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FOOD SECURITY AND PEASANTS’ SURVIVAL STRATEGY: A STUDY OF A VILLAGE IN NORTHERN SHEWA, ETHIOPIA

by

Frehiwot Tesfaye

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Anthropology
University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT
FOOD SECURITY AND PEASANTS' SURVIVAL STRATEGY: A STUDY OF A VILLAGE IN NORTHERN SHEWA, ETHIOPIA
Frehiwot Tesfaye

Department of Anthropology, University of Toronto

Ethiopia is an old agrarian society endowed with a skilled and hard-working peasantry that carries a rich fund of agricultural knowledge. Yet Ethiopian peasants have been the main victims of the cyclical droughts and famines. Recurring famines helped to bring about the 1974 revolution. Many radical reforms were introduced by the post-1974 regime with the aim of giving peasants more economic and political power, increasing agricultural productivity and ending agrarian poverty. The reforms sought to achieve a radical break with the past. The thesis analyzes the impact of these changes on the peasants. It shows that the negation of local initiative and traditional knowledge and institutions, rather than strengthening the peasantry, weakened their survival capacity and made them more vulnerable to crisis. The severity of the 1984-85 famine is viewed in this context.

The central argument of the thesis is that peasants' marginal political and economic position hinders their ability to adapt to rapidly changing social conditions. In the past, their subordination to landlords and the state perpetuated poverty and limited their capacity to cope with crises. Their continued political and economic subordination continues to prevent them from overcoming rural poverty. Combining political economy and oral history, this study traces the spontaneous migration of peasants from the overpopulated area of Wello to the sparsely populated region of Northern Shewa in search of land. It shows how the migrants creatively combined their knowledge of the past with hard work and technical, political and
social ingenuity to adapt to the socially and ecologically diverse environment of the new region in pursuit of a livelihood.

The thesis elucidates how peasants use their material and non-material resources and past experiences with droughts and famines to innovate survival strategies. It stresses that peasant resourcefulness needs to be supported and encouraged for the sake of long-term, sustained development. A development policy, utilizing peasants’ initiative and local resources is an effective substitute for state reforms imposed from above or occasional food relief by outside agencies.
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Finally, Very special thanks to the people of Berekha from whom I had an opportunity to learn about the hardships of rural life in Ethiopia and how to appreciate them. I acknowledge their cooperation that was indispensable to the completion of the research.
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National/Regional Self Government Units in Ethiopia
(Unauthorized map. UNCDF October 1993)
INTRODUCTION

The main focus of this study is on peasants' own initiative to cope with rural poverty and famine in Ethiopia. The study deals with the migration of peasants from the Province of Wello to Northern Shewa in search of land as part of their survival strategy. The analysis combines political economy with oral history. The data for the study was collected through fieldwork conducted between 1992 - 1994 in the village of Berekha located in the district of Efratana-Jille, Northern Shewa, Ethiopia. The thesis highlights how national and international factors affect local (village) conditions that are responsible for perpetuating rural poverty and peasants' vulnerability to famine. The study centres around three sets of interactions: first, between the peasant community and the Sufi Saint, the Great Shaykh; second, between the villagers and the landlord; third, between the villagers and the state.

Chapter One is divided into two parts. In Part I, a brief outline of the framework of the study is presented. Some of the theories dealing with the causes of famine and food security are briefly examined. The selection of the theories is not exhaustive, but based on their theoretical significance and their relevance to the Ethiopian context. Part II provides a brief historical sketch of famine and food security as a consequence of the traditional agrarian relations in Ethiopia. The perception of famine, peasants' moral economy and the traditional cultural nexus defining the obligations of the ruling class and the expectations of the peasants during drought and famine are discussed. The erosion of the traditional nexus as a result of the radical political and economic changes in post-1941 Ethiopia is briefly mentioned. The chapter ends with observations on the representation of the 1984-85 famine in Ethiopia by the mass media and the role of external intervention during famine.

Chapter Two examines peasant social structure and consciousness. This discussion is necessary, since historically, famine is associated with peasant societies. The discussion focuses on peasant mode of subsistence, their mentality, and social organization. It examines the centrality of the land question in peasant societies, the significance of family labour and drudgery in peasant production, peasants' subordinate status, subsistence ethic, and the intertwining of land and religion in defining their consciousness are examined. The issues raised here are selected for their relevance to the ethnography.

Chapter Three introduces the topographic and demographic features of the Northern Shewa region where the village of Berekha, the site of fieldwork, and the district Efratana-
Jille are located. This discussion is necessary in order to situate the villagers in the wider context of the ecological, political, economic, and cultural environment of the region. The assumption here is that the life of the villagers is a historical product of the combination of natural and cultural factors. In order to show the contribution of the villagers to the development of the area, a brief history of the development of the district town, Alem is provided.

Chapter Four deals with methodological issues and problems of doing fieldwork in the midst of poverty, political instability and underdevelopment, as well as the difficulty of doing research as a woman anthropologist in one’s own society within the context of these problems. The two way relationship between a researcher's theoretical perspective and "multiple consciousness" and ethnographic experience through fieldwork is discussed (Harrison 1987). Finally, the relevance of anthropological research to empower the studied population is stressed.

