence. Bakis writing in 1952 spoke of "D.P. Apathy" to describe camp conditions after World War II. In many of the camps in Pakistan, Southeast Asia and the Horn of Africa the behavior of today's refugees is only too reminiscent of that period.

Considered from the perspectives of individual experience, culture, and social organization rather than in the context of mental illness, emotional expression among displaced populations tells more complex stories. Individual experience is rich and variable. However, in the aftermath of war and displacement, these stories reveal, in particular, the importance of emotions of moral judgment (Taylor 1985; Young 1995:218-223) in creating community and political legitimacy. The moral emotions include anger (a perception of an unjustified attack on the self), shame (a self-judgment as unworthy before a specific moral audience) and guilt (a self-judgment as having attacked or harmed another without justification) (Young 1995:220-222). Among Hurso residents, the central emotion related to forced migration was anger, expressed on behalf of the community and thereby strengthening the moral ties among the members of that community.

**Individuals in moral webs: "You must accept who you are."**

My informants told me that, in theory, Somalis can make infinite claims on kin. As one man put it, "even if my brother is lazy and a criminal, if he asks me for food I

have to give it to him." However, individuals are also expected and encouraged to express

unwillingness to depend on kin and to demonstrate the capacity to avoid doing so. As the

examples in Chapter Five demonstrated, kinship and clanship do not necessarily mean

security: obligation is revealed as much more faltering and dependent on circumstance

than the accounts of ordinary Somalis might suggest. An emotional style of directness and

the ready expression of annoyance, laughter at absurdity, and indignation at perceived

injustice reinforce values of toughness, independence, honour, solidarity, perseverence,

perspicacity. Being *fariid*, or quick/smart/clever, is valued in both men and women. An

important dimension of being clever and tough is prudence, care, or attentiveness (Be

careful! - *Iska illaali* or *Iska jir*): to what one does, the conclusions drawn from evidence,

the preservation of options, and the expectations of others and of one's own actions. This

is expressed in many ways, including the expectation of "care" in love relationships as

discussed in Chapter Five, in proverbs or *mahmah*, and in terse allegorical stories. One

famous poet living in Dire Dawa, Hurre (Ousman Ibrahim Warsame), offered a number

of such stories teaching prudence:

A man heard a lion attacking one of his sheep, so he went out to investigate,

armed only with a stick. The lion ate the man *and* the sheep.


A man saw a cloud and ran home to get his family, saying "I see rain!" They

abandoned their well and their land to go to the cloud. When they got to the place,

there was nothing, and they were left with nothing.

A man went to rob a bank. He expected to get money, but he got a bullet instead.

In addition to the expression of toughness and independence, there is among Ethiopian Somali another register, characterized by tenderness, poignancy, and affection (Helander 1988; Lewis 1994). This register is visible in domestic interactions, which are frequently punctuated by arguments and reprimands but which also reveal emotional and physical intimacy, especially between mothers and their children, including adult children of both sexes. Safia's story in Chapter Five addressed this register of "love" (*je 'ayl*). It is visible in the easy silence, conversation and ready banter among groups of men or women friends, especially in the same age cohort. It is also visible in the reactions towards poetry. In Hurso, the young men would murmur the words to a poem chanted by Muusa Umar or Se'id, the best young poets in the village, while their eyes filled with tears. These poems were often political, in the classical tradition of *gabay*, but they might also be about camels—which this community reveres more as a cultural icon than because of their limited material presence in the community—and often about love. As among the Awlad 'Ali Bedouin—whose love poetry and its relation to tensions between tenderness and toughness, and social tensions based on gender and age, is discussed by Abu-Lughod (1986)—both the discourse of toughness and that of vulnerability and tenderness are equally authentic.

A forthright and direct public style and stoicism in the face of misfortune are characteristics which Somalis identify with pride. Sa'ada would often point out the loud wailing at Amhara funerals with disapproval, saying that it indicated a lack of faith

compared to the Somali, who weep in private because Allah made grief, but who

persevere in patient acceptance of the will of God. Other Ethiopians, particularly the

formerly dominant Amhara, identify the direct expression of rapidly changing

moods–from anger to camaraderie and back–as evidence that Somalis are insensitive,

demanding, and untrustworthy. Somalis said that on the contrary, it is a sign of honesty:

one day you may like someone, then they may anger you and you will fight. Similarly,

the custom, still widely practiced in rural areas, of giving a nickname to men according to

their most visible characteristic or deformity was explained to me as a way of both

showing and insisting that "you must accept who you are"[3].

Somalis do not assume that solidarity based on kinship, clanship, or Islam, nor

salient lines of differentiation such as gender or age, mean that individual differences of

temperament, interest, skill, or physique should be glossed over (Laitin 1977; Lewis

1961). The duty to fulfill kin-based obligations is independent, officially, of personal

feelings of liking or antipathy. The ties among friends, especially among the members of

a same-sex age cohort that grew up together, take on many of the obligatory

characteristics of kin or clan or *jim'aed* ties. Like the love and tenderness that are

assumed to occur naturally among matrilateral kin, these ties are seen as natural and

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[3]

 Some examples are "Preacher" - Wadaad, for a man with more education than most, and
who was also trying to "convert" people to family planning in his role as a health
promoter; "Koka" for a cripple or amputee, because he walks the way "Coca" in Coca-
cola is written in Amharic:    ; and in the case of former Somali dictator Siyaad Barre,
"Bigmouth" - Afweyni . One young man in Hurso was known by everyone as Dukurri.
This was in fact a nickname that referred to the aesthetically devalued blackness of his
skin.

voluntary, and not contractual. People who do not honour these "voluntary" ties are nevertheless subject to censure. However, maintaining relationships of reciprocity and obligation identified as "friendships" is not based on the continuous presence of mutual positive sentiment or agreement. I was often asked which of my siblings I liked best, or which my parents liked best, or which members of my Somali family in Dire Dawa I liked best. When I finally explained my discomfort and reticence, saying that I (am supposed to) love everyone equally, both Rosa and Sa'ada rolled their eyes. Rosa said that of course her mother likes this one better because she is more helpful, and that one because he is clever, and so forth. She held up her hand and asked, "Are these fingers all equal, the same? Of course not! Which one will you cut off?" A variety of personalities and skills in one's personal networks is as important as a range of options for ensuring survival. Conversely, the forms of moral web constructed and mobilized among my informants allow - indeed demand - space for individual moral agency and pragmatic initiative. Everyday interactions and explanatory narratives demonstrate this dynamic tension between individual idiosyncracy and moral agency on the one hand, and the importance of mutual obligation and moral webs on the other. These moral webs are active or potential networks of relationships based on obligation, shared experience, or affinity, mapped across a wide range of political and geographic landscapes. They are not static and cannot be understood except in terms of a dynamic tension among individuals and groups, and between the individual and various collectivities.

### Anger, relationships, and obligation

Another proverb states that the man who robs you and leaves you for dead won't

put you in the shade to keep you from getting sunstroke.

While the man who robs you and leaves you for dead should not be approached

for favours, anger and interpersonal violence do not necessarily imply the rupture of, or

even serious damage to, moral webs. In Hurso I observed a number of angry and

occasionally violent interactions among members of the cohort of young adult men with

whom I spent much of my time. One had part of his ear bitten off in an altercation with

another, who was said to be driven to distraction by worry over his livelihood, and who

also belonged to another political faction. The two nevertheless continued a civil, and

even cordial, relationship in other domains. Ahmed got a black  eye once in a fight over

honour, and again maintained civil, if strained, ties with his opponent. Mahamed and

Dukurri, who chewed *chat* together most afternoons, were arguing intensely one

afternoon, exchanging epithets of "thief" and "liar". Dukurri had asked Mahamed for a

loan to pay his rent, and Mahamed, a health worker, said he did not have the money

because he had not received his salary. They were not feigning their anger, nor their near-

desperation at how to survive. But their subsequent friendly interactions were not  merely

formal. Hurso villagers could clearly articulate their anger at their dispossession and the

presence of guards hired to keep them off their lands. At the same time, they would chew

*chat* with these same guards in their off-duty hours. In this way, these young men, like

other Somalis, maintained different affective and moral relationships with the "same"

individual in different contexts.

Not everyone was able to maintain such manifold relations with individuals who might be enemies in one context and allies or even friends in another. One man, I was told, would never eat an orange again, even if his doctor told him his life depended on it, because he was so embittered by the seizure of his lands. I was warned against interviewing another man about the history of Hurso, because, I was told, he would attack and kill me if I so much as mentioned the farmlands to him. While these examples were offered to me with some awe and respect for the depth of feeling that they revealed, they were also seen as morally and politically troubling by the men and women who offered the examples. Such single mindedness impedes the flexibility that is essential for effectively mobilizing the moral webs which my interlocutors inhabited. These individuals identified the potential moral webs based on lineages, kinship, and *jilib* as ideal and theoretical. Flexibility is mandatory in order to actualize the real, imperfect, constantly renegotiated interpersonal and intergroup networks on which both individual and group survival depends.

## Emotion in narrative and poetry

Here I present a number of conversations, poems, and interviews in which emotion words were explicitly mentioned. These narratives were often intended to arouse an audience to indignation and collective action. Most of the examples of emotional expression and emotion talk come from Hurso. They are consistent with the ways in which emotionality was used in Dire Dawa, both among the families I got to know in the city, and among the newly arriving returnees.

The examples below all link individual emotional experience to concrete events

and to social and political processes. The rhetorical and emotional power of these

narratives and interactions does not always derive from the same sources.

*Hummad*–passion/desire/yearning, literally "fever"–is evoked by and brings to my

respondents' minds particular details: the oranges of Hurso, green leaves after rain, the

loading of camels. References to smuggling, along with romance and stories about the

former beauty and richness of the expropriated lands, brought out the importance of

*hummad* as a key axis around which identity, survival, and resistance had been organized

in this community for several generations. Loyalty and duty to the lineage, village or clan

is the other axis, flexible enough to be tentatively expanded to pan-Somalism or to full

membership in a new, pluralist Ethiopia. The emotional power of histories linking

Gurgura to these lands lies primarily in the rhythm of the poems or accounts and in the

recurrent invocation of justice, solidarity, and rights to the land through having lived on

and cared for the land. The dispossession accounts and stories about smuggling combine

the passion and particular references of *hummad* for the land, with references to history

and to justice, references which themselves would evoke the emotional and political

power of the charter myths and genealogies. In practice, the quality of *hummad* permeates

the discourse of solidarity and rights to land, because individuals and communities

always live in particular circumstances and never only in the general framework provided

by myth. Hence, although *hummad* may appear to contrast with a more general, rhetorical

and social structural attachment to kin and clan, in fact the details and passion of *hummad*

are always implicit. They need to be made rhetorically explicit in situations, such as that

of Hurso, where the practical, lived bond between the community and the land (which

might mean grazing land, watering holes, farms, neighbourhood, transhumance routes)

has been threatened or destroyed.


Camels, smuggling, politics, and passion

Se'id approached me one afternoon saying that he wanted to sing a camel loading

song. He began to tell me about his thirteen years as a smuggler for a rich man in

Djibouti.

> There was danger and lots of money–it was a good job. Now the smuggling is not
>
> as good as before. Some of the camel paths through the desert I made myself, [and
>
> these were then used by other smugglers]. I used to strap the money around my
>
> waist and chest - I was ready to die and ready to win. From the time I left Malka
>
> Jabdu, everyone was my enemy. I didn't talk to anyone except those traveling
>
> with me. Other smuggling parties and the nomads would tell each other, "The
>
> enemy is *there*, finance [customs official] is *there*–go another way!" It took eight
>
> to ten days by foot, with many camels.

I asked how he started.

> When I was a boy and I saw these big loads being loaded and traveling across the
>
> countryside, I had a great desire (*hummad*) to do it. I would follow my uncle when
>
> they loaded and transported sorghum...Now, when I sing these camel songs I feel
>
> happy, like I'm in love. Last night I was singing these the whole night.

Risk and passion are integral to long distance trade–legal or otherwise–and link

this activity to poetry, love, and identity. The risk and hardships of such trade are not seen

entirely in a positive light: as the terse demands for assistance in earlier chapters reveal,

Hurso residents do not romanticize the difficulty of their lives. This population has been

through repeated forced migration and the expropriation of most of the clan's capital

base–the orchards and farmlands around the village. Malaria and malnutrition are

endemic. The fact that most people make a living through selling firewood is a constant

reminder of their degradation, almost to the point of beggary[4]. The prevailing mood was

of anger sliding into demoralization, *niyed jab*. Conversations about smuggling, however,

were characterized by excitement. This reflected, in part, the fact that success was more

likely than failure. In the context of this community's history and current situation,

smuggling narratives take on an additional role in the process of creating and maintaining

a collective Gurgura or Hurso identity as tough, independent, adventuresome people who

have successfully battled the state and other opponents. The memory and practice of

smuggling are a political icon, a remembrance of free, if dangerous, movements across

multiple boundaries by communities now destitute as a result of movement forced by war

and dispossession.


The Beauty of Hurso

A few young men were sitting under an acacia tree, listening to a song about the

---

4

Recall the comment by one Hurso resident in Chapter Two: "*Qaxooti* is not like a
beggar; there is no shame to *qaxooti*."

beauty of Hurso. Afterwards, I asked how they felt when they heard this song. Ahmed

said, "Happy. It's very nice *(fii 'an)*. I feel goosebumps *(jirido 'o)*. It's a good feeling - *so*

beautiful *(quruh)*!" Hassan interjected, "I get very interested/attentive, *(hummad)*, a great

desire, like a wind." When I asked Hassan what else can give him *hummad*, he replied:

"When you feel love *(je 'ayl)*, when you want to get married. When you see your animals,

green leaves, the rain. It's a good feeling."

Muusa Omar's *gabay* also sings about the beauty of Hurso, and about the

contrasting bitterness of life in exile:

One man taken to Sodere who was living a very hard life,

In Djibouti's market and Somalia I was living this bitter life.

If my life reaches the depths of bitterness and I hear bad news,

I am a strong man who will infiltrate and get your secret,

I am like crocodiles and their children, who sharpen their teeth...

I am arrow poison and I am also the sword of the angel who takes life...

I am a person whose farms were taken by the Derg

My moans - you will think it's a lion coming to you.

Like a young camel when it's weaned, crying in the afternoon,

I am like that.

The owner must fight for his property...


Women's poetry

Women's poetry is shorter than men's *gabay* and is described by women as

"cultural songs", which are passed on from mother to daughter but which can be composed by individual women, such as Fadumo Yusuf in Hurso. The songs include *burambur* or *durban*, poems about marriage, livestock, and war, "to make you happy" or to rouse warriors for battle; *gelbin* or wedding songs; songs for the ending of the forty day seclusion after childbirth–*afartan bah*–and others. While women downplayed the importance of their songs, some men, including poets, insisted that *burambur* or *durban* were more beautiful than the epic poems or *gabay*. The power and perceived beauty of these poems arises from the combination of a number of characteristics: their brevity, which allows them to be chanted repeatedly, like a prayer phrase; their location in popular knowledge as a corpus of poetry intended to arouse both emotion and action; the alliterative and rhythmic style; and their typical performance in situations where repetitive and rhythmic bodily movements such as walking, dancing, or clapping are also expected as part of the performative event. Desjarlais (1992), in Body and Emotion (a monograph on the experience of illness and healing in the Nepal Himalayas), emphasized the aesthetics, or embodiment, of emotion and illness, in contradistinction to what he considers an overemphasis on discourse in work such as the collection edited by Lutz and Abu-Lughod (1990), Language and the politics of emotion . Women's poetry highlights that among displaced and dispossessed Somali in Ethiopia, emotion can only be understood as simultaneously embodied experience and discursive–and more precisely political–practice.

Here are  three short *burambur* about Hurso. They would have been chanted repeatedly on the long journey–often on foot–to and from Djibouti, in the refugee camps

(such as Dikhil) in Djibouti, and now in Hurso in gatherings of women or of both women and men.

*Haddadiye hooyo Hurso habeen qabow* (Near Malka Jabdu - Mother! - Hurso's nights are cool)

The one who knows the Hurso land will never settle in Djibouti.

I would never go to Oqaar (Dikhil), but Allah has made me go here. It was not my choice.

Elegies and histories: linking personal memories to collective indignation

Ali Yusuf's history, also quoted in Chapter Four, is in fact an elegy to Hurso:

Hurso! There was no better place! Mohamed Ahmed sings in his poem about the orange of Hurso and the Erer mandarin. This song was talking about the interesting [good, satisfying] life situation of Hurso. And anybody who knows how it was before will be in *wareer* [worrying, distressed, literally delirious] when he sees it now. When my oranges reached the first harvest, I sold only four truckloads and the rest was eaten by the Derg government. And still now I think it is the Derg or those who remained from the Derg government who are eating our gardens. Now my morale is not good, because my properties are still in the hands

of the enemy.