The ethnographic material is presented in Chapters Five and Six. Chapter Five provides an outline to show the changing relationship between state and society, with special emphasis on the agrarian sector. It is argued that this change had a direct consequence to the peasantry and was responsible for their eventual migration from Wello to Shewa. This is followed by an elaboration of the economic, political and cultural conditions they found in Efratana-Jille, Northern Shewa. The crucial role played by religion and religious leaders within Ethiopian agrarian tradition is briefly outlined. It is argued that persistent agrarian crisis continues to make religion important in the lives of the majority of the population. Focusing on the continuity and change in the land tenure system, the chapter provides a historical background of the changing relationship between state and society as a result of centralization in the two provinces of Wello and Northern Shewa. The purpose of this analysis is to show how peasants have to continually struggle to create space for themselves within the rapidly changing political, economic and ecological conditions.

Peasants' creative use of history, religion, local knowledge, and traditional skills in search of livelihood is described in Chapter Six. The important role the Great Shaykh played in initiating the migration and finding land in Northern Shewa is emphasized. It is shown how the migration and settlement of the villagers in Efratana-Jille was successful due to the
mediatory role of the Great Shaykh. His Sufi teachings focusing on harmony helped integrate the new settlers into the unstable social environment of Ifat. The tradition of self help and mutual cooperation among the villagers and their attempt to live in harmony with the neighbouring Amhara highland farmers and lowland Oromo pastoralists helped them not only to meet their day-to-day survival needs, but also to avert starvation during the 1984-85 famine, until the aid provided by the state and international organizations arrived.

Chapter Seven opens with a brief mention of the conditions on the eve of the Revolution of 1974. This discussion is relevant in understanding and interpreting the response of the peasantry to the changes that followed the Revolution. The main focus of the chapter is to analyze the major reforms introduced by the Derg regime after 1974, with an objective to alleviate poverty in the short run and improve the conditions of the peasantry, the overwhelming majority of the country’s population, in the long run. Why the reforms failed to meet their professed objective is briefly discussed. The gap between the stated objectives and the actual outcome of state reforms is discussed with two main aims: first, to show the difficulties of implementing socialism in conditions of underdevelopment and war, second, to underline the importance of peasants’ own initiative in any attempt by the state or other outside agency to free them of the cycle of persistent poverty and famine.

The discussion in Chapter Eight draws on major points covered in the earlier chapters to emphasize, in the absence of other sources of livelihood, the centrality of the land question for peasants. The importance of peace and political stability as a precondition for development is stressed. It is emphasized that ordinary people at the local level utilize their own resources, rather than relying on outside support by the dominant group, the state or outside agencies. To recognize the importance of local initiative and traditional resources is, however, not meant to undermine the importance of economic structure (availability of land, state of technology), political structure (authoritarian/democratic) and culture (determining the work ethic) that set a limit on what people can or can not accomplish. Finally, the two-way relationship between the researcher’s theoretical assumptions and the experience of fieldwork is acknowledged. It is emphasized that Anthropologists have a moral obligation to ensure that their research is used to empower, rather than to further marginalize and subordinate the potentially vulnerable people with whom the research is done.
CHAPTER ONE

In Part I of this chapter I am going to discuss why famine is not a favourite subject of study by historians and anthropologists. It is further shown that while famine is caused by a combination of natural and human factors, human factors play a primary role, that is, human intervention can either accentuate the impact of natural factors or effectively control them to avert famine. Traditional moral economy that defined the obligations of the ruling class and the expectations of the subordinate classes during famine is discussed, followed by a brief mention of the probable consequences of a breakdown of this moral order in times of famine. The significance of culture in understanding the general perception of famine and the popular response to the crisis is discussed.

In Part II of this chapter I discuss how famine in Ethiopian society has been a structural-historical process, showing the primacy of human factors. The traditional cultural nexus defining the obligations of the ruling classes, the state and the church is briefly discussed. The decline of this nexus and its implications for relations between rulers and ruled are mentioned. The questions raised in this section are discussed in detail in light of the ethnographic evidence in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

Finally, there is a brief discussion of the limitations of the media representation of the 1984-85 famine in Ethiopia. It is argued that anthropological research, focusing on the local initiative and traditional resources within the wider historical-structural context of the national and international forces, can balance the biased, one-sided media representation of rural poverty and famine.

I: FAMINE AS A PROCESS: A HISTORICAL-STRUCTURAL PERSPECTIVE

a) Writing About Famine

Cormac O’Gra’da (1988: 47) finds it rather curious that so little has been written about the Great Famine of 1846 in Ireland. The goals and achievements of the ordinary Irish farmer and worker, he notes, have attracted little attention. Few writers, if any, have had a good word for them. They are mostly perceived as lazy and ignorant, or as too oppressed to work effectively. Why have Irish historians neglected to study the history of famine? According
to O'Gra'da, "politics is part of the answer". Irish historians, he says, are, by and large, conservative and do not find this area of research particularly rewarding. He states, "There are no Irish E.P. Thomsons or Eugene Genoveses...The famine remains a sensitive subject, and perhaps that is why its economic and social history has not been written" (O'Gra'da 1988: 81-82).

The case of the Irish Famine is by no means unique. David Arnold (1984: 63) observes a similar situation with regard to the famine victims of Madras in South India in 1876-77. Mary Douglas (1966) thinks that a lack of serious research on the cultural and social aspects of food and famine is caused by an ad hoc separation between food sciences and social thought, a legacy of intellectual compartmentalization in the academic world (Arnold 1984: 2). Parker Shipton (1990: 282) sums up the situation as follows: "Almost any subject is easier than famine, and cheerier". However, he adds that "those who learn something about it should not fear soiling their hands now and then in practice or political advocacy, as they soil their feet in fieldwork."

The central concern of the theories of famine is to explain the causes and consequences of famine, response of the famine victims, the elite, and the state, as well as provision of effective solution. Broadly speaking, there are three explanatory paradigms of famine that are relevant to our study. These are: natural (climatic and environmental) factors, demographic factor (neo-Malthusian), and political economy (entitlement thesis).

b) The Climatic Factor

Famine is a complex phenomenon, in which climate plays an instrumental rather than a causative role. Arnold (1988: 29-33) has argued that famine is a sign of society’s inner weaknesses, not a consequence of temporary climatic disturbances. He suggests that non-industrial societies have been subject to factors other than climate which have increased their vulnerability to natural disasters (and hence to famine), or made effective forms of adaptation to climatic variations and periodic food shortages more difficult to maintain. Nicole Ball (1975) commenting on the recent droughts and famines in Africa, has similarly argued that lack of rainfall or other such natural disasters fail to explain the fundamental and underlying causes of African hunger and famines. She argues that drought, like all other natural
disasters, results from an interaction of social, political, economic, and environmental factors. The interaction of these elements, over the long term, can greatly reduce the ability of a system to cope with new and/or suddenly intensified stresses, creating conditions for disaster and breakdown. Because such disasters usually follow a natural phenomenon, such as too little rainfall in the case of drought, they tend to be characterized as natural, while more fundamental problems are ignored.

Instead of seeing climate as the explanation for famine, Ball focuses on a long-term deterioration of Africans' control over their own economic and social systems as a result of colonialism and international capital. Africans no longer had the opportunity or capacity to control their productive forces and to manage the environment in accordance with their own needs and past experience (Arnold 1988: 33). Thus, for instance, in West Africa, the Tuaregs' desert-side economy was undermined by the incoming French colonial administration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Tuaregs' political ascendency (and hence their capacity to exploit the resources of other communities in times of need) was put to an end, their flocks were pillaged to satisfy colonial demands for meat and skins, and their customary trade in salt and grain declined once the railways reoriented trade away from the desert to the coast (ibid.50). These historical-structural distortions exacerbated the consequences of natural dislocations causing human tragedy.

Paul Greenough (1982), in his study of the Bengal Famine of 1943-44, points to the underlying historical-structural factors. When he began his work he was concerned only with the events in the 1940s. Later he became convinced that the famine could not have developed to such a catastrophic proportion without an underlying condition of dearth and disorder. He argues that the calamitous months of 1943-44 were only the most intense phase of a decades-long period of food scarcity and rural distress in Bengal. A demonstrable decline in rice consumption since the end of the nineteenth century accompanied by a rapid increase in this century of undesirable alternatives to tenancy, such as sharecropping and agricultural wage-labour, make it at least arguable that hunger and economic insecurity had been the lot of millions of Bengalis for more than eighty years preceding the famine of the 1940s. By thus enlarging the chronological horizon, he tries to show the deeper, historical roots of the famine.
Amartaya Sen’s analysis of the Ethiopian famine of 1973-74, in which the upland areas suffered disproportionately, illuminates the contributory role of natural (climatic) factors in causing starvation. The drought of 1972-74 had the indirect effect of drastically reducing the capacity of the various sections of the agrarian population - tenants and small owners, agricultural labourers, and pastoralists of this region. The tenants and small owners lost their purchasing power due to crop failures. Agricultural labourers lost their purchasing power because they were unemployed. Finally, the pastoralists lost most. Their animals died, and the price for animals fell while the price for grains rose. Sen is able to bring out the chain reaction of climatic changes resulting in the entitlement failure of various classes (cf. Sen 1981: 93-111). He does not ignore climatic change, but he uses it only as an adventitious factor - a contributory factor - not as a substitute for structural factors which account for long-term trends (Tilly 1985: 138).

c) The Demographic Factor

Stimulated by famines and food crises in the Third World, there has been a strong revival of interests in Malthusian theory since the 1950s. The theory is recast to meet the needs and fears of the present age. Population in the Third World is seen to have risen sharply, especially since the Second World War, largely as a result of improved medical services and technology (Arnold 1988: 39). Thus, Ronald Seavoy (1986) has argued that their 'indolence ethic' makes peasants habitually subject to famine and prevents them from equating their numbers to an assured food supply. Discussing Indonesian agriculture in general, the famine crisis in Ireland in the 1840s and in India in the 1870s, Seavoy claims that in their desire to expend as little labour as possible, peasants grow only enough food to provide for their immediate subsistence. They take a calculated risk and make a 'subsistence compromise,' growing just enough food for their own consumption with a minimal expenditure of labour assuming normal harvest each season. That being so, even a partial crop failure may reduce them to starvation level. Seavoy further argues that peasant societies are characteristically prone to high birth - rates because peasants want to escape as quickly as possible from the irksome labour of ploughing and reaping. Apparently, the sooner they can transfer this burden to their children and "retire to the comfort of their firesides the better!"
The remedy for peasant indolence and famine vulnerability, according to Seavoy, is greater involvement in a market economy, if necessary through the forcible intervention of the state (ibid. 58).