One afternoon a group of elders was explaining the history of Hurso and the

Gurgura to me, from the wars with the Oromo and 'Issa, through the time of Haile

Selassie, to the seizure of the lands by the Mengistu government. Other villagers and

travelers were standing or sitting around, listening. The conversation was initially fairly

informal and led primarily by my attempts to get a Western-style history of the Gurgura

in this area–specific dates, numbers, and so forth. The elders answered my questions in a

"normal" tone (that is, not rhetorically or didactically), helping me to piece together the

various episodes and interpretations which had shaped local history. What was most

salient in these histories was not dates and events as such, however, but the assertion of

legitimate claims to the land and to collective kin and clan identity. At one point, the tone

changed from that of an ordinary informative conversation to an angry political lament.

The elders had described the range of landholdings (from 150 to 2,000 trees). In response

to my question, "Why stay here?", an elder responded:

> From Menelik, Mekonnen, Haile Selassie, the Italians and the Derg we are
>
> living here: how many years is that? It is seven fathers. After the Italian
>
> government it is the third father only. It is our umbilical cord (*hondur*). The bones
>
> of our grandfathers are under this land, so we can't leave to another place.
>
> After the war, after the people are defeated and we lost the farming lands,
>
> the ones who went as far as Hamaar (Mogadishu) have come back and are selling
>
> firewood. The ones who went as far as Hargeisa have come back and are selling

firewood. The ones who went as far as Djibouti have come back, and since they

didn't get the farming lands back they are selling firewood.

Suddenly Malasami, an elder who had not been part of the conversation itself, yelled out

my Somali name from behind me while brandishing his axe:

UBAHEY!! Stop this talk about the farmlands!!! When I hear it, it makes me

*marrora dilla'!!* (anguish caused by sudden loss of something precious; powerless

rage and a desire to vomit; a torn heart)

The others said, "He was one of the ones with 2,000 trees."

Charter myths

The charter myths of clans are appropriated by each community and individual in

the context of their specific lived situation. In this version of the Gurgura story, the

emphasis is on a common Gurgura identity which is fundamentally Somali, even though

many Gurgura speak other languages and practice other customs, and on the courage,

wisdom and independence of Gurgura. This diversity of cultural practice and livelihood is

attributed to the presence of large numbers of Gurgura warriors in the Muslim army of

Ahmed Gureh that conquered much of Ethiopia in the sixteenth century (Trimingham

1965). These warriors are said to have settled in all parts of Ethiopia and to have adopted

the cultural practices of the local populations, but without changing their core identity,

based on blood lines, as Gurgura.

I heard the following account from a young man who was working for a local

Somali NGO. He was extremely reluctant to tell me anything about the organization that

was not common or official knowledge, because it was not his place as a young man to reveal any details, let alone conflicts, that might place the "polity" at a disadvantage. He told me about his personal experiences of the Derg years. Then he said he was sure I wanted to learn about the Gurgura, and especially about their war cry, "Jirsa!", which would fill the opponents with terror and lead to the certain victory of Gurgura warriors. This war cry is also said to be essential for weddings, thus rhetorically, symbolically and affectively linking history, politics, subsistence, kinship, and the establishment of new families and hence new sets of social relationships. Whether or not the cry "Jirsa!" is actually heard at Gurgura weddings is a separate issue. The details of the charter myths varied from version to version. What was consistent was the emphasis on a common identity in the face of considerable diversity within the clan, on the fierceness and independence, but not belligerence, of Gurgura warriors and Gurgura in general, and on links within the stories between indvidual experiences and collective identity. The cry "Jirsa!" is one example of how memories and emotional associations of individual or lineage events, such as weddings, are inserted into the overall story or myth of the clan. This insertion or linkage, in turn, makes the general myth specific to the particular experiences of any individual or lineage. This is his account:

> Gurgura people are Somali. Gurgura people have a lot of cultures. Some Gurgura have the culture of the Amhara. A lot of them have the culture of Somalis. A few of them have the culture of Oromos, and some of them

have the culture of white people![5]....The poorest of Gurgura will not ask anything - he won't beg. His mind is rich. Gurgura have land. Some of them are farmers. Some are herders, with camels and cows. Now, only Malka Jabdu, Hurso, and Erer do not have a lot of nomads, but other areas do. ...Gurgura people are the *best (fii'an)*. Gurgura always wants peace, but if anyone wants to fight, Gurgura will win. Now some people are saying Gurgura are Oromo or Somali, but Gurgura are Somali. They are a *pure* people. Some speak only Tigrinya or Amharic or English, but they are Gurgura!...If Gurgura fight, they shout. If they shout "JIRSA!", nobody can fight them. If for example 'Issa fight Gurgura and hear "JIRSA!", they stop the war, they say "We can't fight." Jirsa is like our spinal cord; it is pure Gurgura. If there is a wedding or a song without "Jirsa!", they'll say "This is not a wedding", and will leave. The wedding will start with the name of Jirsa and will finish with the name of Jirsa.

*Niyed jab:* **loss, demoralization, and anger**

Finally, the first emotion word that came up in a Hurso narrative, and which was

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[5]

In Hurso I heard about an entire community of Gurgura in the area, from the Nibitur and Konduble subclans, which had converted to Catholicism, possibly in the 18th century. One of the men who told me about this group recounted the following story:

When there was a conflict between the Oromo and the Gurgura, the Oromo took their camels. We went, got the camels, and brought them back. We asked them, "How do you feel about Muslim Gurgura?" They said, "We welcome them. They are part of our bodies." We asked them, "How about becoming Muslim?" They said, "No no no! We are all Gurgura, but we will keep our religion."

used repeatedly throughout my stay, was *niyed jab*–demoralization, hopelessness, broken will. I first noticed it in Halimo Muusa's narrative, which began as an account of her own current life situation and evolved into the story of the loss of the farmlands, told while were sitting on a piece of sack on the dirt floor of her sister's tiny shop:

> When we repatriated to our homelands, we didn't get our farming lands, and still the government didn't give them to us. We became and we remain refugees. The government or the United Nations who were helping us, we followed their instructions, we repatriated, but we did not get our farming lands, and we remain refugees. Our property is being eaten in front of us. That is how you see our people. Some are demoralized (*niyed jabay*), some became mad (*waalliy, waalleh*). They are demoralized. Because our farming lands have been taken by force and still the government is eating the lands in front of us, and the hard situation we endured, because of that we became very demoralized. That is the problem, that is our problem (*dhibaato*).

Many of the words whose semantic networks I explored were linked to loss–of land, of love, of family, of livelihood. For Hurso residents, the loss of the farmlands and the consequent destitution was the central motif. It is alluded to in every discussion of *niyed jab*. It is paradigmatic of what *murugo* means (thinking or rumination about an insoluble problem or loss; sadness or depression), or *marrora dilla'* (anguish caused by sudden overwhelming loss of something precious, and characterized by rage, perceived powerlessness, and uncontrolled behaviour ranging from weeping to violence to

madness). While the quality of emotional arousal, distinct from specific content, is

relevant to Somali, in general it was in the sense of *ra'yi*, "concept, sentiment, verdict",

that emotionality was experienced, understood, spoken about and used by my

informants. "Sentiment" and "feeling" are understandable as terms, but *murugo* and

*marrora dilla'* in the abstract, divorced from content and context, are meaningless words.

For middle class women, *niyed jab* is linked to a husband marrying a second wife. For

mothers, *niyed jab* is linked to the repeated deaths of infants, and for both mothers and

fathers, to being unable to provide a decent life for one's children. Other related words

arose in other conversations: *argegah* (sudden shock and the subsequent physical and

behavioural reactions, including vomiting and temporary inability to act; *argegah* ranges

from waking from a nightmare, to the horror experienced at seeing the murder of one's

relatives); *wareer* (thinking/anxiety/dizziness/confusion, caused either by a febrile

illness–delirium–or by life problems; it is worry to the point of distraction, much stronger

than ordinary worry, *wilwil*).

In Hurso, Mahamed and Ahmed, my two key research assistants, discussed *niyed*

*jab* with me.

> Mahamed: Hopelessness. When you have your own property, if you lose it
>
> and look for it and miss it for a long time, you will tire. *Niyed jab* will
>
> come to you.
>
> Christina: What else?
>
> Mahamed: When you are tired, you become hopeless and you are [too]
>
> tired to do anything else, for example a job. Suppose you are working with

the community, as a medical person or another staff. When you work so

hard and you don't get any help from the community or government, when

work becomes so busy, you get tired out. You will become weak from the

work, and if you haven't any help from the community or the

government—one person can't do everything—you will become [literally,

"take"] *niyed jab.*

Christina: What about women?

Mahamed: The most common reason is traditional marriage. She may

have love for somebody and want to marry him. Her father wants her to

marry another to get money or animals, so he may refuse to allow her to

marry the loved one. When he refuses, she may take *niyed jab.* She will

refuse, and the father will marry them by force.

Christina: What else?

Ahmed: For example, I wanted to learn English. The UN said sixth grade

is enough for a refugee. I was a brilliant student, the first. I tried to find

courses and I couldn't find the money. Then I came to Ethiopia, and it

became hard. [Finally], I became *niyed jabay.*


A second set of words is on the positive end of the emotional spectrum, and while

the living conditions and self-reported morale of Hurso residents were poor, these

positive emotions were also expressed. Fieldwork about contraband was a relief from the

constant awareness of hunger and poverty, because the passion of risk, desire, and

enthusiasm was very much in evidence even in interviews with former smugglers who were now as destitute as the rest of the population. When I asked why smugglers didn't hold back enough capital to get restarted in the event of being caught, given the high risk of getting caught, one man's eyes lit up as he replied, "Ah, but if you *don't* get caught...!" Some of the emotion words at this end of the spectrum are *niyed fii'an* (happiness; good morale; a sense of being able to provide for oneself and one's family without being dependent on frequent or constant help; a general sense of wellbeing); *farhad* (joy, usually finite and attributable to a particular cause); *fi 'il* (a spirit of action that enthuses or activates warriors, as well as, for example, athletes); *hummad* (passion/desire/love/longing/yearning, literally 'fever', expressed in poems about the beauty and fertility of Hurso and characterizing men's reactions to hearing these poems - love of home; also sexual desire and passion, and passion for activities, including contraband).

It is clear even from this brief catalogue that there is a rich vocabulary of emotion, and that people learn this vocabulary. It is learned through hearing and discussing life problems and issues. You don't talk about feelings, I was told; you talk about how to solve the problems, or how to live with them.

**Working Through Emotion**

Christina: A personal problem is something that does not belong in public discourse?

Hurre: [There is a proverb], "You can cut your hair in public, but there are some

parts of your body you shouldn't shave in public."

- from an interview with the poet Hurre, about a

poem focusing on personal loss

The *work of culture* is the process whereby painful motives and affects such as

those occurring in depression are transformed into publicly accepted sets of

meanings and symbols. Thus the constellation of affects...can...be transformed in

a variety of directions - into Buddhism and into spirit attack and no doubt other

symbolic forms also...Work also implies failure; if mourning is successful work,

melancholia is failure.

(Obeyesekere 1985:147-8)

In this section, I discuss some of the ways in which "culture works" around

emotionality among the communities I studied. This discussion will be continued in the

following chapter, on "trauma".

The "awakened spirit"–*niyed ka'* (*niyad kac)*, the literal dictionary translation of

"emotion" (Khorshel 1994)–of emotionality among Somali has a rich vocabulary. More

importantly, emotion carries significant power to create, maintain, mobilize and destroy

moral webs, whether these are at the intimate level of matrilateral kin or sexual passion,

or at the level of limited smuggler solidarity against "finance", or in creating clan history,

solidarity, and political action. Emotion *per se* is not something to be suppressed, but the

appropriate expression and use of emotion varies according to gender and age, in ways

similar to those described by Abu-Lughod (1986, 1990) and Boddy (1989) for other

Muslim societies in northern Africa. Women and younger men are expected to express

modesty, deference and self-control before older men and, to a lesser extent, older

women, but women are also more free to express grief (*murugo, tiiraanyo*). In addition,

and sometimes in conflict with the expressivity considered appropriate according to

gender, religion plays an important role in "working" emotion, as do irony, forgetting and

distraction, and the mobilization of networks through or in response to emotion and the

circumstances remembered and condensed through emotion.

Although the atmosphere in Hurso was often heavy, a striking characteristic of

interactions was the frequent outbursts of laughter at the irony and absurdity of the

situation in which the residents found themselves. Irony is an important stance that is at

once emotional and cognitive, a meta-commentary on a situation which people cannot

change, and a strategy for directing attention and affective energy away from personal

suffering and distress to a shared exasperation, humour, and solidarity. One ex-soldier,

after recounting his decline in fortune to his current status as water seller, stood up in

mock pride and said "I was a soldier of Mengistu Haile Mariam!" Then he laughed, along

with the other people on the river bank who had been listening to our conversation. The

argument between Mahamed and Dukurri described earlier in this chapter was already

being de-escalated when I entered the room. The epithets of "thief" and "liar" were

initially intense and angry but were repeated several times, each time with less

vehemence and finally with laughter, albeit strained, and then an explanation to me of the

situation in a joking tone. After Malasami's interjection[6] during the discussion with elders

about the history of Gurgura claims to this land, a senior elder repeated that even people

who had thousands of fruit trees were now gathering firewood, but this time all the men

laughed after the statement, the tone of which was very different from the rhythmic

repetition of a similar refrain just moments before. Even questionnaires became

opportunities for sparring. Mahamed had returned, deadpan, the English version of an

interview that he had conducted on my behalf, in which the answer to my question, "Why

did you return to Hurso?", was "What do you mean? Isn't this my soil?" It was clear that

I was meant to hear this response both literally, and as an ironic jab at the stupidity of the

question. Even the serious topics of misery and demoralization can be approached with a

humourous slant, which both highlights the irony of life situations, and helps to prevent

an inward-focused paralysis in distress. Here is how two middle class women explained

*niyed jab* to me, Rosa seriously and Sa'ada immediately responding with a

humourous–though hard-edged because held to be "true"–story:

> Rosa: Disappointment. *Niyed* [refers to] when you need something. You don't get
>
> it, so you are disappointed - demoralized, disappointed, discouraged.

Rosa offered the examples of repeatedly being turned down for jobs. Then her mother,

Sa'ada, offered the example of a husband marrying a second wife. She described a case

where one such woman was so distracted that she used a chicken (instead of a cloth) to

wipe the pan on which she was frying *lohoh* (a local sourdough pancake) and offered her

---

6

"UBAHEY!! Stop this talk about the farming lands! When I hear it, it makes me
*marrora dilla'*!"

baby the kerosene bottle instead of the milk. The reaction of others to such a story would be one of sympathy—that's life.

In other circumstances, other forms of distraction and direction of emotional energy towards social networks are employed, and the interplay of gender-appropriate emotionality, especially the demonstration of toughness by men, with life experience, religion and attempts to mobilize moral webs is demonstrated. Religion is an important source of consolation, and also of the norm of *samir iyo iman*, acceptance in faith and serenity. This simultaneous consolation and instruction is not always conflict-free, as another discussion with women revealed. Women are considered less likely to suffer from *niyed jab* or *murugo* in the case of death of a loved one because they can cry, but when pressed to say whether it is better to cry or to accept the will of God, the women said it is better to accept the will of God. The norms of expressing emotion are not the same as the norms of morality.

Men are not expected to cry in public. During one interview with a newly arriving returnee in Dire Dawa, the respondent started to cry. His wife and some of his children had been killed when a mortar exploded in his yard in Dire Dawa. He left for Djibouti after this, and eventually remarried. The second wife also died, in childbirth in Djibouti. He was now returning to Dire Dawa, and recounting his story to us proved too painful to endure stoically. Rosa, who was interviewing him with me, became visibly uncomfortable and embarrassed, straightening up in her chair, shuffling her feet, turning her head and lowering her eyes. She stopped the interview and told the man, rather brusquely, to pull himself together, and then, more gently, made a number of concrete

suggestions of where he might get help. He was a clansman of the second richest man in the city, and Rosa gently but insistently repeated that he should go to him, even though the man was reluctant to deploy this seemingly obvious and ordinary claim in what were clearly legitimate circumstances. The man's reluctance to call on kin was both the culturally expected response to being theoretically able to do so, as well perhaps as an indication of his awareness that people who get this rich are not entirely within the normal webs of mutual obligation among Somali. This interpretation of his reluctance is supported by stories I heard in Hurso of specific cases where fairly close patrilateral kin had not fulfilled their political or material obligations when claims were made. The explanation offered was that they were too implicated in government or development agency networks and therefore felt free to neglect their kinship roles. When I was told such stories, the narrators expressed a sense of betrayal, bewilderment, and sadness, as well as shame that such things can happen.