Seavoy presumes, all too uncritically, that peasants have the freedom to control and so to change the economic and social conditions in which they live. Treating peasants as if they were autonomous farmers, geared only to self-sufficiency, not only overlooks the extent to which most peasants are already involved in some degree in market relations. It also ignores one of the peasantry's cardinal characteristics - their subordination to the holders of economic and political power. Arnold therefore disagrees with Seavoy's view of peasant vulnerability to famine as a "self-induced nightmare" (ibid. 59). The spectre of famine, according to Arnold, is present in the very social and economic structure of the agrarian society, that is, in the expropriation of the surplus by the landlord, various expenses in connection with birth, death, marriage and religious rituals over which peasants have little control. To an outside observer, these expenses "might seemingly smack of peasant profligacy. But they were necessary for the renewal of social ties and as the price of membership of a wider community which... might in turn provide support in times of need or in old age" (ibid. 60). Arnold raises an important question about how we are to understand the role of peasants in history. Should they be seen "as the indolent victims of history", submissive even in the face of the gravest misfortune, or "as a more dynamic and purposeful force of agrarian change"? From this perspective, famine serves as a measure of peasants' adaptability or inertia, a means of understanding their ability or inability to control their lives. The pivotal role of the peasantry in history cannot be ignored, and once again Arnold reminds us that, "by the sweat of their labour peasants underwrote the sweet-smelling civilizations of the pre-industrial world" (ibid. 60-61). At the same time, the history of major famines, such as Ireland in the 1840s, Russia in the 1890s, or Bengal in the 1940s, and Ethiopia in the 1970s and 1980s reveals similar patterns of peasants’ limited ability and opportunity to act or innovate sufficiently to avoid the onset of famine.

d) Critics of the Malthusian Thesis

The Malthusian thesis has been criticised by many. Thus, Ester Boserup (1965) has
argued that population pressure, rather than being a cause of demographic catastrophe, has been the driving force behind agricultural innovation and increased agrarian production. Contrary to what Malthus assumed, rather than being inelastic, agriculture has historically expanded and adapted to meet the needs of a rising population. The transition from pastoralism and shifting cultivation to various forms of increasingly more intensive agriculture arose from the pressure of demographic necessity. In contrast to those neo-Malthusians who see population growth as having disastrous consequences for the environment through 'over-grazing’, soil erosion, and the exhaustion of soil fertility by excessive cultivation, Boserup argues that the human contribution has generally been a constructive one. Although there have been ecological disasters in the past, many societies have improved the productivity of the soil through labour, drainage, irrigation and the use of natural fertilizers and manure. Population growth has thus been an incentive to agrarian innovation and a stimulus for the development of a more complex and technologically advanced society. Faced with a choice between starvation and innovation, human society usually opts for the latter and turns the potential adversity to real advantage.

Arnold (1988), without denying the merit in Boserup’s argument, doubts whether historically human societies have had as much freedom to adapt and innovate as Boserup claims. There have been many societies (e.g., Ireland in the first half of the nineteenth century or China in the second half of the nineteenth century) in which, despite obvious and mounting demographic pressure, the necessary innovations or more basic transformation of the agrarian system was not possible due to political constraints, lack of capital, want of the appropriate technological skills and knowledge, environmental factors, or social and cultural reasons. It is important to note here that Ethiopian peasantry suffers from all these limitations. It would seem rash, therefore, to assume that societies historically had an almost indefinite capacity or willingness to change (see also Arnold 1988: 41-42).

e) Food Availability Decline (FAD) and Entitlements

Meghand Desai (1988: 108) notes that famines are a relatively new topic of study for economists (and other social scientists) after a lapse of a hundred years or more. Recurring famines in the twentieth century in the underdeveloped world provided a new impetus for the
revival of the Malthusian thesis that famine (epidemic hunger) is caused by a lack of food where there are too many people to feed. Sen's (1981) notion of "exchange entitlements" based on his study of the Great Bengal Famine (1943) followed by his analysis of the famines in Bangladesh, the Sahel and Ethiopia offers an alternative approach.

Sen (1981) challenged the view that famines are caused by a 'Food Availability Decline.' The critical issue for him is not the volume of food itself, but the way in which food is distributed. Starvation occurs not because there is not enough food to eat but because some people do not have enough to eat. His thesis has global implications. In opposition to Malthus and Malthusians, he points out that in recent decades in most parts of the world (with the exception of Africa), agricultural production has kept pace with population growth. The main cause of famine therefore is not food not being produced, but food not being equitably shared out and hence not available to all who need it. Sen argues that famines have been brought about locally through differential access to, and control over, available food supplies.

Similarly, Greenough (1982) notes that at the time of the famine in Bengal, there was an adequate supply of grain. Starvation was unnecessary and occurred only after a series of fateful human errors. Greenough's argument supports Sen's thesis that starvation and death during famine are not merely a matter of an inadequate supply of food. William Dando (1976) notes that famines have historically taken place in the world's best agricultural regions.

To explain his thesis, Sen develops a theory of 'Exchange Entitlements.' The term 'entitlement' refers to a legally sanctioned and economically viable right of access to resources that provides control over food. This right can come through production, trade, and labour, through property rights and inheritance, or through public welfare. Entitlements are, therefore, not fixed and equal but vary according to an individual's position within a wider system of production and distribution. Accordingly, famine occurs because the burden of deprivation and hunger is not evenly shared. Famine results not from the theoretical per capita availability of food but from the inability of some social groups (due to their location in the social system) to obtain sufficient food to meet their subsistence requirements (Arnold 1988:43).
Sen's entitlement thesis examines the social and political context of famine, and emphasizes the economic, social, and political relationships of those who suffer and die in famines. Sen claims that starvation is not a matter of food supply per capita, but a function of entitlement relationships such as those of ownership, employment, and social security rights. People starve because they do not have money to buy food or they do not have the politically and socially sanctioned right to receive food free. Sen's approach is relational: he explains hunger and starvation as a consequence of existing or shifting economic, political, and social relationships and cultural norms (Tilly 1985: 136).