Another way of coping with problems and suffering is to distract the mind, whether through laughter, or singing, or chewing, or by deliberate "forgetting" or not thinking about problems. One discussion with a women's group put it like this: "Too many problems and too much thinking makes you *wareer* (thinking/anxiety/dizziness/confusion), but it doesn't happen all at once, it happens bit by bit. So we try to forget about the past problems".

In fact, they don't "forget about past problems". Young men who were infants at the time of flight can recount the story in minute detail. What *is* done, is to frame the "past problems"–and the present ones, for that matter –in terms that provide a meaningful

story and framework for action. Such a framework was typically based on history and

(in)justice, or in reference to stories about Muslim heroes, saints, and martyrs, or in other

terms that reinforced the sense of community and the meaningful place of an individual in

this community and its trajectory.

## Emotion talk: Social rupture, injustice, and powerlessness

The root word of both hopelessness/demoralization and wellbeing, *niyed* (*niyad*,

*niyaad*) can be glossed as mind or attention, the ability to focus, spirit, will; it was often

said to be more or less synonymous with *qalbi*, or "heart" in the sense of focus of desire

and love (not the anatomic heart, *wadne*). Rousseau et al (1998) discuss *niyed* (*niyaad*) as

the locus of desire and dreaming: when a desire gets into your *niyaad*, you must pursue it.

This understanding seems to approximate the *qalbi* gloss that my Hurso respondents

offered. The way that Hurso residents used and discussed *niyed jab* suggests a more

transitive understanding of "mind" or "heart" or "locus of desire". It is not that desires

come from the outside and settle into your *niyaad*, but rather that desire, or need, or

unmet need, all point to an individual in interaction with the social or material world and

not to an inner state. This may not in fact contrast with the ways in which emotion is

experienced and talked about among ordinary people in the West, as Shweder and Bourne

(1982) argue that it does (and see Rosenberg 1990 for a critique). It does differ from

psychological and psychiatric understandings of and approaches to emotion, which

emphasize the inner state and its catharsis or cognitive reformulation, and which seek to

define and examine what emotions "are", rather than what emotionality does (Abu-

Lughod and Lutz 1990).

### "Strong" versus significant emotions: grief and hopelessness

One discussion with Mahamed and Ahmed reveals the importance of attending to

what emotion means, references, and does, in contrast to preoccupation with what it "is"

or how it feels at the individual level. Some emotions, such as *murugo, argegah*, and

*marrora dilla'* "are" more intense, and potentially more serious in terms of risk of

individual madness, but ultimately pose less of a social danger than others, such as *niyed*

*jab,* which are described as "less strong". Both the "strong" and the "milder" emotions

have social significance, and it is in reference to the multiple meanings *for individuals*

*embedded in common moral webs* that the importance of emotion among these

communities can be grasped. The "private" experience of *murugo* or *niyed jab* cannot be

understood except by attending to the dynamic connections through which individuals

and social networks are mutually constituted. All of the "negative emotions" imply a duty

(not always fulfilled) to intervene on the part of interlocutors, especially close kin or

friends, preferably by changing the situation that caused the distress, and by deploying

one or more of the strategies discussed above: religion, irony, insistence on gender-

appropriate expression, or distraction and forgetting. This conversation was primarily

about *niyed jab* and *murugo*.

These young men claimed that the death of an infant would cause three days of

*murugo* (in this case meaning "grief"), but no *niyed jab*. When I presented this opinion of

how long grief would last to a group of women, they disagreed sharply, but would not

discuss it further because it was clearly the opinion of inexperienced young men and did

not merit rebuttal. Other women did agree, however, that it was the *repeated* deaths of

infants that led to the demoralization and hopelessness characteristic of *niyed jab*, even

though any one child's death could be profoundly distressing. While Ahmed and

Mahamed's discussion of infant death seems to make light of it, in fact both they and

other informants indicated that *murugo* was the stronger emotion, and the more easily

"felt" (*dareensiin*) from someone's face, and that *argegah* and *marrora dilla'* are yet

stronger and can cause madness, temporary or permanent. *"Niyed jab* is smaller than

*murugo*....You can't feel it so much from someone's face". *Murugo* happens when you

face big problems and you think and worry, but it is usually limited in duration. The

appropriate response to someone in *murugo* is to help them forget and stop thinking,

preferably by giving them what has caused the *murugo*. If this is impossible–for instance

in the case of death–there are other possibilities. One is to lie in order to "ease his mind".

For instance, if a relative is missing and almost surely dead, but there is still some

uncertainty because the body has not been recovered, then one might say that the person

has gone abroad, you seem to remember hearing that someone had seen them, and so

forth. The final consolation, however, is to remind the person that everyone dies, that

Allah gives and takes away. While crying is not encouraged in Somali Islam because "it

shows your faith is not strong", nevertheless spontaneous grief, properly demonstrated

and contained in the spatial and temporal boundaries of a given community's Muslim

practice[7], is acceptable and indeed expected because "Allah made this". This religious

stance is not limited to observant Muslims. People who do not pray also invoked the

religious norms, which are also the preeminent mutually acknowledged–though not

always rigorously adhered to–formal norms of this and other Somali societies. *Murugo*

can recur for years on thinking about a lost loved one, but it has then usually become

transformed into a more benign and distant sadness.

However, although extreme shock can cause madness, it is *niyed jab* that is the

more significant and problematic, because it can last a long time and "it means you lose

the hope of something", and by implication the strength to carry on. *Niyed jab* is the more

threatening to the survival of the community, because it embodies the sustained effects of

circumstances that are–in the case of Hurso–shared by much of the community, and

because it precludes action.


Individual desire and moral webs: passion, identity, and romantic love

The connections and possible conflicts among individual experience and feeling

and moral webs are visible in the discussions related to survival, but they are highlighted

in discourse about love (*je'ayl, hummad*). The word *hummad* itself links individual and

social experience, erotic love and the sense of belonging and personal identity inherent in

kinship, charter myths and details of landscape. For an individual, *hummad* can refer to

his or her own sexual passion at the same time as to a nostalgic yearning for the physical

---

[7]

Respondents around Hurso and Dire Dawa told me that three days of expressing grief
was appropriate, but that this should be done in the privacy of the home.

details of home: the green leaves, the rain, camels being loaded with sorghum, the cool

nights of Hurso and the "different minerals" that women sing about in *burambur* about

different places. Such concrete details were striking in the realist narrative of the loss of

the farmlands, in comparison to their relative absence in personal and clan histories.

These latter relied primarily on clanship and kinship metaphors for their emotional,

moral, and political power. In contrast, the "strong wind" of desire and interest is tied to

the experience and remembrance of minute details that cannot be contained by the social

order, yet which infuse that order with a passion for "home".

The simultaneous reference to and evocation by *hummad* of "home"–which

necessarily implies kin, community, and moral webs–and sexual passion, highlights the

interconnections through which individual experience and moral webs are mutually

constitutive. These interconnections include conflicts. Individual suffering is not

considered to isolate one in unshareable grief, but rather to embed one more deeply in a

moral web, one in which all women, for example, are assumed to understand the pain of

loss and the injustice of forced marriage, and in which young men and widowers alike

can share the bitter reality of loving a woman but being too poor to ask for marriage.

Ahmed: Listen - a song is playing on the radio: "I have no animals and no money

and I have love. There is no other I can love. Where is my golden girl? Either I get

the medicine – you – or I will die." That is *niyed jab*!

People speak about love in reference to one lover–either themselves or someone

else–but romantic love indexes a range of relationships and highlights the conflicts

among some of them. These conflicts are recognized by everyone and disturb everyone,

as suggested by the many times my respondents mentioned the sorrow of forced

marriage. In Dire Dawa, Ibrahim Jama and Sa'ada were able to ignore financial or

political needs and focus on finding good husbands for their daughters, using their

personal and kin networks as a way of finding men of recognized good character and

leaving the final choice up to their daughters. This is not always the case in poorer

communities, where the traditional social functions of Somali marriage–establishing

affinal relations that will be of economic and political value to the families in question

(Lewis 1994)–cannot so readily be put aside. These conflicts are usually settled in favour

of collective interests and not personal desires. It is the recognition of this political and

economic role of marriage and the simultaneous injustice and misery that it can cause the

lovers–acknowledged in song and poem as well as in religious and everyday

discourse–that leads to *niyed jab*. The discourse of romantic love is a counterpoint to the

necessity of maintaining social networks, even at the expense of personal desires or

particular dyadic relationships. It is also a protest against the reality that some individuals

have more power to pursue their individual interests than others, regardless of moral

obligations or others' interests (see also Abu-Lughod 1986). Men have more power than

women, and wealthy Somalis–men or women–have greatly expanded personal options

relative to the poor. Halimo Muusa began her account with a bitter lament of her

husband's abandonment of her. Amina, whose "refugee experiences" are described in

Chapters Five and Eight, considers that the causal and unifying thread of her unhappiness

is not recurrent displacement, witnessing horrific events, poverty, or even having two of her children adopted by her sister in Europe, but rather her inability to divorce her unfaithful and unsupportive husband because she is still, despite everything, in love with him.

"Love"–both romantic love and platonic or family love–may seem to outside observers to be the most private, least political constellation of emotions, yet it is perhaps the quintessentially social. It refers at once to the best and the worst outcomes of an emphasis among many Somalis on family and moral webs. It implies a duty of care and minute attention, as the story of Safia indicates, and as does 'Aasha's comment that the military "are not careful of the land; it becomes hyena's houses". The land itself is loved, cared for, and invested with kinship ties:

It is our umbilical cord (*hondur*). The bones of our grandfathers are under this land, so we can't leave to another place. - Hurso elders

## Conclusion: Emotion, survival, and the politics of suffering

*Nin 'aida hagee buu ka keenaya niyed fii'an?* Where is a poor man to get happiness?

Burale, former Hurso landowner, now an
elderly goatherd in Ganda Hurso

When your life is blocked from every direction and you can't advance, that is

*niyed jab.*

Hurso tea seller

What is striking about these and other conversations about "emotion" is that most

of the time and effort of my informants was spent at trying to convey to me the details of

context and response, from which I was to glean what *niyed jab* feels like and implies.

Emotion is not something private and psychological and ineffable, which might be

triggered by circumstances but remains essentially individual. Rather, emotion and talk

about emotion is a simultaneously embodied and discursive way of commenting on the

possibilities, limitations, frustrations, and outcomes which an individual faces in

engaging with the totality of experience, from survival to romance. In this engagement

and commentary, what is most significant to my informants is not the individual

emotional reaction but what it says about the circumstances with which an individual has

no choice but to engage. *Murugo* and *taabo* ("*murugo* about how I will feed my family")

mean being unable to think through pressing life problems–because there *is* no solution

available. *Argegah* and *marrora dilla'* are about shock, rage, and powerlessness to

overcome sudden adverse circumstances. It is the inability to advance, being blocked

from every side, that is central to *niyed jab*. And it is *niyed jab*, of all of these negative

"emotions" or engaged, embodied commentaries, which while not the most intense, is the

most pervasive and destructive.

Among these Somali, emotional distress–unrequited love, a heart torn by grief,

failure to care for the land, inability to continue an education, inability to provide for

one's family–is about social rupture and injustice and not about private suffering. It is, as

Young (1995) described for anger and guilt among American Vietnam veterans, a moral

community and a moral economy. Central to the ability to meet the moral obligations

which define both community life and a decent human being is the capacity to focus, or

awaken, one's desire, heart, or will. While individual sentiments and uncontrolled

emotionality can indicate lack of social and moral sense (*'aql*; see Abu-Lughod 1986,

1990) and can be destructive of society as a whole, "emotion"–*niyed ka'* understood as an

awakened spirit–is essential.

Emotion talk to me was a way in which my interlocutors commented on their life

situation, and it is here that the notion of "the politics of emotion" is particularly relevant

to understanding emotionality, politics, suffering, and "the refugee experience" in these

communities. When Hurso residents repeatedly characterized themselves to me as *niyed*

*jabay*, I was meant to hear this less as a commentary on their morale–still less their

morals[8]–than as an accusation. People who were in fact *niyed jabay* were few and did not

readily participate in interviews or conversations. The frequent and intense comments that

a wide range of men and women made to me about *niyed jab* were expressions of anger

put in terms of describing the effects that adverse life circumstances could have on

people. Public expressions of indignation on another's behalf were meant to rouse

indignation in the audience. This aroused emotion, in turn, was understood to indicate

membership in a group sharing kinship or contract or co-residence ties, and hence implied

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[8] Judgments of "dependency" or "DP apathy", for example, are inappropriate.

a duty to act. *Niyed jab* implies the threat of social rupture and possibly even death–either

of the affected individual, or of his or her dependents if the individual could not continue

productive activity. Mentioning this condition therefore highlights the centrality of social

networks to material survival and individual experience. Recognition of another's misery

entails a duty to assist[9]. Talk about *niyed jab* was, thus, a simultaneous condemnation of

and demand for action on "a life which is blocked from every direction."

The everyday experiences and concerns of people included emotion–altercations,

humour, illness, suffering, romance, and so forth–but the principle concerns were for

justice, survival, and a decent human life. It is in the context of these concerns that

"trauma" must be addressed and interpreted, and not the converse. The signature

emotions of Hurso's "refugee experience"–anger and demoralization–were not addressed

in a framework of medicine. They were interpreted in the context of politics. In one

household survey I conducted in Hurso (n=25), 73% of respondents indicated that at least

one relative had died during the war, the flight to refuge, or in the camps, and 61% had

lost at least one first degree relative. While a psychiatric model of suffering and "the

refugee experience" would focus on the individual loss and trauma that such statistics

indicate, in fact not one respondent identified these losses as the cause of the almost

---

[9]

Boltanski (1993) distinguishes pity, compassion, and communitarianism as bases for
assisting someone in need or distress. His discussion of communitarianism would apply
to these Somali communities: common membership in a defined group entails an
obligation to assist, regardless of personal motivation or empathic feelings. Among the
Somalis I knew, the structural obligation to assist kin is reinforced by an understanding
that recognition of another's misery implies acceptance of an obligation to intervene.
Islamic norms of compassion, first to all Muslims, and then to all humans and finally to
animals, add a further moral rationale to structural obligations of mutual assistance.

universal "poor morale" or, more strongly, demoralization (*niyed jab*). Rather, they emphasized the inability to envisage a sustained livelihood, and the injustice of dispossession.

My acquaintances in Hurso and elsewhere took for granted that terrible life circumstances could cause individual unhappiness and even madness. The obvious response, to them, was to do something about the circumstances or, failing that, to reinforce people's capacity to carry on. Talking about distress and their histories was important because it represented an attempt both to do something about their circumstances and to enhance people's capacity to carry on materially and emotionally. It reinforced local social networks and the community's political legitimacy in Somali, regional, national, and international arenas. Returning to Hurso and physically residing in a place with very few possibilities for making a living was itself a political and ritual act: a recognition of the destruction of much of the fabric of the community at the same time as a refusal to vanish, a collective mourning of both private and collective losses at the same time as a deliberate creation of both history and the possibility of a future through the rhetorical–indeed ritualized–telling of the story of dispossession to each other, to their children, and to any outsiders who might be made to listen.

A poem entitled "Odowaa" appeared in one issue of a periodical published by a Somali relief and development NGO in Ottawa. The poet, Abdirisak I. Kooshin, is a young man whose father was killed in the Somali civil war between the Isaaq and the Siyaad Barre forces. His mother was killed by a stray bullet. The title, "Odowaa", is a name meaning "Fatherless". The central refrain throughout the poem, *"Waxaan ahay*

*agoonka*", means "I am an orphan". The poem describes the young man's pain,

bewilderment, physical suffering, and sense of abandonment by his entire people. He is

"fatherless" because the Somali nation itself has abandoned him. I showed or read the

poem to many Somalis in Dire Dawa. All found it very moving. Mothers of grown

children in particular would often become tearful, quiet, and shake their heads. I also

showed it to Hurre, with whom I had spent several afternoons learning about poetry,

proverbs, and Somali culture. Hurre is among the best known living Somali poets. Here is

his reaction to the poem:

> Hurre: It's no good. How old is he?
>
> Christina: Twenty-one.
>
> Hurre: When we read this, we imagine he's much younger - a small child.
>
> Christina: Why?
>
> Hurre: When you read this, you feel he needs help, that he's not
>
> independent. You feel his problems very deeply.
>
> Christina: Is it not good to feel problems deeply?
>
> Hurre: He is not speaking only for himself, but for all Somalis in his
>
> situation. More experienced poets like myself should take all this in hand
>
> and soften the problems that we feel (*Hurre looks*
>
> *disgusted/upset/uncomfortable*). It makes me shiver–*Waxaan ahay*
>
> *agoonka, ummaddiisu duudsiday*–you don't know what he's driving at.
>
> There is no way to resolve the crisis. The bullet that killed his mother–he
>
> doesn't know who shot it or for whom it was intended. He wanted to go

avenge his mother's death but couldn't....Knowledge and justice and

religion unite society; under Siyaad Barre all this blew up.

Christina: Did he grasp or evoke the experience of society?

Hurre: Yes. I myself was a victim.

Christina: Then why is it not a good poem?

Hurre: What is the role of a poet? He (Kooshin) takes his parents and

himself as the most important. A great poet thinks of the whole people.

Christina: So, if a good poet had lived this experience, what would he do

with it? How would he express it?

Hurre: He's 20, I'm 50. That's the first chasm between us. Then, each

person has his own experience and perspective. But as for me, I would not

have put such an experience as the problematic, that others should sense

my problems. I would have used it to say "This happened to me, and this

could happen to you as well."

Christina: As a warning?

Hurre: Yes[10].

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[10]

Later, Hurre added: "There are two kinds of poets: local or family poets, and national poets, those who deal with the problems of the people as a whole. I am in the second group - I was one of the poets who spoke at the faction reconciliation meeting. But Kooshin will be a very great poet. I would have spoken about larger themes, even if the problems in the poem are societal problems."

# Chapter Eight

## NARRATIVES OF VIOLENCE AND SURVIVAL

Given that war is a public and collective experience, leaving memories which can be described as social as much as personal,...biomedicalised and individualised concepts have limited power and application.

Summerfield 1998:22

In "Ethnocultural Aspects of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder" (Marsella et al 1996), Friedman and Marsella discuss the diagnostic criteria for PTSD with an openness to the variability in response to distressing or traumatic events, as well as to the roles of social groups in addressing trauma experienced by individuals:

[T]he subjective appraisal of an historical event may determine whether an individual perceives a stressful episode as traumatic or merely difficult (p. 16);

In some cases cultures have developed institutions for addressing the impact of traumatic exposure...[A] terrifying physical ordeal might be appraised as a rite of passage in one cultural setting and as a traumatic event in another (p. 24).

These possibilities are interpreted as "many possible interactions between ethnocultural traditions and vulnerability to PTSD" (p. 23), but Chakraborty's (1991) suggestion that PTSD is a Western culture-bound syndrome is rejected with some incredulity (Friedman and Marsella 1996:12). The terrain occupied by PTSD appears to be shrinking in the context of such discussions, but PTSD, and individual psycho-emotional trauma, remain

the "real", underlying responses, which can be shaped by "ethnocultural traditions." Such

a position indicates sensitivity to cross-cultural variation, but not yet to the notion that

psychiatry is itself part of a particular ethnocultural tradition.

Nevertheless, this argument is more nuanced than the model under which trauma

counselling programmes are increasingly offered in war situations, from Bosnia to

Rwanda[1]. Each of the cases discussed in this chapter challenges the assumptions

underlying trauma counselling programmes, and more broadly the characterization of

"the refugee experience" as a private psychological trauma. These assumptions are

critically discussed by Summerfield (1999) and articulated as follows in his paper:

1. Experiences of war and atrocity are so extreme and distinctive that they do not

just cause suffering, they cause "traumatisation."

2. There is basically a universal human response to highly stressful events,

captured by Western psychological frameworks.

3. Large numbers of people are victims traumatised by war who need

professional help.

4. Western psychological approaches are relevant to violent conflict worldwide.

Victims do better if they emotionally ventilate and "work through" their

---

1 In 1999 there were 198 psychosocial trauma projects in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The total
population of Bosnia-Herzegovina is approximately 5 million; approximately 15% are
estimated by agencies to have experienced "psychological trauma"(pers. comm., March
2000; Dr. Alma Kadic, Assistant to the Minister of Health, Bosnia-Herzegovina). On the
models of "culture" underlying rape trauma counselling programmes in refugee camps,
see Atlani and Rousseau (2000).

experience.

5. There are vulnerable groups and individuals who need to be specifically

targeted for psychological help.

6. Wars represent a mental health emergency: rapid intervention can prevent the

development of serious mental problems, as well as subsequent violence and

wars.

7. Local workers are overwhelmed and may themselves be traumatised.


Psychological medicine provides one out of many potential ways to construe and act on

the significance of extreme events–as psychological trauma and PTSD. This way of

construing violence and distress focuses on helping individuals to comprehend the fact of

violation (Caruth 1995; Felman and Laub 1992) and accept a given social reality. The

ethnographic material presented in this chapter explores another way of construing such

events, one which takes as a given the fact of violence and that focuses instead on

marshaling individual experience and emotion to the recognition of and resistance to an

unacceptable social reality. It offers emotional, material, and political support to

individuals, primarily through reinforcing social ties.

The cases discussed in this chapter could be read through the lens of trauma, and

more specifically, the possibility of post-traumatic stress disorder. However, the

experience of Somalis reveals different ways of understanding and acting on the

experience of violence and threat to life. Among Somali in eastern Ethiopia in the mid-

1990s, violence, distress and displacement related to war and forced migration are not

interpreted in a medical framework aimed at individual or collective healing, whether

physical or psychological. Rather, such violence is predominantly assimilated into the

framework of politics. In the framework of Somali politics, individual injuries are seen as

injuries to a lineage or other defined collectivity (Lewis 1961). The dominant emotions

are not sadness, grief, or pity--as they might be in a psychiatric framework around

psychological or emotional trauma--but anger. This anger is interpreted as evidence of

unjustified injury and of the appropriateness of demands for compensation. The

expression of anger and outrage is also interpreted as evidence of solidarity and of intent

to participate in remedial measures, whether demanding compensation, negotiating a

settlement, or pursuing revenge. Expressing anger over injury or threat to a member or

the collectivity is a way to indicate membership in a group, and to receive validation as a

good Somali. This validation has emotional importance in confirming identity and

coherence in a world characterized over the past few decades by frequent and severe

violence. It also implies an obligation on the part of the validating group to assist

individuals in the event of injury or need.

My purpose here is to argue that there is no simple line between social experience

(such as loss or violence), individual feeling states (such as sadness or shock), and

publicly verifiable outcomes (such as depression or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). To

repeat the words of Obeyesekere (1985:147-8),

The *work of culture* is the process whereby painful motives and affects such as

those occurring in depression are transformed into publicly accepted sets of

meanings and symbols. Thus the constellation of affects...can...be transformed in

a variety of directions ...and...symbolic forms.

While I emphasize the differences between the notions of human nature and

emotion that are implicit, and often explicit, in the practices and accounts of Somalis

versus those of Western academics and humanitarian and development practitioners, the

immediate reactions to witnessing or experiencing violence are not incommensurate with

those described for Western populations: the usual reaction to extreme events, such as

seeing one's family killed, is of horror (*argegah*). Nevertheless, the outcomes are

different, because the publicly accepted sets of meanings and symbols are different, as

are, to paraphrase Young (1995), the technologies, practices and styles of reasoning that

glue together current Somali responses to what Western psychiatry would identify as

"traumatic events". Survival is the overriding concern of the affected individuals as well

as their community, in the long term as well as during "traumatic events". Emotional

experience and expression are interpreted primarily with respect to what they indicate

about social and political, rather than intrapsychic, processes, not because Somalis do not

recognize individual emotional experience or distress, but because in this context the

organizing framework is not psychological medicine, but politics. Whether a medical

framework and an individual diagnosis and treatment would do better, in these

circumstances, at helping individuals and communities make sense of violence and distress and reconstruct meaningful lives and relationships is a question that should be asked before advocating trauma-based models of "the refugee experience" and trauma counselling models of response to the human experience of war and atrocity.

In this chapter I discuss four narratives involving witnessed or experienced violence. The first occurred in Dire Dawa in 1996, during my fieldwork. The second involves the one surviving person in Hurso who was universally held to have gone mad as a result of the events surrounding the Ogaden War and the seizure of the Hurso farmlands in 1979. The third is Amina's account of her experiences of the 1988 bombing of Hargeisa. The fourth is a discussion of the experiences of a young man who was caught in, and escaped, the "pulverization of society"–*burbur*–that characterized the civil war in Somalia in the early 1990s.

In none of the cases discussed here would an approach emphasizing "working through feelings" in an introspective process aimed primarily at integrating individual traumatic memories through catharsis either capture what was at stake for the individuals involved, or facilitate the resolution of the suffering indexed or expressed in each case.

## A Shooting in Dire Dawa: Emotional Trauma or Political Icon?

Since 1974, the ethnically diverse population of the eastern Ethiopian city of Dire Dawa has experienced wars, the presence of several thousand Cuban troops and Soviet advisors assisting the government in its wars on the Somali, Tigrean, and Eritrean fronts,

state sponsored terrorism and rebel activity, looting and generalized insecurity at the

collapse of the Mengistu regime in 1991, and since 1991 intermittent fighting among

Somali, government, and competing Oromo militias for control of the city and

surrounding countryside. Shortly after my return to Dire Dawa in January, 1996, I and

three Ethiopian Somali young men witnessed a shooting. Two of these young men were

friends, and all were volunteers with a local organization offering assistance to displaced

and impoverished communities in the area. I was trying to become more directly involved

with the activities of this organization. None of the young men had any combat

experience or other direct involvement with military or paramilitary groups, and none

was directly involved with either the victim or the gunmen. The ways in which these

young men, their friends and co-workers, and in one case the family responded to the

incident allow one real-time view of how violence–and witnessing violence–was

perceived by Somalis in this city at a time of relative peace, where uncertainty and

rumour were nevertheless the dominant aspects of the political context. My own presence

allows additional pieces of a "trauma" puzzle to be sketched out: how a foreigner is

incorporated into one local construction of violence, how an illness is constructed, and

how a "trauma", or a political icon, is constructed out of the flow of events.

This incident is an ambiguous vignette. It shows how the individuals with whom I

worked responded to a shooting, but the incident as a whole speaks less to emotional

distress per se than to a debate about "democracy", the ongoing construction of a post-

Derg Ethiopia and the perceived role of outsiders–especially "white people", whom I was

taken to represent–in this process. The fieldnotes are quoted at some length to show how violence fits into the flow of daily life, and to stay close to the local histories and experiences that are generally erased by universalizing medical or development approaches. Finally, some aspects relate to how I myself experienced what would in a psychiatric, PTSD model be considered a "traumatic event". This last dimension is of relevance primarily in its differences from how my informants construed the event. The ambiguity of the incident and my attempts to write it speak to the issue I wish to address through raising this fieldwork experience: the interactive and culturally mediated construction of "trauma", which can involve a political, moral or psychological stance towards witnessing violence. The relative "mildness" of this event allows some of the processes involved in responding to and making sense of violence to be observed.

**Tuesday 16 January 1996** 11:50 am

We left the NGO around 11 - myself, Mustafa, Idris, and Yusuf. As we were walking towards the lot where *chat* remnants pile up, we heard two shots. I held back, and Mustafa stayed with me. Idris and Yusuf went up to the southwest corner of the lot, and Idris beckoned to us to come near. There were dozens of people. As we approached, a teenager in a yellow shirt walked away from the piles of twigs, a Kalashnikov over his shoulder. Then I saw three or four other men with Kalashnikovs. Mustafa had said that it was "*militaires*" who had shot, at a thief. I could see a man lying on the ground, moving. The guys with guns were

near him, and a crowd of men and women was gathering. Idris was talking loud

and fast, mostly in Somali, some in French. He said we should go away and

around, if they saw me they'd be upset and it might be dangerous, because they

might think I was a journalist. I asked if he (*the man on the ground*) was ok,

should I do anything, should we call an ambulance, but they walked away and

around, along the street on the north side of the lot. More people were gathering.

Idris got more agitated - "He wanted to finish him off! He wounded him and he

wanted to finish him off, but the others held him back!"; later, again,"You talk of

doctors, and he wanted to finish him off!" Then he talked loud and fast to the

others, shaking his head and raising and shaking his arms, about *dad edyopia* -

"Ethiopians". He and the others said "they could easily have caught him, he was

less than four metres away, but no, they had to shoot him, and the one guy wanted

to finish him off as he lay on the ground! How can people live like this? How

long? For four branches of *chat* they'll kill a man, these Ethiopians!" By the time

we got to the Harar Road, Mustafa said "Now they'll take him to the hospital" - I

had asked again if I should do anything, or what we could do. Yusuf said the man

had said he was losing his mother. The man and the ones who shot him were

Oromo. Idris continued in the same vein to the turnoff to his house, where he told

the others he wanted to throw up. He and Yusuf turned down, and I continued on

with Mustafa. I asked him if this could possibly be just for the *chat*, or if

something else was going on. He said he thought there must have been something

else, some rancour, because for four branches of *chat* you don't shoot someone!

He said the first guy shot at his feet and missed, and the second one hit him - (*he*

*pointed at his right flank*) . Then he said it's like that sometimes: "If they (*police*)

catch a thief, they'll hold him in front of you and ask you what they should do

with him - should they kill him in front of you?"

At this point in my notes I go back to the start of the day and try to reconstruct it,

as I did on other days throughout my fieldwork. Since I did not tape record each full day,

live, but rather wrote up my notes once or twice a day, filtering and interpretation

necessarily occurred. The notes nevertheless bring out how the mundane and the dramatic

are interspersed in the course of daily life. For example, my fieldnotes just before the

shooting discussed kinship and visiting etiquette and described a debate about the status

of women in Christianity and Islam, and immediately after the shooting I described the

details of shopping and bargaining in the market and a dinner conversation with a French

couple about their experiences as development workers in Ethiopia. The next morning I

walked back to the office of the NGO with Idris and Yusuf, and we discussed news of the

event, including the fact that the wounded man had been shot again, and killed. Then

Idris changed the topic to a discussion of office management and how I might concretely

assist the NGO in this regard.

Here are two more excerpts from my fieldnotes, the first describing interactions at

the NGO on the day of the shooting, and the second from my visit with Idris's mother,

Quraysha, and one of her friends in the afternoon of the following day.

**Tuesday**:

At 4:30 we came back to the office. Samuel (*an older Amharic man who had*

*grown up in the Somali town of Jigjiga*) said I had seen something terrible today -

he was not sad/serious/quiet, more agitated. I asked if they'd heard any more. Idris

said I had to write this down, how democracy works in Ethiopia. He said he had

told his father, who was upset by it. ...Yusuf said that what the man was crying as

he lay on the ground was that he was losing his mother. I asked Idris if he'd heard

anything on the radio - he said there won't be anything, or in the papers. He

himself had tried to put out a newsletter once, and was told to be careful. I said it

seemed unreal to me. I had once seen a victim of a car accident and felt sick all

night, but this seems like something on television. Idris said "Yes, like a

Western!" They said some more about how "this was not a democracy, it's

terrible - everyone just shoots." ... I said again there must be  something else,

maybe it was political. They said the *militaires* say he was OLF (*Oromo*

*Liberation Front, a competing Oromo party pressing for Oromo independence*

*and suspected of extensive terrorist activity*), he had a grenade, but they (*Idris and*

*the others*) don't believe it. They said it's unheard of, shooting like that in the

middle of town. They said I should tell about this to all the white people I see, so

people will know what's going on - there is no government here. Other people,

when they have fights, arrange to meet outside of town, and they fight; not where

there are old people, children, women, everyone. Idris said "Imagine if we'd been on the other side of that lot when they were shooting - we could have been shot"....We left around 4:45. They asked if I wanted to see the blood. I said no, but we went to and through that lot anyway. Idris showed me the flags, while the others were saying not to point. There was no blood visible. There was a group of raggedly clothed, thin, *"markan"*-looking (*intoxicated by chat*) men and young men chewing right on the spot. After we walked by, both Yusuf and Idris said "he was one of them, and they are chewing right on his blood." Across Harar Road were *chat* sellers, business as usual.