f) The Entitlement Approach: a Critical Appraisal

In a critical appraisal of Sen's thesis, Amrita Rangasami (1985) observes that starvation is not a sudden but rather a long-drawn out or protracted process. However, perceptions of famine tend to relate to the "terminal phase" and not the process in its totality. As a result, these perceptions are of limited value. Rangasami's main concern is that famines are defined too partially. Most definitions of famine (including Sen's) hinge on the elevation of mortality and are therefore inadequate, she says. Her focus is wider, covering not only the economic but also the biological (nutritional) process, for example, how inadequate food intake and undernourishment over a period of time may result in death in times of epidemic hunger. She identifies three stages of famine: dearth, famishment, and morbidity. The movement from dearth to morbidity is via famishment. Famishment is the stage at which strategies to prevent death become imperative.

A major oversight in the entitlement approach is consideration of the dynamics of situations which start with drought and deteriorate into famine. An important factor is the state of the overall economy. If the economy is already weakened, there will be limited reserves. Another crucial factor is the intervention of the internal and external agencies which may not only help people cope with the current crisis but also help them be better prepared to stand on their own when the trigger factor causing famine subsides. For example, some agencies might protect people against losing access to provision of seeds, oxen, etc., when the succeeding years the natural conditions might return to normal or become more favourable. As Rangasami (1985) notes, during famishment people may sell their productive
assets which in turn may render them unable to resume their productive activities later leaving them permanently vulnerable to famishment and eventual morbidity (cf. Desai 1988: 126).

The above critique does not, however, mean that Sen’s entitlement approach is static, unable to account for the consequences of long-term structural changes. It has been argued that entitlement shift as a cause of hunger and starvation can be used to explain short-term as well as long-term structural changes in a society which render a segment of the population vulnerable. For instance, a change from a feudal to a capitalist system or from a capitalist to a socialist or a post-socialist system may result in basic entitlement shifts of particular social groups (Tilly 1985: 137). The implications of long-term structural changes on entitlement failure in the context of the Ethiopian famine of the 1970s is raised by Sen. Specifically, he discusses the predicament of the pastoralists of Afar in the 1973-74 famine in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian government and the multinational corporations, in attempting to encourage commercial/capitalist agriculture for export, encouraged the low-lying dry weather pastures traditionally used by the Afar pastoralists to be put into cultivation, driving the pastoralists off. Against this background, unfavourable terms of trade in the exchange of meat for grain in the drought of 1972-74 aggravated the conditions of the pastoralists. Similarly, in the Sahel, commercialization of agriculture made pastoralists vulnerable eroding their exchange entitlement (Sen 1981: 112-126; see also Tilly 1985: 143).

Sen recognizes war as another adventitious factor which can result in serious entitlement shifts causing hunger and starvation. Thus in the Bengal famine of 1943, the chain reaction of war created hunger and starvation. The wartime decrees of the colonial state, removing boats from the coastal areas (for fear of their capture by the Japanese) prevented fishermen’s access to their livelihood. The rice stocks were removed from the coastal areas for similar reasons. Both actions drastically reduced coastal people’s ability to buy food. The policy of the state by focusing on the food supply to the urban sectors (because of their strategic usefulness for the war) only aggravated the conditions in the rural coastal regions (Tilly 1985: 140). This discussion is relevant in the context of civil wars and famines in Ethiopia from 1974 onwards, which I cannot pursue here.

g) Free Market and Famine
Classical political economists claimed that free trade in grain would result in a national balancing of supply and demand, even during times of dearth. Sen (1981) points out that nineteenth-century civil servants in India were confident that the market mechanisms would solve food shortages. However, in that case the free market failed to deliver. He argues that the problem with the theory of free market as the solution of seasonal or climatic food shortages (originally proposed by Adam Smith) is that a market-based demand cannot solve the problem of food shortage unless the problem of market-based entitlement (shortage of purchasing power) is solved. The believers in the free market expect too much of it concludes Sen (ibid. 160-61). It has been argued that in reality, the free market increases the division of labour and differentiation within the economy and society resulting in differentiation of entitlements which in turn leaves many with inadequate entitlements. Those within inadequate entitlements cannot be left to the vagaries of the free market (Tilly 1985: 144-45).

Sen’s thesis, although certainly applied by him and by others to various famine contexts, is particularly significant for an agrarian society that is highly differentiated and elaborately stratified, such as, the nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Bengal. His thesis also underlines the role of political factors (liberal-democratic pluralism) for finding a solution to famine. For instance as Sen shows in his later work (Dreze and Sen 1989, 190), India has a liberal state oriented to public welfare, a multi-party democratic political culture, and a diversified media that puts pressure on politicians. These political factors, according to Sen, have played a role in India’s effort to overcome famine. What about societies that do not have a liberal-democratic-plural political system?