**Wednesday:**

Then Quraysha came, preceded by a call of "Kiristiin!" She asked how I was - I said ok. She said "You went home, you slept, you ate lunch, and now it's better, right?" "Right". Then I showed her my Somali books and practiced reading out loud. Then the two women talked about the shooting. Quraysha asked if I had written it down. I said yes, and she nodded and said yes, I should tell them there is no democracy. Then the two of them said his last words were "I am losing my mother". They shook their heads, paused, frowned, their voices broke (*deliberately but not exaggeratedly - a very different reaction from the young men's*). Then the woman left, and Quraysha talked some more. She said there had been shooting two nights ago, and five men were killed a couple of weeks ago. I

should not go out at night, and I should write this, and tell Amnesty

International... I asked if there was anything on the radio yesterday - she said no,

shaking her head and holding her lips together with thumb and index finger. She

said people don't say anything, and it was worse under the Derg, when they would

knock on the door and take someone.

The shooting does not come up in interactions with others after Friday, nor in my

fieldnotes after Sunday.

Discussion

Neither the witnesses nor the other people with whom we interacted were neutral

about the witnessed shooting. All of the parties demonstrated and subsequently verbally

insisted on their distress. However, this distress was expressed not through describing

their internal states, but in terms of outrage over the occurrence of the event and, for the

two women, sorrow for a mother's loss of her son. The young men's reactions also

included a preoccupation with the details of the shooting—stating who had shot and where

the bullet hit, repeatedly asking me if I wanted to see the blood and insisting on walking

through the space where the killing had occurred. These reactions are consistent with an

emphasis among Somali on facing the unpleasant details of reality, just as the nicknames

given to men are a demand that "you must accept who you are", and any evidence of

squeamishness, for example in not wanting to watch a sheep be slaughtered, is met by

ridicule and insistence that one watch. Seeing a shooting was a more complex event: both

acceptance of the reality of the event, as well as outrage and disgust over its occurrence,

were expected and expressed. A somatic idiom was self-evident to Idris, who told us he

wanted to throw up and who subsequently did, according to his mother, Quraysha. It was

also taken for granted by the many others who suggested to me that the symptoms that I

was experiencing the day after the incident, and which I myself initially attributed to food

poisoning or the flu, were in fact a predictable consequence of seeing someone shot in

broad daylight in the middle of town. Both men and women repeated that the last words

of the dying man were that he was losing his mother--the personal existence of this man,

who was some woman's son, was acknowledged, independently of his death becoming a

political icon. However, the final significance of the incident was not psychological, but

moral and political. We asked each other and were asked how we were feeling, and

reassurance was offered that distress was normal. Beyond this, our individual distress was

minimized: "You went home, you slept, you ate lunch, and now it's better, right?"

The emotion created by the shooting was important--as evidence of moral sense,

as a way of both creating and demonstrating community, and as fuel for political action,

which included "telling the story". The connections continually made during this episode

among personal experience, especially a mother's loss of a son, the remembered political

history of Ethiopia, and the obligation to feel outrage and to act on this outrage link

concrete details of personal experience to emotionally and morally powerful themes

related to kinship: maternal love and political solidarity, the latter expressing a crucial

dimension of patrilateral kinship among Somali (Lewis 1961). The shooting should spur

us–especially me–on to political action, to telling everyone I see that there is no

democracy, and to serve as a point for reflection about the degraded condition to which

humanity in Ethiopia has sunk. This degradation was evident both in the occurrence and

circumstances of the shooting, and in the apparent indifference to it on the part of the

other men and women, mostly beggars, who search for scraps of chewable leaves among

the piles of stripped branches collected in the lot where the killing occurred. While the

response to the beggars was more of pity than contempt, the response to the government

was one of anger. My own reactions spoke of a need to find a "reason" for the killing, and

after some months in Ethiopia the direction in which I thought I should look for this

reason was not theft, but politics. My personal "effort after meaning" (McFarlane 1995)

seemed more intense than those of the young men, reflecting perhaps my own

psychologizing tendencies. However, what preoccupied me was not to deal with

emotional distress, but rather to come to terms with my perceived moral deficiency at not

feeling as distressed as my internalized trauma model suggested that I should.

A de-moralized "emotional trauma" from witnessing what was assumed and

asserted to be a political killing made no sense–neither to me, even in my private, de-

politicized reflections, nor to the other witnesses of the shooting, nor to the community in

interaction with which these witnesses sought to interpret, evaluate, tell the story of, and

act on a shooting in Dire Dawa. The experience of much of the population during most of

the Derg years was of fear and of being silenced, particularly as a religious, ethnic, or

other collectivity. This shooting was interpreted as yet another example of silencing. The

reaction was to refuse this, albeit tentatively, through gossip and outrage expressed in the

relative safety of a familiar community, and through exhortations to me to tell the

story—not to a therapist, but to political and human rights organizations[2]. Among the

witnesses and their community of coworkers, friends, and families, the key axes for

experiencing and acting on this event were power and powerlessness, justice, and a

historical memory that was inscribed on the community as a whole as well as on

individual bodies and minds.

This episode demonstrates some of the ways in which local cultural patterns and

local history shape responses to witnessed violence, in this case among urban Somalis in

Ethiopia. The fieldnotes were quoted at some length to bring out how meaning and

coherence are constructed out of a flow of otherwise disparate and often jarringly

opposed events. How the mundane, the dramatic and the traumatic interact and influence

each other is an important issue in trauma research from both psychological and social

perspectives. The assumption implicit in much PTSD research is that while the mundane

involves collective understandings, generally thought to be stored in people's heads in the

form of propositional knowledge or schemata (cf. Bracken 1998; Good 1994), the

traumatic involves a collapse into the ineffable privacy of individual experience, and

indeed represents an inability to process the literal reality of an event into symbolic form

---

2  I had been incorporated into a local community as a guest, and was frequently offered
hospitality, protection, and criticism. I was expected to offer what my relatively protected
position as a foreigner allowed me to offer - advocacy, if not at the time, then later.

(Caruth 1995 b). This shooting and the other narratives in this chapter suggest that

personal experience and collective meanings are mutually constitutive, in the case of

lethal violence as well as in everyday life. The ways in which the Dire Dawa Somali with

whom I worked responded to the shooting–both as individuals and in their self-ascribed

collective identities as "Somalis" or "Africans"–emphasized the public and collective

meaning and implications of the incident.

These processes are not, of course, unique to Somalis. Feldman's (1991) work

with Catholic and Protestant paramilitaries in Belfast demonstrates how violence creates

its own symbolic and public logic. Spatial and bodily markers of sectarian division are

critical to a violence which transgresses every safe place–surely what is meant by the

trauma-related concept of "shattered personal worlds"–precisely by reinforcing and

manipulating collective markers of identity, especially among those *not* directly involved

in the fighting:

> The discovery that the brutal killing of a single individual is commensurate in its
>
> political and polluting impact to the forced movements of entire communities, that
>
> terror has its own circuits of amplification that do not require material destruction
>
> on a large scale, is an essential discovery of paramilitary practice. (Feldman
>
> 1991:78-79)

> It is not that Somalis or other non-Western peoples are "sociocentric" while

personhood in the West is "egocentric" (Shweder and Bourne 1982). What Belfast

paramilitaries and regimes of terror around the world have learned is that an effective

way to attack the core of a person and of a community is to manipulate the collective

symbols through which individuals define their fundamental identities and values. The

episode discussed here was not a "doorstep killing" such as those described by Feldman.

It was, nevertheless, laden with cultural and political meaning which the involved

individuals did not dissociate from their "personal" experience of the event.

It is also more typical of the kinds of violence experienced and witnessed by most

populations in war zones than the individual violence to which "trauma" or PTSD might

be thought to be more applicable, yet teams of trauma counsellors are becoming an

increasingly popular and indiscriminate Western response to what is thought to be a

hidden epidemic of PTSD in war zones around the world (Atlani and Rousseau 2000;

Barnett 1999; Summerfield 1999). The exact nature of the stressor criterion for

PTSD—especially in DSM IV (the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American

Psychiatric Association, Fourth Edition)—remains contested in theory and it is very broad

in practice. That a social and political reading should occur among bystanders to a

relatively distant episode such as the one discussed above is perhaps not surprising.

However, it is ignored in most models of trauma counselling. Among the Somalis with

whom I worked, a political and social reading was also offered for violence and loss that

*did* lead, in local opinion, to individual madness, and for which a "trauma model" might

therefore be considered more appropriate.

**Madness, emotion, and survival**

Somalis in eastern Ethiopia referred to madness as *waalliy* or *waalleh*. I was told

that it can occur under three circumstances[3]: (1) subsequent to a physical illness; (2) for

no known reason ("sent by God"), and (3) as one of three possible sequelae of extreme

events that had caused horror/shock (*argegah*) or *marrora dilla'*, extreme impotent rage

and a "torn heart" (the other two possible sequelae are recovery, and *niyed jab*,

demoralization/hopelessness/despair). Two cases of madness were identified in Hurso at

the time of my fieldwork. One person identified as mad was a twelve year old girl who

screamed, tore her hair and clothes, could not control her bladder or bowels, could not

feed herself, and could not speak. Her symptoms were attributed to a serious febrile

illness at two years of age. Treatment had been sought from government, traditional, and

religious healers. The girl's father had long since left the family and her mother had

reached the point of bankruptcy. There was no perceived incompatibility between the

"local" or "traditional" treatments and the "foreign" or "modern" interventions. The

second person identified by the community is Aden, whose case I discuss here.

Aden is an older man who was one of the larger landholders in Hurso. Aden

spends his time either with 'Aasha, his first wife, or with his second wife, or in a shelter

he built on his land a few years ago. His son works for a local NGO in Dire Dawa and

hopes to be a doctor. I first met Aden as he walked by a shop near the railway tracks in

---

3 Various forms of spirit possession, including *zar* and *wadaado*, are also recognized but are not
considered to fall under the category of madness in this area. They are not discussed further in
this thesis.

the village, yelling. Several people were at the shop at that time, including 'Aasha, and

this episode provided the material for my first lesson about *waalliy*. I was told that he had

gone mad as a result of losing his lands and then of being beaten on the head by soldiers

when he repeatedly tried to enter his lands in the years after the expulsion. Eventually the

soldiers concluded that he was mad and harmless and have since allowed him to enter and

even farm a fraction of his expropriated land. I was told that he would get well, "even

now", twenty years later, if he got his lands back. Otherwise there was no treatment for

his condition.

The madness that could arise from dispossession, violence, and flight is said to be

characterized by either withdrawal and death, or excessive speech and bizarre behaviour.

This behaviour is not bizarre in the sense of being unintelligible, but is "rational"

behaviour practiced in inappropriate circumstances.

One evening, while I was visiting 'Aasha at her home, Aden came by, yelling

greetings jovially and saying he wanted to stay because the roof of his second wife's

home was leaking. Aden's episodes of madness occurred several times a day and lasted

from a few moments to an hour or more. 'Aasha said that, on these occasions, Aden

talked about the old days–the farms of the community, the names of acquaintances now

dead and with whom he had once worked. Aden watched us as we conversed with the

assistance of a young man, Ahmed. Aden interrupted us, speaking quickly, and said that

the land around Hurso was good, it had been irrigated, but then the farmlands had been

taken. He asked Ahmed and 'Aasha, "Which branch [of the United Nations] is she from?"

They discussed me briefly, and Ahmed explained that I was writing a book about Somali culture and the history of Hurso. Aden resumed:

> We left here. I carried my son on my back. They gave us a tent and rations, and after nine years a second thing happened. They told us to go to back to Ethiopia. Now we wait for good fortune. Any assistance [*gargaar*, mutual aid] would be welcome. I buried a suitcase. What can she (*C.Z.*) do for me? Our interest is to get our own land back. Now I want to go to Washington.
>
> Ahmed: Why?
>
> Aden: For money. I want to stay here tonight - it's raining at 'Addo's house. As compensation for my stolen farmland, I have only this house.
>
> Ahmed: What would you do in Washington?
>
> Aden: Forget about Washington. We are here. We only want something for our children.

Aden stopped speaking and looked off into the distance. 'Aasha continued:

> He saw his brother killed. The shock (*argegah, nahdin*) and the anger ('*adho*) made him decide to return home, take the children, put water on a donkey and go to Djibouti. He left the children in Djibouti and came back. The government had said it was ok to come back, but then they said "You are a rebel" and beat him. We had four children then. Only Muusa survived. Three died on the way. Muusa spent six months in the hospital. We were at Ali Sabiy camp... Aden came back to Hurso again when Muusa was in school [about five years later]....As for Aden, he

cultivates three trees that have been overlooked by the government. He is a Sufi, a

little mad. He can pray, talk, and work, but he speaks too much. I will show you

the trees tomorrow.

I asked about the course of his illness. 'Aasha continued:

He is worse now. They beat him. They added more anger (*'adho*) [i.e. in addition

to seeing his brother killed and losing his land]. Now if you see the three trees,

you would say that a tractor has worked here. When he is planting, he doesn't

remember that there is no water and no irrigation [so the plants shrivel and die].

'Aasha's narrative now transformed itself into a familiar story chronicling the loss of

farmlands, the evacuation of the local population at gunpoint, and the bulldozing of the

village the following day.

The next day, I went with 'Aasha, Ahmed, and two other young men to see the

hectare of land that Aden continued to work. There were three large mango trees and a

small field of sorghum. Ahmed said, "When Aden is here, he sees the trees and becomes

a little calmer. He works, talks a bit. But when he is in the town, he talks all the

time."Ahmed and his companions told me about other cases in which men or women

were driven mad by losing their land or seeing their livestock slaughtered. Most of these

people had since died. Aden listened, added details to their accounts, then removed

himself to his hut to chant prayers. At this point, he told me to leave because he had work

to do. On the way back to the village the men who had accompanied us pointed out farms

expropriated by the government. They made a point of emphasizing that even the guards

use the original owners' names to indicate which plots of land they were guarding.

In this series of conversations, the present and the past blend seamlessly . Several narrators participate in an account whose subject shifts from Aden's monologues and apparent flashbacks[4], to the history of the village, to other specific cases of madness, to immediate practicalities such as the likelihood of rain in the coming days. This collectivization of a medical history and comments such as the young men's assertion that "even the guards use the original owners' names" transform what was ostensibly an excursion to show me how well Aden was tending his mango trees into another deposition in the community's legal case against the government.

Discussion

The story of a young girl who had gone mad after a febrile illness was presented by my informants as a straightforward case history of madness, although even here the mother's social and financial situation was considered relevant to describing the case. A case history of post-traumatic madness encapsulates a social history of the entire community. The contents of Aden's frequent reenactments of the events surrounding his flight from Hurso are memorials to the community, to his friends, to the land. The story

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4  I use this term deliberately. Much of the time Aden's conversation is as recorded above, shifting from the immediate here-and-now ("It's raining at 'Addo's house") to reminiscences and judgments. However, these are not his "episodes of madness". During the latter, some of which I observed, Aden appears to be re-enacting the flight from Hurso, shouting in great distress to an invisible 'Aasha, demanding whether she has the children, and so forth.

of the course of his illness is part of the story of the family's flight and return and the

claims of all Hurso residents to the land or, at least, to compensation. In Hurso narratives,

the particular details of this individual case are intermingled with the standardized

concrete details of the expulsion of the population from their lands and homes.

Presenting Aden's case history without addressing the fact that his case is always

linked by his family and other informants to the story of dispossession and the social,

political and material circumstances of people's lives at the time of telling would

misrepresent the significance of "post-traumatic stress" in this community. Attempting to

treat his symptoms as if they were independent of the social and political history and

moral networks of his community would be counter to the insistence of every person

recounting Aden's history that Aden's symptoms are indissociable from the injustice he

and the rest of the community had experienced. His wife tries, at one point, to reframe his

madness as excessive spirituality ("Sufi"), but this conclusion was refused by other

informants. They agreed that Aden was indeed mad, (*waalliy*), but their use of *waalliy* to

describe Aden was less, and not more, stigmatizing and disapproving than the ways in

which excessive religiosity was discussed. The physiological component of his symptoms

is not what is salient, even though many informants attributed at least some of his

symptomatology to head injury. It is the "anger" caused by the beatings, rather than the

beatings themselves, that is felt to be most important. Young's (1995:220) discussion of

the meaning of anger for American Vietnam vets concludes that "anger is a response to

an assault on the self". The self in Hurso is not a private, separate individual, but is

embedded in relationships to other individuals and to the land.

Anger, *argegah* (shock, horror) and the torn heart and rage of *marrora dilla'* are

one mode of experiencing violence and loss. These emotions are relational. Aden's

symptoms consistently revolve around social relationships and a productive relationship

with his own land. His family and community recognize and support this. Aden's

flashbacks are also interspersed with here and now attempts to get assistance—"Which

branch is she from? What can she do for me? I want to go to Washington."–and curt

acknowledgments that compensation from the government or from UN agencies is a

dream: "Forget about Washington. We are here." Attempting to treat or understand

"mental illness" without addressing the imperative of survival would be, for this

community, the ultimate madness.


**Amina: Fleeing Hargeisa**

One woman's account of the heavy bombing of a city and the flight to refuge also

reveals emotional reactions of horror and fear, but in this narrative as well the main theme

is not emotional trauma, but survival, politics, and moral webs.

In 1988 the military forces of Somali president Siyaad Barre carried out an

intensive bombing campaign of the northern Somali city of Hargeisa, capital of the

former British colony of Somaliland and centre of the Isaaq-based insurgency, the Somali

National Movement (SNM). During this campaign, government aircraft and ground

forces also attacked other towns and villages and poisoned wells on Isaaq grazing lands

(Africa Watch 1990).

Here is one young woman's account of the bombing and flight out of Hargeisa,
told to me in Dire Dawa in 1995 when I asked her to tell me about her experiences as a
refugee. Amina, introduced in Chapter Five, had been sent from Dire Dawa to Hargeisa in
the late 1970s to escape the Ogaden War and subsequent Red Terror in Dire Dawa. At the
time of her flight back to Dire Dawa in1988, she was eighteen years old, married, with a
one month old son. She describes several months of uncertainty, when household
members and neighbours debated the likelihood of war. Her father-in-law insisted that the
family should leave the city, but her husband argued that there would be no war and they
should stay in Hargeisa. Two of Amina's sisters had moved to another neighbourhood
three months before the bombing started. In the weeks preceding the bombing a curfew
was imposed, confining people to their homes except for a few hours a day.

> We went out and bought rations - rice, pasta, sugar, flour, canned fish, and
> so on. We bought a lot of food. One night while we were sleeping, at 2
> a.m., they started bombing. My mother and younger sister went to join my
> two other sisters. Together with my baby boy, I stayed with my father-in-
> law. The bombing started near my house. Others nearby had also [spent
> everything to buy] rations. We took nothing except a few things for the
> baby. All our money had gone for rations, so we left like that, without
> money, without anything. We went to the Siina neighbourhood and stayed

there a day. The bombing started again. We went to a different house

where we spent eight days. Then we saw a corpse in the morning. People

were afraid to look. If you looked, the government soldiers would ask

"Why are you looking?!"

I wanted to find my mother-in-law, so I looked for her in the city.

When I found her, she had two goats. She gave me one and she told me to

slaughter it for us to eat. We started butchering the goat and the bombing

started again, and we left it. We didn't eat. Everyone started to run, and

people were killed just ahead of us when a bomb exploded. Many people

died, ahead of us and behind us. We saw a lot of corpses in the street. At

night there was no bombing. We returned to the house where we had been

butchering the goat. We ate and spent the night there. In the morning, my

mother-in-law said, "Let's go back to our house to get the rations." When

we got to the house we saw that it had been looted, and also there were

two dead men and another one, so three, ...no, two in the yard and two

inside the house. We went into the house. We saw all my clothes, and my

husband's, thrown about - looters had taken the suitcases. Then we started

to take some sugar. My mother-in-law was getting the sugar and I saw

another corpse, but his eyes were open like this (*opens eyes wide*), beside

the window, and I yelled to my mother-in-law, "Look! There's a man

looking at us!" We threw down the sugar and ran out of the house. We

left the house. We were hungry. We were buying some things nearby when a bomb fell. There was a lot of dust and neither of us could see. I thought the bomb fell on her and she thought the bomb fell on me. We were both flat on the ground, like this. But the bomb hadn't exploded, it just fell. We decided to leave Hargeisa and go to Ethiopia.

We were many... There was a group who returned to Hargeisa, and some who went to Bur'ao town [which was said to be safe], and others who set off for Ethiopia. We divided into three groups. Everyone would head for Ethiopia eventually. I was with my father-in-law, my mother-in-law, and my husband's brother, when we left Hargeisa. My husband and my grandmother and my other relatives had gone in another direction. After four hours, my father-in-law asked, "Where's my wife?" My mother-in-law had gone with another group, with the baby's milk and bottle. My father-in-law was worried. "Where's my wife?", he asked, "I will go back to find my wife." Others said, "We will keep going. After the bombing stops we'll look for her. Either she is dead [and nothing can be done], or she is with another group and we will find her later." We walked and walked and walked. We saw SNM soldiers, but we thought they were government soldiers so the men started running. The women sat down. We said "*Halaas* (It is finished). We are going to die."

The soldiers accompanied the refugees to the safe town of Garabis, and from then

on the refugees were on their own.

In this narrative of chaos and disintegration, the thread of continuity relates to action and not to introspection. Where blame for misfortune cannot be placed on specific agents, or when escaping threat is impossible (as when the women sat down, thinking that they were about to die), the obligation to accept Allah's will is invoked. This acceptance of the will of God does not imply deserved punishment for sin, as Das' (1995:18-23) discussion of theodicy suggests[5]. Rather, it approximates what she proposes as an alternative theory of and for pain and suffering, namely, chaos–the unpredictable and uncontrollable. PTSD researchers argue that a sense of loss or lack of control is a risk factor for developing PTSD (Freedy and Donkervoet 1995; Marsella et al 1996). In Amina's narrative and other Somali accounts, in contrast, the attribution of misfortune to unpredictable and uncontrollable disaster–if a perpetrator is not clearly identifiable–appears to free individuals and communities facing extreme threat to focus on immediate survival while reinforcing their identity as Muslims–literally, "those who submit to Allah".

Amina continues her account with the description of her stay in the village of her father-in-law's second wife, quoted in Chapter Five. She was adamant that the time in

---

5 Das writes: "I have argued...that in the face of such suffering, which is overwhelmingly experienced as accidentally visited upon the person, a search for meaning only gives legitimacy to the system, even as there is a profound failure to affirm the suffering individual. In such cases, can we think of giving irresponsibility a positive sense, in that the existence of undeserved suffering can become testimony to the chaotic nature of the world?...Most intuitive notions of a just or meaningful life assume that suffering must be deserved.." (1995:19-20)

that village was far worse than her experience of the bombing of Hargeisa and the flight

out of the city. I asked her if she didn't feel horrified by the memory of the sight of the

corpses and distressed at remembering the destruction of this city and the huge losses of

life in her Isaaq clan. She replied, no, this was not troubling for her, because the Somali

National Movement soldiers had led a counterattack and had killed many government

soldiers, so there was no unavenged loss to continue grieving. Her account of the

bombing and flight was intense and engaging, and included expressions of disgust when

she described seeing the corpses in the city. The overall story does not emphasize fear or

horror, but rather the determination to survive. Her account of the bombing itself is also a

story of mutual concern and material support where various parties looked for or asked

about each other.

Amina's accounts of her "refugee experiences" are not narratives of emotional

trauma, in the sense of overwhelming events "that [are] not assimilated or experienced

fully at the time, but only belatedly, in [their] repeated possession of the one who

experiences [them]" (Caruth1995b:4). They are stories of how she managed to survive.

Indeed, she finds her memories of being unable to mobilize kinship or gender-based

networks in the village of her father-in-law's second wife to be far more disturbing than

the uncertainty and outright terror of the period up to and including the bombing and

flight from Hargeisa. If there is a "radical disruption and gap of traumatic experience"

(ibid:4) for Amina, it is not the threat of death under fire but the revelation of the fragility

of her moral claims on kin.

**Pulverization and recreation of society: Politics, history, and violence**

Somalis have coined a new word for the experience of protracted total war in

Somalia in the 1990s: *burbur*, complete pulverization (Samatar 1994b). Most of the

refugees, returnees, and other Ethiopian Somalis with whom I interacted did not

experience this war and famine, but some, such as 'Abdi, did. 'Abdi was 25 years old in

1996. He described his personal journey from being a student at the agricultural

university in Mogadishu, through the civil war and flight to Afgoy, Kismayo, Gedo,

Mombassa, and Nairobi, and finally to his stay in a refugee camp in Holland for seven or

eight months, before being free to travel and study in Holland. Like the reactions to the

shooting in Dire Dawa, his experiences–including witnessing the shooting, evisceration

and subsequent death of his brother along the stretch of road known as Habar Werit (The

Curse of Your Parents)–are intertwined in his story with clan-based political histories.

'Abdi makes no attempt to present either his own history or that of Somalia as

neat. Paradox occurs and is simply accepted, likewise the fact that he did not know where

he was going from Nairobi until he heard an announcement that he was at Schipol Airport

in Amsterdam. When I asked how he survived along the route out of Mogadishu, and

what he ate, 'Abdi said:

> You know, in Somali culture, we have a saying that unless everything is totally
>
> destroyed, you will not starve. Eating was not a problem.

Things were not too bad, life was pretty normal, once they got to a safe place for a few

days or a few months. Because uncertainty and precariousness are accepted as normal, the

horror of *burbur*—complete pulverization—can be assimilated into an assumption that you

will not starve for as long as you are not actually starving.

The memory of near death—whether Amina's statement that the women sat down,

thinking "Halaas. Now we are going to die", or 'Abdi's accounts of the Habar Werit—is

shaped by the fact of having survived. Hundreds of thousands of people did starve. I do

not have access to their accounts. Among survivors, however, it is this fact of survival

and the circumstances that are held to have led to the experienced catastrophe that are

central to shaping the memory and narrative of trauma, and not the fact of near death or

experienced horror.

After he told me, sketchily, about the circumstances of his first months in

Holland, 'Abdi said that now it was his turn to interview me. He asked me about my

project and made a few suggestions for how to proceed. Then he made two points. First,

he said that if I want to understand Somali refugees, I should study Somali history and

general culture, otherwise I will never understand why they are fighting. He argued that

other people fight because of religion, or ethnicity, or for property, but that Somalis fight

to get political power. In the case of Mogadishu, for instance, he claimed that Hawiye

already controlled most of the business, so why did they want political control? His

interpretation was that part of the Hawiye push was to enter, and take control of, the

political domain which had previously been contested primarily by the Daarood and the

Isaaq, and he specifically mentioned the tradition of political poetry from which, in his

opinion, Hawiye had been absent or excluded. Actual control of economic resources was

insufficient to ensure continued primacy or at least survival; political control was

considered essential.

"Look at the fighting in Somaliland", he said; "why are they fighting?" "Because

[President] Egal told the [opposing Isaaq faction] Gerhajis to hand over their weapons", I

said. He laughed,

> No. When the British came, most of the police, administrative, and educational
>
> opportunities went to Habr Yunnis [who are the main actors in the Gerhajis
>
> coalition], who thereby got ahead. This bothered the Habr Ja'elo [who are among
>
> the supporters of current president Egal], who therefore got involved in the fight
>
> for the unification and liberation of Somalia. They [including Egal himself]
>
> started "Ir-ism", a political union of Isaaq and Hawiye. When independence
>
> happened, the Habr Ja'elo were well positioned, and got lots of good jobs,
>
> advanced in education and business and government, and generally left the Habr
>
> Yunnis behind. This continued into the Siyaad Barre era, till the late '80s when he
>
> went after *all* of the Isaaq clans. The Habr Yunnis couldn't complain effectively in
>
> the international press, because it sounded silly, and they couldn't complain
>
> effectively at home because others would say the Habr Ja'elo had fought to
>
> liberate Somalia, had overcome clan divisions and so on. And what had the Habr
>
> Yunnis done? They helped the British colonialists. So the current fighting is Habr
>
> Yunnis trying to get even with or ahead of Habr Ja'elo - it is a continuation of the
>
> SNM, which was started in 1981, well before the total onslaught on Isaaq. But if

you don't look beyond the newspapers, you won't understand it.

The point here is not whether political power is more important than economic power. ('Abdi's analysis does coincide with scholarly accounts of the importance of controlling the state apparatus as a prerequisite for controlling the wealth that might arise from foreign aid, wealth which could be used to reinforce personal and clan political power [Lewis 1994, 1997; Lyons and Samatar 1995; Markakis 1987, 1994; Samatar 1994]). The point here is that 'Abdi's analysis stresses the historical roots of political and economic processes, including the civil war, and the complexity of clan, class and state alliances among Somalis today. 'Abdi is a 25 year old agriculture student who survived, despite personal and family losses, the pulverization of society during the civil war of the 1990s. He interprets Somali politics in a way that differs little from "traditional" accounts.

The second point 'Abdi wants to make is that I must understand that, in rural areas, it is considered a good thing to have killed a man. Violence, fighting, and killing are not, per se, unacceptable and horrifying. He recounted a story that he had been recently told by a young Marehan sheikh:

> It was hard to believe this story! This man, the sheikh, was travelling and came upon a settlement just before one of the prayer times. He saw two young women and asked them to give him some water so he could wash before praying. They looked at him, then turned away and kept talking. He repeated his request. They said to each other, "Who is this simpleton, this idiot?" and started walking away. He followed them, and repeated his request again. They turned to him and said

"Look, there's this old man in our village who's not quite dead - why don't you

finish him off and then accompany him [to paradise]? He's probably killed 70

men, and here are you, young, probably haven't killed anyone, and you're already

thinking about praying instead of fighting!"

Both his assertion that killing was sometimes considered a good thing and his

anecdote, in which women humiliate a man who is not a warrior, are consistent with

many other accounts that I heard. These included a lengthy discussion with the poet

Hurre about the ways in which children are taught to be tough. These ways include games

analogous to "Capture the flag" where children sometimes suffer broken bones. The

parents of the injured children cannot claim compensation. Both children and young men

are taunted by other children and adults if they are considered to be cowardly. The

reactions of the young men to the shooting in Dire Dawa–specifying the details, insisting

on walking through the place where the shooting happened–were also ways in which

toughness is being expressed. Violence, however, must be controlled and channeled into

socially appropriate expressions, one of which is collective retribution. Counter-violence

is managed through the mediation of lineage elders, through *shir*, and appeals to the

principles of Islam. Further, there are popular proverbs, *mahmah*, that promote

negotiation over violence. One such proverb (which Hurre quoted to demonstrate the

tripartite structure of one form of *mahmah*) goes as follows:

War is bad. If you make peace, it is better. If you had made a treaty before

arriving at fighting, it would have been best of all.

This proverb brings together all of the preceding values: peace; the importance of

negotiation to make peace; the importance of treaties and contract to prevent war–an

appeal to the general value of *xeer*; and, paradoxically, the inevitability of war in the

absence of enforceable contract or treaty.

'Abdi makes no attempt to "explain", still less justify, his particular experience or

his brother's death or the rape of women along the Habar Werit road in terms of the

rationality of clan conflict over political power, nor in terms of a culturally constructed

positive value of killing. What he does is to situate his own, irreducible and paradoxical

experiences of near death and survival against a historical and cultural fabric that can

hold conflict and contradiction, and that allows him to maintain an identification with a

tradition at the same time as having experienced some of the worst outcomes that can

arise from this very tradition. He did not go mad.


**Conclusion: violence, emotion, and the politics of meaning**

From its very first act of "benevolence" towards abducted women and children to

its assumption of a *parens patriae* role in relation to victims of the Bhopal

disaster, the Indian state privileged the languages of professionals–the social

worker, the judge, the medical scientist. The discourse of the professional, even as

it speaks on behalf of the victim, does not seem to have the conceptual structures

by which voice can be *given* to them. I am not suggesting that the experience of

the victim can sepak to us pure and neat, unmediated by intellectual reflection. I

am suggesting, however, that the conceptual structures of our disciplines...lead to

a professional transformation of suffering which robs the victim of her voice and

distances us from the immediacy of her experience.

Das 1995: 175

Somali politics provides a framework within which  intense personal emotion

around injury or loss can be expressed, validated, and channelled into social practice.

Contradiction and dynamic tension between potentially conflicting interests and needs are

not hidden or seen as obstacles to the coherence of the self, but rather are accepted as a

reality with which individuals and collectivities have no choice but to engage and through

which both the individual self, and the moral webs within which this self is embedded,

are constructed.

In the burgeoning field of trauma counselling for war-affected developing

countries, emphasis is placed on individual psychic trauma and ensuing personal distress

assumed to arise from personal danger, the death of loved ones, or witnessing horror or

violence, and individual counselling is offered to allow individuals to "talk through" and

"integrate" their individual traumatic experiences and memories so that epidemics of

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can be prevented or treated early (Bracken and

Petty 1998; Friedman 1996; Norris and Thompson 1995; Summerfield 1999). Among the

destitute returnees with whom I worked outside of Dire Dawa, the suffering and

narratives which were considered salient were those that indicate an individual's position

within the community and its history of dispossession. Attention to personal, private loss

or suffering was systematically discouraged, in part, I suggest, because such attention

risks causing further fragmentation of moral webs, and ultimately the madness of

disconnected individuals.