Louise Tilly (1985) adds another important dimension to Exchange Entitlement. Historical cases of conflicts over food, she argues, demonstrate that the main issue of conflict was not the availability of food per se, but the entitlement failure of certain sections of the population. Thus, the moral economy of food riots in eighteenth-century England shows that the rioters were demanding that the contemporary Government fulfil its moral (paternalistic) obligation to protect poor consumers from starvation due to their inability to pay higher prices for food (cf. Thompson 1971). In 1631 in England, a crowd turned furious and desperate at the sight of grain being exported from their community. The crowd in 1709 France
complained that there was no justice if people died in Burgundy to feed the city of Lyon. The grain was there, but the local people had lost their entitlement. Similarly, in 1973-74, while the local people in Wello were facing hunger and starvation, the grain from Wello was being directed to Addis Ababa and Asmara. It is thus necessary to stress that what caused grain scarcity in 1630 in England, in 1709 in Burgundy, and in 1973-74 in Wello was not the availability of food per se, but the entitlement failure (cf. Tilly 1985: 141-142).

II: THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL FACTORS

Sen’s thesis of exchange entitlement has been criticised by Alexander de Waal (1989), an anthropologist, in his study of the Darfur (Sudan) famine of 1984 - 85, whose main emphasis is on the significance of local understandings and definition of famine. His argument is that in Darfur people did not use all the resources at their disposal to purchase staple foods they could afford. People chose to go hungry; they did not purchase as much of the staple foods as they could have, and ate wild foods instead. If the people of Darfur had exchange entitlements to staple food which they did not utilize, the question is: why? The answer de Waal provides is that people chose to use what resources they had to pursue strategies that would provide the base for a future livelihood. For people of Darfur, the most important thing was to avoid long-term destitution. Destitution is perceived as a far greater threat than starvation because it destroys not just individual lives but a way of life and social relations in general. Most of the excess death in the Sudan could have been avoided if there had been better health care and clean water (ibid). The argument de Waal provides about people’s concern to avoid long-term destitution is convincing, while his assumption of people having purchasing power at the height of the famine and not buying food is questionable. In fact, their purchasing power seems to be non-existent as he himself would agree. People’s responses to the threat of destitution as he himself argued were varied and were closely linked to the particularities of local contexts, including such factors as land holding systems, availability of employment, supplies of surface water, and social valuations given to particular tasks and sets of social relations.

The significance of the local context, along with an emphasis on historical-structural roots of famines, has been emphasized by some other scholars as well. Thus, Mengistu
Woube (1987:18) makes a valuable observation about hunger and famine in a society. He points out that famine (or what he calls "epidemic or open hunger") occurs in a society with a regular hunger ("an endemic hunger/hidden hunger"). Hence, it is important to investigate the structure which creates an endemic hunger in order to understand the vulnerability of a particular group to famines.

Arnold (1988) criticizes Sen's thesis on empirical grounds in the 1866 famine of Orissa, India. He points out that the difficulty was not simply a lack of funds (or other entitlements) to buy grain but "a severe dearth of grain itself" (ibid. 45). Arnold goes on to argue that a partial rain failure, a bad harvest, or rumours of price rise - all these factors could have serious effect in a society where the subsistence of the mass of the population is already precarious. The 'exchange entitlement' thesis fails to account for a moderate short-fall in production which by early 1943 had been translated into an "exceptional short-fall in market release" (ibid. 45). For instance, in late eighteenth-century France, the fear of dearth was always present, especially at the lower levels of society, and it took very little at any time for this fear to set off hysteria and panic (ibid. 46).

a) Solution to Famine

Arnold (1988) points out that in England escape from famine became possible only within the context of a wider transformation in which a famine-prone peasantry was able to transform itself radically from within or be "destroyed altogether from without" (ibid, 69). What made the eradication of famine possible was the emergence of a more efficient and productive agriculture coupled with the weakening of the feudal economic-political system that created opportunities for the more enterprising farmers to gear their production to market demand. Improvements in agricultural technique and practice pioneered in the earlier period finally led to the Agricultural Revolution after 1750. The improvement in the agricultural productivity helped develop the urban centre, while improved modes of transportation (the roads and canals of the eighteenth century, the railways of the nineteenth century) gave further impetus to the expansion of a market-oriented agrarian economy. The development of these infrastructure helped to eliminate the risk of local shortages and tended to equalize prices across the country as a whole (ibid. 69-70).
Tilly (1985) notes that protests (food riots) in eighteenth and early nineteenth century Europe were a form of popular response to food shortages. Food shortages in turn were caused not by non-availability of food but by shifting entitlements, a result of transition from feudalism to capitalism. However, the food riots disappeared over a period of time. How and why did they disappear? No doubt, there was increased food productivity as well as developments in the means of transport and communications which facilitated the distribution of food. But, most significantly, new entitlements were earned as a result of improved economic conditions and increased employment opportunities. Moreover, political mobilization of the working class in order to enhance its food entitlement played a crucial role. The working class suffering a loss of entitlement struggled, at times in collaboration with the employers (for the repeal of the Corn Laws in England, for instance), other times against them (protests in the forms of strikes and demonstrations for higher wages, regular employment, etc.). Nineteenth-century workers’ organizations and collective actions were an effort to win new entitlements under a new economic system (capitalism). The emphasis was on stable employment (guaranteed income), not on food availability. The governments and employers responded by providing for new entitlements (employment and social security). As a result, popular protests over food disappeared (cf. Tilly 1985: 148-49).