Violence, insecurity, and the threat of death are not intrinsically "traumatic" in the

sense of being so difficult to assimilate into any personal world that they are highly likely

to trigger dissociation and acute or chronic psychopathology. Rather, it is perhaps the

exclusion of violence from the "usual human experience" predicated upon the relatively

tranquil world of the middle class Western professional that confers on violence some of

its traumatogenicity. Somali models, and perhaps those of other populations living in

chronic insecurity and danger (Turton 1992), re-connect individuals with society and

provide cultural, psychological and political mechanisms for dealing with the reality of

violence.

Using diagnostic categories, such as PTSD or even "trauma", as the point of

reference of all discussion, decontextualizes the experience of "trauma" and reifies the

diagnosis which initially was meant to point to one facet of a complex, public and

political domain of experience and contestation. Some of the Somalis with whom I

worked, including Aden, may be diagnosable as having PTSD. This is a category fallacy,

a misreading of the local significance of signs and symptoms (Kleinman 1988), or, in

Summerfield's (1999) words, a pseudo-condition that does not capture the significance of

what they have lived through. Indeed, although a formal prevalence survey was not a part

of this ethnographic study of the long-term significance of having experienced collective

violence and repeated forced migration, the prevalence of severe mental illness among

Somali populations near Dire Dawa appears to be very low. This does not mean that

dispossession, violence, and forced migration are unimportant for Somalis. It may mean

that mental illness is irrelevant as a measure of the nature and significance of "the refugee

experience" of these populations, except when it is situated in social context, or

understood and deployed as a political icon as both the shooting in Dire Dawa and the

madness of Aden were understood and deployed in their respective communities.

The problem is not that there is anything inherently wrong with describing reality

in one or another way. Rather, the problem is that each way of describing reality has

implications that go beyond theory. A description of a statistical distribution of

symptoms, which is what research based on DSM IV diagnoses provides, erases the very

experience of coercion, powerlessness and threat of both personal and collective

annihilation–and the variety of human responses to these–that attention to the "human

costs of war" promises and that Somali in Ethiopia take such great pains to emphasize.

Clinical models that bracket power, culture, history, and politics may well have a

valuable place in such conflict zones, if used strategically and sparingly. However, a

psychomedical model of violence and emotion risks further fragmenting the social worlds

on which personal survival–both material and psychological–so closely depends. The risk

of causing social and individual harm is increased when such a model is implemented

through humanitarian aid programmes that highlight and reinforce inequalities between

donors and beneficiaries.   Biomedicine is particularly blind to power; therefore, we need

to pay attention not only to the political framework within which responses to violence

are shaped, but also to the political implications of assigning meanings to violence,

emotion, and trauma.

# Conclusion

## REFUGEE EXPERIENCE AND THE POLITICS OF SUFFERING

Somewhere at the black writers' elbows, as they wrote, was the joggle of independence coming to one colonised country after another, north of South Africa. But they wrote ironically of their lives under oppression; as victims, not fighters. And even those black writers who were political activists...made of their ideologically channelled bitterness not more than the Aristotelian catharsis, creating in the reader empathy with the oppressed rather than rousing rebellion against repression.

The fiction of white writers also produced the Aristotelian effect - and included in the price of hardback or paperback a catharsis of white guilt, for writer and reader.

Nadine Gordimer, "Living in the Interregnum" (1988:272-273)

## Moral webs and the experience of war in Somali Ethiopia

An "experience near" ethnography of the refugee experience of Somalis in eastern Ethiopia in the mid-1990s is not one that explores the private anguish, or even resilience, of individuals, but rather one that is able to sense and convey the importance—and among the poorest, the urgency—of forging, maintaining, and mobilizing moral ties between individuals and among groups so that survival and other needs can be met. Individual experiences related to displacement and violence, including what may be glossed as

"emotions", are consistently interpreted not with respect to what they say about the interior state of an individual, but with respect to what they say about the situation of an individual vis-à-vis life circumstances and other social actors (see also Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990). This is not to say that individual experience is non-existent or insignificant. On the contrary, individual characteristics, actions, and idiosyncracies are recognized and at times exaggerated both by the person in question, and their interlocutors. However, the core of human nature implied in the Somali discourse and practice which I observed does not reside in private, subjective experience, but in being situated within a moral web which one is able to mobilize on one's own or others' behalf. The destitution and economic and political marginalization of communities such as Hurso preclude the realization of the material and political support that moral ties are normally thought to ensure. Under these circumstances, local moral webs are maintained in two main ways: everyday rituals–the performance and public demonstration of social interaction and solidarity through activities such as groups of unemployed young men chewing *chat* or poor women assembling in meetings of a *jim'aed*, and the practice of collective memory through public narrations of histories of dispossession.

Somalis in Ethiopia–refugees, new returnees, landless returnees, middle class survivors of waves of war and displacement–stressed politics, justice and poverty, and not private distress, in their interactions with me about their experiences of collective violence and forced migration. My research suggests that the Somalis with whom I worked in Ethiopia have experienced war and dispossession as an attack on webs of relationships through which these individuals and their families have immediate or

potential access to the material, social, and political resources necessary for survival. It is

these webs of relationship that must be attended to, repaired, constructed, reinvented, as it

is in these moral webs that the possibility for living a human life resides. For Somali in

Ethiopia, "human nature" does not primarily reflect the individual feeling, thought or

action that remain after the social layers are removed, but rather the dynamic of actual or

potential interactions among persons. Disconnected, solitary individuals were identified

to me as mad. Individual experience—which varies widely—is felt and known as significant

through the ways in which moral ties and moral webs reverberate in the life of a person,

and through the ways in which an individual's actions and experience are played out in

the textures of the moral webs in which she or he moves.

The preoccupation of middle class urban Somalis is the forging of an effective

Somali regional government and securing an education, marriage, and livelihood for

themselves and their children. The preoccupation of refugees in the Aware camps is

politics and representation in Somaliland, and maintaining trade or remittance networks

with kin and non-kin—including refugee relief agencies—in Somalia, Somaliland, Ethiopia,

the Gulf States, and overseas. The preoccupation of newly arriving returnees in Dire

Dawa is to secure material resources for survival and to situate themselves as legitimate

citizens who therefore have legitimate claims in the newly refederated Ethiopia. The

preoccupation of landless peasants is to deploy, and if necessary create, networks of rights

and obligations to gain sustained access to a means of survival.

Individuals do act on their own behalf, sometimes against the interests of kin or

clan groups or individuals towards whom they have, in theory, obligations. These moves

are themselves attempts to forge other ties—with the state or with development agencies,

for example. The moral webs which individuals and communities weave are not limited

to "traditional" patterns based on kin, clan, or even gender. The notion of language games

is a useful tool for seeing how Somali in Ethiopia are actively engaging non-traditional

structures and processes such as development agencies and a state in the process of

reconfiguration. Language games in the strict sense around words such as "refugee" and

"development" are particularly evident in settings such as the Dire Dawa returnee camp,

formal women's associations interacting with the state or development agencies, and the

didactic narratives told to me, and through me to other potential audiences, about women,

men, humanitarianism and so forth. However, the engagement with the state and other

actors also occurs through symbolic, social and political practices not limited to words or

narrative accounts. Both verbal and non-verbal engagement aims at establishing moral

ties, that is, ties of rights and obligations, through which both material and social survival

might be more securely established. These new forms of moral web intersect with and at

times compete with more familiar forms. What these communities and individuals

sought through interactions with NGOs, the state, and other actors was not so much a

particular instance of material assistance, although this was often what was immediately

at stake, but to establish a framework for an ongoing relationship.

An emphasis on moral bonds—on embeddedness in dynamic, at times conflictual,

communities—does not imply that all Somalis have the same "refugee experience". This

thesis has shown that the experience and effects of forced migration are significantly

influenced by social inequalities based on gender and economic and political power. Nor

does it imply, among these Somali, the absence or insignificance of individual desire,

character, or protest. It is not that the individual does not exist, nor that "community"

colonizes individual lifeworlds and appropriates experience, pain, and memory to the

point of obliteration of difference or protest, as Das suggests may happen with some

strongly communitarian rhetoric in polarized situations (Das 1995, Chapters 6 and 7).

Rather, individuals and individual pain are continually re-framed and re-incorporated into

a moral community, lest loss, suffering, and insecurity isolate them in the silent madness

of unshareable pain.

The centrality of moral webs is visible in local discourse and practice related to

suffering, which over time are seen to privilege some forms of distress over others, and

not in the ways that are obvious to a Western observer. Loss, suffering and insecurity are

expected among pastoralists, who face the possibility of drought and hunger every year.

Nor are the more settled populations unfamiliar with loss and distress, since they have

memories of generations of local wars, state oppression and, especially among the

landless, destitution, not yet relieved by promises of refederation or development.

However, suffering is not romanticized in poetry nor presented as a virtue. It is something

to be avoided if possible and endured if necessary. Indeed, it is precisely the widespread

experience of loss and distress that gives narratives of–or even allusions to–dispossession

and destitution much of their moral power: the listener cannot claim ignorance of the

costs and effects of, in this case, violence and forced migration.

Cassanelli (1982, 1986) has demonstrated that socio-economic and political life

among Somali has long reflected an awareness of uncertainty and the possibility of

disaster. Cultural forms and values also reflect the importance and awareness of this

uncertainty. The emphasis on moral webs, the elastic tension between individual and

various social interests, and the variety of genres addressing history and justice–both epic

and quotidian poetry, mythologies of war and clan power, geneologies, personal

narratives, allegorical stories such as that of Ali Giljeri, and realist accounts such as the

story of the loss of the farmlands–all speak to the precariousness of survival and the

importance of constructing and maintaining flexible and widespread networks.

Nevertheless, the dominant note of social life and personal narratives is not the

precariousness of survival and risk of death, but rather the determination to survive–that

is, to establish and maintain access to the resources essential to achieve what my

informants called *nolol adaaminiimo*, a decent human life. Indeed, a keen sense of the

absurd is present in the midst of widespread demoralization in Hurso. Poverty,

dispossession, hunger, and forced migration are the experiential ground on which are

woven moral webs directed at justice, restitution, and living the life of a human being.

Misery is emphasized not to describe emotional states or even material reality, but to add

moral force to claims on outsiders and to demands for solidarity among kin and

neighbours. The claims on outsiders and the demands for solidarity on kin provide a

space for individuals to locate and assuage their own losses, even when these cannot be

spoken of directly, and even, as I argue, when these are not experienced or remembered

as private traumas.

## Culture, power, and the meaning of trauma

This thesis has addressed two ways of making sense of violence and forced

migration: personal psychological trauma, in Western society's domain of psychological

medicine, and personal and collective injury, in Somali society's domain of politics. Both

of these approaches involve theories and ways of interpreting and acting on emotion, and

both entail assumptions about what, fundamentally, constitutes human nature or the self.

Both approaches are also embedded in social relations and practices and have

implications at individual, social and political levels.

Attention to individual suffering can be a political act in the aftermath of

genocides or states of terror which target both the social fabric and individual existence

(Agger 1992; Elsass 1997; Zarowsky 1998). Many texts on trauma and trauma

counselling mention the importance of culture and occasionally of power, but in the final

analysis therapy is aimed at helping the individual to cope with their feelings through

narrating their trauma (Freedy and Donkervoet 1995; Friedman 1996). A chapter on

"Applying Community Psychology to the Prevention of Trauma and Traumatic Life

Events" (Norris and Thompson 1995) includes a plea for political engagement and action

as primary prevention. However, the proposed "Framework for Trauma Intervention"for

American populations includes a discussion of crisis counselling that urges

a proactive posture rather than a reactive one in identifying persons in need of

services. This posture involves active casefinding and outreach services in the

community...Outreach is needed because many people who need help may not

seek it. The elderly, for example, tend to rely upon informal support structures

such as family, friends, and religious organizations...This reluctance to use formal

assistance may reflect a generational emphasis on independence and "carrying

one's own weight" and the stigma against utilizing "public welfare." For groups

who are reluctant to request assistance, a traditional "office" approach in which

the clients are self-referred may not be effective.

(Norris and Thompson 1995:56).


In a similar vein, Friedman (1996) addresses the following comments to primary care

practitioners:


Thanks to a massive psychoeducational program provided by the print and

electronic media, the public has become familiar with the concept of PTSD and

recognizes that it can be caused by war trauma, domestic violence, sexual assault,

industrial accidents, and natural disasters. Media coverage of major recent events

such as the Persian Gulf War, Hurricane Andrew, cases of child abuse, and the

genocide in Bosnia have often underscored the psychological impact of such

events thereby contributing to the growing sophistication of a public that knew

little about PTSD until the late 1980s. Furthermore, PTSD is an attractive

explanatory model for many people because it places responsibility for their

suffering on factors outside themselves. factors over which they often had neither

full responsibility nor control.                          (Friedman 1996:173-174)

This quote from a leading PTSD researcher reveals the biomedical perspective on the connections among individual experience, illness, and publicly available explanations. PTSD is a natural fact, recently discovered, and the massive psychoeducation program provided to teach the public about it is held only to uncover hidden cases and causes, and not to offer a new way of making sense of suffering. Other papers by this author (Friedman and Jaranson 1994; Friedman and Marsella 1996) reveal a more pragmatic relationship to the diagnostic category, which is seen more in terms of a working hypothesis under continual revision, but this particular paper represents PTSD as factual and as contested only in its nuances. The researchers, clinicians, humanitarian workers and policy makers who apply PTSD to refugee and war situations are progressively further removed from a critical analysis and application of this diagnosis.

Such a "proactive" orientation is problematic in the West itself, where an increasing proportion of social problems appears to be claimed by the "neutral" and "apolitical" domain of psychological medicine. It raises major ethical questions in its application to war-affected countries (Bracken and Petty 1998; Bracken et al 1997).

I am not arguing that psychological medicine is necessarily—by virtue of being "foreign"—an inappropriate framework for work with Somali or other non-western populations. In the Hutu refugee camps in Congo-Zaire, women expressly sought out foreign involvement to set up "non-traditional" social spaces such as women's projects and foreign-run schools (though not trauma counselling projects), precisely to create a "foreign", hence potentially neutral, space where extremist political pressures might be evaded (V. Jefremovas, pers. comm.). In this case as in the issue of setting up psychiatric

services, however, it is essential to understand the local rules and to know what is at stake

for various actors, including the would-be helpers. Knowledge of alternative

frameworks, such as non-psychiatric ways to address violence, threat, or forced

migration, may indicate spaces from which outsiders, including therapists, can offer their

own models in ways that support or complement local systems of knowledge and

practice, instead of deliberately or implicitly attempting to supplant the latter. Ager

(1997) and Summerfield (1996, 1999) discuss how this might be done in the case of

psychosocial programmes for war-affected populations. Openness to alternative

frameworks might also indicate ways in which dominant models in psychiatry might be

modified.

In addition to attending to conceptual frameworks and patterns of practice, it is

important to know or try to find out what roles the outsider–researcher, therapist, or

advocate–is playing, from the perspective of the actors she is observing or trying to help.

The cases discussed in this thesis highlight that an outside "observer"–myself–can be

incorporated into local ways of responding to violence. Even though my interlocutors

knew that I was a physician, it was my foreignness and potential links to sources of

political or economic support that were most important. My presence influenced how

some incidents unfolded, and hence what I observed. This is always the case. What is

necessary is not to attempt to eradicate such interaction effects, but to attempt to

recognize them and how they shape both practice and knowledge.

## "Dependency" and the globalization of the (Anti-)welfare state

Charity and humanitarianism are not just rhetorical strategies cynically manipulated to achieve the "real" agendas of various actors. Humanitarian aid is seen as an obligation, on both moral and legal grounds. To this extent, it is redistributive of resources and delimits sovereignty, much as Hathaway (1991) argues that human rights law is primarily a way of delimiting state sovereignty. However, donors also seek to delimit the extent of obligation on them, or conversely, to delimit the rights of claimants, in this case refugees. The obligation of gratitude and the pervasive rhetoric of dependency, with its proposed remedy of cutting off aid out of concern for the recipients' dignity and mental health, are ways both of expressing the conflict, and of attempting to resolve it in the donors' favour.