Many underdeveloped (developing) countries today are experiencing a similar transition from a traditional to modern system of production and exchange. Various rural and urban classes in these societies are faced with a potential (and real) risk of hunger as a result of the entitlement shifts. These include small agriculturalists, landless labourers, pastoralists in the countryside and various strata of the urban proletariat and the unemployed. The popular expectation of these classes is that their governments should intervene to protect their entitlements to food. According to their moral economy, this is a legitimate expectation. In the process of transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe, urban proletarians, peasants, and agricultural workers had similar expectations of their public authorities, and when they felt that the authorities were not responding to their legitimate expectations, they responded with protest and riots. These protests and riots were an assertion of their entitlement rights which were threatened as a consequence of the great transformation. The reaction of the governments in developing countries to the entitlement shifts of the popular masses and the
response of the latter will depend on the conjuncture of economic, political, and cultural factors in each society (cf. Tilly 1985: 150-51).

b) Famine and Popular Consciousness

Greenough (1982) cites Satyajit Ray’s famous Bengali film Ashani Sanket ("Distant Thunder" - a film about the Bengal famine of the 1940s) to argue that, like the memory of the great depression in the industrialized world, the famine is regularly recollected by thoughtful Bengalis and continues to have an impact on their consciousness. He goes on to say that when foreigners visit Bengal now, they seem most struck by the very low standard of living, the dangers of disease and environmental catastrophe, and the marked political instability of the region, all of which lead periodically to episodes of mortality and disorder.

For many of these outsiders Bengal is what Greenough calls a land of "Malthusian rigors" (10). The Bengalis’ vision of Bengal is, however, different: It is Sonar Bengal ("Golden Bengal"), which invites a comparison with the region’s more prosperous past. The elements of the landscape are given idealized images, recalling the pleasant side of domestic life and the villages of the Bengal Delta. Collectively these images express the conviction that the land of Bengal is a nurturing, loving mother who provides her children with an abundance of material benefits and parental indulgence. Greenough asserts that these images may only be a millenarian vision of a golden past, but that does not undermine their tremendous significance for folk consciousness. Indeed, famine and other more recent troubles notwithstanding, all Bengalis seem to share this common vision of Bengal as a land of great beauty and potential prosperity. Greenough’s analysis suggests that the persistence of this popular vision of Sonar Bengal, despite crushing experiences of famine, partition, and civil war, is related to enduring concerns about subsistence, order, and health in a traditional agrarian setting. These concerns, he argues, are more or less independent of communal or caste consideration and express the

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1 Bengalis were using the famine as a calendar of events. Famine being used as calendar is also mentioned by Arnold in his study of the Madras famine of the 1870s. Famine as a marker of time is also common in Ethiopia. For instance, the elders of Berekha village refer to the Great Ethiopian famine of 1888 to 1892 as goda yetebelabet gize (the time when hide was eaten). For discussion on another popular use of famine in Ethiopia as a calendar see Anne Cassiers (1988).
common predicaments of rural life everywhere in Bengal.

c) Famine and the Structural and Symbolic Aspects of Food

In analyzing food issues in societies facing frequent famines, both the structural and symbolic aspects of food are relevant. In general famine is an absolute lack of food (Mesfin 1986). However, as Dando (1980) notes, few cultural anthropologists, cultural geographers, and other social scientists have approached the world food problem from the basis of available food resources a group eats and does not eat. He asserts that cultural food preferences and prejudices present major barriers in putting to use available life-sustaining food resources, raising the standards of world nutrition, and eliminating famine (101). Hence, cultural anthropology of famine has to deal with food as a social-cultural problem. Jack Goody's (1982) approach to social aspects of food is very helpful here, even though he does not develop his thesis in the specific context of famine. Goody recognises the merit of taking cultural aspects of food into account - food as a symbol. He is, however, critical of the anthropological approaches that attempt to grant autonomy to cultural realm, as done by Mary Douglas (1966, 1971) and Marshal Sahlins (1976). A concern with meaning, Goody argues, need not - and should not - exclude a concern with the structural and historical aspects of food. He goes on to assert that, the symbolic and structural aspects should be treated as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. He argues for a modification of the notion of a "timeless cultural pattern" that continues to be unaffected by internal and external historical changes.

Goody (1982) further suggests that a cultural anthropological account of food must cover four main areas - growing, allocating, cooking, and eating. In other words, cultural anthropology must be able to deal with production and distribution, along with the symbolic aspects of food, from a historical-comparative perspective. While production and distribution of food belong to the spheres of economy and politics, preparation and consumption, being partly symbolic, belong to the realm of culture which provides food with a social meaning. The point he stresses is that the meaning attached to food in a society during famine or otherwise, is not isolated from the system of production and the power structure. It is, rather, related to the nature of land tenure, soil, crops and vegetation, organisation of labour and
Methodologically, Goody argues for a combination of historical and comparative methods in order to correct the shortcomings of the approach that emphasizes the autonomy of culture in dealing with food. The use of history is especially important in understanding the changes in a food system. That is why, he maintains, some of the most insightful studies of food have been carried out by the historians, who have investigated the relationship between changes in food, its content and meaning and the wider historical milieu. Among such works, he mentions several contributions to the French historical journal, Annales, and Fernand Braudel’s (1975) Capitalism and Material Life, which seek to establish the connection between cuisine and the Industrial Revolution in Europe. K. C. Chang’s (1977) study, Food in Chinese Culture is a similar endeavour in a non-European context.