However, I wish to suggest a further point, namely, that the rhetoric of dependency contributes to what Mark Duffield (1992) refers to as the globalization of a socially polarized society, where one part exists in a state of permanent crisis. Duffield suggests a continuity between the permanent underclass in the West and the nexus of conflict, impoverishment, drought and chronic large-scale food insecurity in, especially, sub-Saharan Africa. Duffield suggests that the perceived undesirability of "relief" as opposed to "development" tends to minimize awareness of the state of chronic emergency characterizing sub-Saharan Africa, even though the general orientation to Africa is one of welfare or relief. The conditions requiring continual "relief" are presented as temporary aberrations, "emergencies", rather than as the normal state of affairs for the past two to three decades.

Refugees, refugee discourse, and "dependency" play a particular role in this process. In addition to being an uncomfortable marker of nation- and statehood, refugees also represent the most visible part–literally, the homeless–of the global underclass. It is not surprising that with the internationalization of welfare, we should also see an internationalization of attempts to erase, through discursive, legal or fiscal strategies, the structural links between the underclass–welfare bums, bag ladies, youth gangs, or refugees–and the rest of society. A pity-based discourse which zeroes in on standardized individuals, both on the donor and on the recipient side of the relationship, who are stripped of social, political or economic networks (let alone power) makes these structural links more difficult to see, while maintaining inequality between donors and beneficiaries.

"Dependency" could be understood as a simple description or assessment of the degree of choice (i.e., little or none) available to the recipient. However, in the context of debates over domestic safety nets and refugee relief, it is instead a discursive strategy which shifts the topic of debate from material and social inequality, to psychological and moral weakness. It reinforces the power of the donor to give or to withhold, by invoking scientific ("mental health") and moral authority to limit both the basis and the extent of claims that would-be recipients can legitimately make. "Dependency" in this sense may or may not reflect objective dependency, and may or may not be a "bad thing". It is located, however, not in the refugee, but in the rules that structure the language game where the meanings and significance of "refugee" and "humanitarianism" are contested.

**Pity, mental health, and the erasure of power**

A recent WHO manual on the mental health of refugees (WHO 1996), which

mentions the primacy of securing basic needs and the importance of addressing cultural

aspects of mental illness and of healing, nevertheless slips into the perhaps inevitable

position of recommending and describing breathing exercises and relaxation techniques

for managing the stress under which refugees often find themselves (WHO 1996:16-31).

Despite frequent reference to the material and political risk in which people live, healing

in this manual is limited to activities which are thought to improve the emotional state of

the individual. Thus, although religious rituals, meditation, and traditional healing

practices are cited as possibly beneficial interventions, their benefit is tacitly assumed to

lie in helping to calm or heal the individual. Social action, or even individual action,

directed primarily at social, political, or economic conditions is not mentioned as a

strategy for improving the mental health of refugees. This is in line with psychiatric

models of mental health and mental illness. Individual psychotherapy for survivors of

collective violence may be a political act, in so far is it asserts the individuality and

separateness that genocidal violence seeks to eliminate along with the collectivity itself.

However, to reduce the suffering of refugees or other displaced populations to a question

of mental health, seen as fundamentally individual and private, does injury both to the

subversive and healing potential of individually oriented therapy itself, and, more

importantly, to the individuals and the social networks in which they are inextricably

embedded.

Current concern and rhetoric about refugee mental health, including post-

traumatic stress disorder and "refugee dependency", express, in part, a desire to see

refugees as whole human beings with emotional and psychological lives, rather than as

mere numbers. This discourse is also meant to express support for the empowerment of

refugees (von Buchwald 1994). One of the advantages of the dominant discourse around

refugees as victims is that it facilitates fundraising for refugee assistance programmes.

However, this "appeal of experience" (Kleinman and Kleinman 1997) and its expression

in graphic images of starving children and despondent and helpless adults has

consequences rather different than the hoped-for empowerment (ibid; see also Malkki

1995, Introduction). Empowerment, if it is indeed a desired condition, seems more likely

to arise from the Somali discourse about refugees, which is overtly moral and based on

justice.

The discourse of pity erases both the specificity of each refugee situation, and the

claims of justice which might be made by one or another party. The further

transmogrification of a moral discourse of pity into a purportedly neutral and scientific

discourse of psychological distress or illness, whether "dependency" or PTSD, eliminates

even the possibility of identifying the rhetoric *as moral*, and therefore at least implying

rights and obligations. A moral rhetoric at least allows an interrogation of pity,

paternalism, and the vested interests of those taking the paternalistic or "helping" role.

Once someone is labeled as "sick", this moral dimension and the possibility it offers to

analyze and challenge power relations vanish into the allegedly neutral "facts" of science.

This labeling is not new. In the nineteenth century, Irish refugees to the United States

were also much more effectively dismissed as rights-holding persons if they were labeled

as "mentally ill", rather than as one party among others in a contest for resources (Kraut 1994). Power has been erased - both the real and potential power of the refugee or claimant, and the real and potential power of the donor.

A medicalizing approach to refugee distress may at times have a useful place in providing a neutral territory for addressing what are often highly polarized issues, much as development rhetoric offers returnees a way to press political claims without directly confronting the state. However, it is critical to examine much more closely the assumptions generally underlying the use of such depoliticizing discourses—whether medicalizing , humanitarian, or development—including the variant around the notion of "refugee dependency". Otherwise, this discourse which is thought by its agency and medical proponents to express the most benevolent concern for refugee suffering (see eg de Vries 1998; von Buchwald 1994; WHO 1996), will express instead yet another face of colonialism: the appropriation of suffering and the colonization of minds (Kleinman and Kleinman 1997; Nandy 1997; Summerfield 1997; 1999b). One aspect of this colonialism is that the culturally and historically conditioned Western emphasis on the individual and on the primacy of individual psychology as the "real" core of human nature is attributed to all of humanity throughout all time (Summerfield 1996; Young 1995). PTSD and "refugee dependency" are examples of conditions or disorders which are held to be timeless, natural, and subject perhaps to varying cultural window-dressing but fundamentally pan-human in their occurrence. However, the effects of this "colonization of minds" are not limited to a subtle shift in ways of thinking about human nature, which might in any case be argued to be a shift to a better and more humane model (see the

exchange between Summerfield 1997, 1998b and de Vries 1998). The globalization of refugee identity in terms of mental (ill)health is important primarily because this discourse obscures the very real political, social and economic stakes involved in refugee crises and refugee relief. It erases the individual as well as the collectivity, and history, and power.

In North America, political and moral debates are increasingly carried out in the language of medicine. This is reflected in the history of PTSD and in the ways in which medico-legal cases[1] are used to challenge the power of employers, large corporations, and the state. However, once in the domain of science and medicine, the use of scientific rules of evidence and the language of objectivity, neutrality and facts is mandatory. Heuristic concepts such as PTSD take on an autonomous existence, expressed not through the voice of the sufferer but through that of the expert. Political, moral, and social agendas become obscured. While the outcomes of political contests fought in terms of medicine are not predetermined, inequalities of political and economic power are seldom inverted or eliminated. Among Somali returnees and refugees in Ethiopia, political legitimacy and power are not sought through the medium of medicine, but are, rather, contested primarily in an openly political arena. However, the increasing use of the language of development and humanitarianism in these communities suggests that the language of trauma could, in principle, become a new vehicle for expressing distress and pursuing

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1 For example, for compensation for PTSD, or the American class action suits against DOW Chemical on behalf of women whose leaking breast implants were considered the cause of extensive disability.

political and moral objectives. Whether this language would be more effective in

conveying their lived experience and resolving the distress caused to these individuals

and communities by war, dispossession and destitution is another question.

## Appendix 1 - Notes on Research Methods

**Fieldwork**

The principal focus of this ethnography is a population of Ethiopian Somalis who fled or were forced to leave the region around Dire Dawa in eastern Ethiopia during the 1977-78 Ogaden War with Somalia, and who have since returned to this area.

In June 1994 I visited Ethiopia for several weeks and made initial contact with Gargaar, a local non-governmental organization (NGO) providing relief and development assistance to Somali and Oromo returnees outside the city of Dire Dawa. From June to September, 1995, I studied the repatriation of Ethiopian refugees from Djibouti to Ethiopia. The first Ethiopian stop of these returnees was in Dire Dawa. The remainder of my time during these months was spent with local Somali families and poets, the friends of the daughters and sons of one middle class family, and with a brief visit over several days to the new capital of the Somali Region (Jigjiga) and refugee camps in the east (Daror, Rabasso, and Camabokor camps, near Aware). From December 1995 to October 1996, and in May/June 1998, I worked in Dire Dawa and the village of Hurso, some 25 kilometres to the northwest of Dire Dawa. I also interviewed and observed staff and managers of several local, national, international and UN agencies involved in some way with humanitarian aid. I visited these agencies' offices, field staff, or projects in Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa, Malka Jabdu (seven kilometres outside Dire Dawa city, part of Dire Dawa Autonomous Region), Hurso, Harar, Babile and Gursum (two towns along the road from Harar to Jigjiga, in Oromiya - the Oromo National Regional State - with sizable Somali populations and reintegration projects funded by UNHCR), Jigjiga, and the Aware

refugee camps in the northeastern Ogaden. They included: the Administration for

Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA, the Ethiopian government partner and

implementing agent of UNHCR), the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC,

renamed in 1995 as the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission, DPPC),

UNHCR, the World Food Programme (WFP), Save the Children (UK) (SCF-UK),

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Gargaar (a local NGO), and representatives of

municipal, regional, and federal government. I was invited to observe a two day meeting

of government officials, UN staff, and over two dozen local and international NGOs

(including UNHCR and the Southeast Rangelands Project, SERP, the largest

development programme in the Somali region) in Jigjiga in December of 1995. This

meeting reviewed development programmes and plans for the Somali National Regional

State, then known as Region 5. I maintained informal contacts throughout my fieldwork

with individuals working with other relief and development agencies, including the

Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP-

EUE) as well as with Canadian Embassy staff and researchers affiliated with Addis

Ababa University.

This thesis is based on formal and informal interviews and participant observation

as described above. I included three small surveys using structured and semi-structured

questionnaires, two with newly arriving returnees (Chapter 3, N=35, 119), and one with

residents of Hurso and Malka Jabdu (N=25+30), to complement the ethnographic

research. The interview guides are attached in Appendix 1. I was also able to draw on the

resources of the library of the Institute for Ethiopian Studies at AAU, as well as records

and archives of UNHCR, ARRA, WFP, the Dire Dawa administration, and preliminary

and final results of the 1994 census. This census was repeated in the Somali region in

September 1997 because the 1994 results were considered flawed. The Somali Region

census data cited in this thesis are from the 1997 re-count, which is the official Somali

Region component of the 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia. It was

published in February 1998 in Addis Ababa and was available to me only after I had

completed my fieldwork. The research was conducted in English, French, and Somali.

Formal interviews were conducted primarily in English or French, either directly or

through a research assistant/interpreter. Informal conversations and interactions were held

in Somali, unless my interlocutors spoke English or French.

Most of the people I interviewed, particularly in Hurso, said that I should use the

real names of individuals and I have done so in regards to their narratives about the lands.

Otherwise, I have used first names - some real, some fictitious to protect privacy. Where I

did not have permission to use individuals' names when writing about their personal

experiences, I have changed names but not gender or age.

**INTERVIEW I- NEWLY ARRIVING RETURNEES**

DATE:
LOCATION:              PHASE (OF REPATRIATION):
INTERVIEWER:           LANGUAGE OF INTERVIEW:

1. SEX      M    /    F                    2. AGE:
3. MARITAL STATUS:
4. (a) ALONE        or   (B) ACCOMPANIED?
5. IF (b), BY WHOM?
6. DESTINATION:
7. HOW WAS YOUR DESTINATION CHOSEN?
8. OCCUPATION:
9. ETHNICITY:      AMHARA  SOMALI  OROMO  AFAR  OTHER:
   CLAN:           SUBCLAN:
10. CITIZENSHIP: (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY) ETHIOPIA        SOMALILAND
                                SOMALIA    KENYA     OTHER:
11. WHEN DID YOU GO TO DJIBOUTI?
12. WHERE WERE YOU LIVING BEFORE LEAVING FOR DJIBOUTI?
13. HOW LONG HAD YOU BEEN LIVING IN THIS PLACE?
14. WHY DID YOU GO TO DJIBOUTI?
        a) WHY DID YOU LEAVE ETHIOPIA?
        b) WHY DJIBOUTI?
15. HOW DID YOU GO TO DJIBOUTI?
16. WITH WHOM DID YOU GO?
17. WHAT DID YOU DO WHEN YOU FIRST GOT TO DJIBOUTI?
18. DID YOU CONTACT ANY OR ALL OF THE FOLLOWING:
        a) FAMILY?        i) Y /        N
           If yes,        ii) WHO?
                          iii) WHY?
                          iv) WITH WHAT RESULT?
        b) GOVERNMENT AGENCIES?   i) Y         N
           If yes,        ii) WHO?
                          iii) WHY?
                          iv) WITH WHAT RESULT?
        c) OTHER AGENCIES OR ORGANIZATIONS? i) Y              N
           If yes,        ii) WHO?
                          iii) WHY?
                          iv) WITH WHAT RESULT?
19. DID ANYONE CONTACT YOU?    Y         N
        If yes, WHO?              WHY?


20. DID ANY RELIEF AGENCIES CONTACT YOU? Y / N

If yes, WHO?
      HOW?
      WHY?
      RESULTS?

21. DID ANY SECURITY OR POLICE AGENCIES CONTACT YOU? Y N
      If yes, WHO?
      HOW?
      WHY?
      RESULTS?

22. HOW DID YOU MAKE A LIVING IN DJIBOUTI?

23. WERE YOU EVER IN A CAMP?       i) Y / N
      If yes, ii) WHICH?
      iii) WHEN?
      iv) HOW LONG?
      v) WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE CAMP?

24. HOW IS IT THAT YOU ARE RETURNING AT THIS TIME?

25. IS ANYONE EXPECTING YOU AT YOUR DESTINATION? i) Y / N
      If yes, ii) WHO?

26. WHAT ARE YOU INTENDING TO DO IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS?

27. WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU WILL DO OVER THE NEXT FEW MONTHS?

28. WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO USE THE REPATRIATION PACKAGE?

29. WHAT DO MOST PEOPLE DO WITH THE REPATRIATION PACKAGE?

30. WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH YOUR REPATRIATION PACKAGE?

3 1. IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE REPATRIATION
      PROGRAMME?

32. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE REPATRIATION PROGRAMME?

33. HOW IMPORTANT IS THE REPATRIATION PROGRAMME, AND THE ID CARD,
      i) FOR MAKING A LIVING?
      ii) FOR LEGAL PURPOSES? (e.g., for identification, schooling, voting, etc.)

34. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT COMING BACK TO ETHIOPIA?

35. DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING ELSE TO SAY ABOUT THE SUBJECTS IN THE
      INTERVIEW, OR ABOUT OTHER ISSUES?

Thank you very much for your participation.

**HURSO INTERVIEW - SEPTEMBER 1**

1. Language of interview:
2. Who answered the questions?
3. How many people live here now?
a) Total          b) Elders          c) Youth          d) School children          e) Small children
4. Clan/Ethnicity
5. Are you raising or taking care of anyone else's children?
6. a) Are any of this family's children living elsewhere? b) If yes, where and with whom?
7. How do you make a living?
8. What does each person do?
9. What animals do you own?
10. What do you do with them?
11. a) Do you have a family in the countryside?
    b) Do you have family in another town? (Specify)
    c) Do you have family in another country? (Specify)
12. a) If yes, do you help each other?
    b) If answer to 12 a) is "yes", How?
13. a) When did you first come to Hurso?
    b) When did you come back to Hurso? (if returned)
14. a) When you most recently came, did everyone come together? b) If no, who came
    first? c) Why? d) When did the others come?
15. Where did you last come from?
16. How long did you live there?
17. What did you do there?
18. Where did you live before that?
        ** if answer is "Hurso", go to Question 22
19. How long did you live there?
20. What did you do there?
21. Did you live in Hurso before?
        ** if answer is "no", go to Question 26
22. If yes, what did you do?
23. How was your life?
24. a) When did you leave?      b) Why did you leave?      c) How did you leave?
25. Why did you return to Hurso?
26. If you were here during the 1977 war or if you were a refugee, did anyone in your
family die during the war, in the country where you were a refugee, on the way? (specify)
27. What do you think of Hurso now?
28. What are your family's needs?
29. What are Hurso's needs?
30. a) How is your morale?      b) How is Hurso's morale?
3 1. How do you compare Hurso and Ganda Hurso in Malka Jabdu?
32. Do you have anything else you wish to add? Thank you very much for your help.

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