d) Famine and Foods of Desperation

Goody (1982:59) observes that famine often brings its own cuisine, selecting foods that are not ordinarily consumed. In big cities and towns, animals such as cats and rats, or in extreme cases, the flesh of horses and even humans can enter the menu. In the countryside people usually turn to 'wild' foods. The Chinese peasants are familiar with a whole range of "famine plants" which are not ordinarily used for food (Chang 1977:3-21). The knowledge of these "famine plants" is part of the collective memory, handed down from generation to generation through oral tradition. Arnold (1984) describes how the victims of the 1876 famine in Madras (India) turned to a number of otherwise proscribed and unpalatable animals, weeds, and plants to satisfy their hunger. Cannibalism of desperation is regularly recorded in times of famine and disaster. In China between the 1640s and the 1910s, local gazetteers often mention the incidence of people slaughtering each other during wars to obtain meat or eating each other in times of famine (Tang 1978: 108). Dando (1980) cites many cases of cannibalism during famines in different parts of Europe. England suffered ninety-five famines between A.D. 501- 1500 and there are several accounts of "food of desperation" adopted by the people during these famines. For instance, according to the written statements of the chroniclers in 1314, people ate "horse flesh, dogs and even the flesh of their own children" (Dando 1980:78). Forty-eight famine years were recorded in eleventh century
France alone. Due to the seriousness of the food shortages caused by famine and pestilence, cannibalism became frequent (ibid.). It has also been stated that the Great Ethiopian Famine of 1888 resulted in the adoption of numerous 'unnatural practices', including the eating of traditionally forbidden and disgusting foods, wild fruits and roots, the flesh of dead animals, etc (Pankhurst 1985). Even cannibalism, "a practice entirely alien to Ethiopian culture" (Hancock 1985:68) is also reported (cf. Pankhurst 1989: 143). However, Dessalegn Rahmato (1991), on the basis of his study of Wello disagrees with the above view that famine that food crisis bring out the worst in men and women. He is critical of Greenough (1980) and Pankhurst's (1985) assertion of cruel and abnormal behaviour, such as mothers eating their children and other acts of cannibalism. To the contrary, Dessalegn argues that famine also brings out the best in individuals. Thus, during food crisis rural communities show a spirit of cooperation, sharing assets, resources and services, and provide reciprocal support to each other which plays a critical role in peasant survival strategies (1991: 29-30). In the interviews I had with wide section of the people of Efratana-Jille on the 1984-85 famine, one of the worst famines in Ethiopian history, I did not find any evidence of such desperate practices.

e) The Victims of Famine

There is general agreement that it is the members of the subaltern groups in society who are the real victims of hunger and famine (Arnold 1984: 62). Those, who suffer and starve as a result of famine are the women, children, old and poor (cf. Lefort 1981: 44-45; Agrawal 1992). Their sufferings are not limited to times of famine. The strain on them continues even after famine conditions have passed in so far as the recovery and readjustment process places a heavier burden on them (Kaunda 1989: VIII). On the other hand, the affluent not only survive but some of them even prosper by exploiting the misery of the masses (cf. Arnold 1984). Famine, in other words, is a leveller in so far as it spreads poverty among a wider section of the population but it is not a socially indiscriminate catastrophe. Rather, it is highly selective, affecting the rural and urban poor with its double-edged weapon of starvation and disease, and leaving the richer sections in towns and in the countryside relatively untouched. In fact, many among the rich emerge more prosperous by exploiting the
scarcities created by famine. In that sense, famine tends to accentuate social and economic divisions.

f) Popular Response

Greenough’s (1982) study gives a valuable insight into the relationship between famine and popular response. From his interviews he found that the contemporaries revealed among the famines’s most striking features, Bengali "fatalism" and the lack of violence accompanying starvation. His conclusion is that though there is not enough evidence available to assert that absolute public order and starvation coexisted during famine in Bengal, there is little doubt that bloodshed, expropriation, and rebellion played almost no role as defensive adaptations to famine. He disputes the axiomatic view that hungry men must rebel. At the same time he recognizes the availability of evidence to show that, despite appearances of "passivity" and "fatalism", Bengalis pursued an active and rigorously logical adaptation to crisis.

III: POVERTY AND FAMINE IN ETHIOPIA

a) History of Famine

According to the available evidence, since the ninth century Ethiopia has suffered many major famines (cf. Pankhurst 1968). The situation in Ethiopia was, however, greatly aggravated late in the nineteenth century. Thus, the Great Famine of 1888-92 wiped out over ninety percent of the country’s cattle population. Dependency on these animals for farming, dairy, transportation, and diet resulted in almost one-third of the population perishing (Mesfin 1985, Pankhurst 1968). Again, in the famine of 1972-74 some 200,000 people died. Between 1957 and 1974 alone 700,000 to 1,100,00 persons died due to famine (Mesfin 1984).

b) Natural Factors and Agrarian Social Structure as the Main Causes of Poverty and Famine

The most apparent natural cause of famine in Ethiopia has been drought due to irregular rainfall. There were some other causes, including plagues of locusts, war caused by the outside invaders, particularly the Ottoman Empire (Abir 1968), and European Colonial
interests. In the past, the famines were almost invariably followed by the outbreak of epidemics - smallpox, cholera, dysentery, typhus and influenza (Pankhurst 1989:135). However, the most important causes of famine in Ethiopian history have been the internal human factors, i.e., the Ethiopian socio-economic system and political culture.

Traditional Ethiopia’s vulnerability to famines was not due to its backwardness. Indeed, by contemporary standards, Ethiopia was an advanced society. Jack Goody (1976) observes that while located in Africa, Ethiopia shared a number of fundamental cultural and social structural features of advanced societies in the pre-industrial world in China, India, Japan, the Middle East, and parts of Europe. These features included the use of the plough, a large agricultural surplus, wide variation of land tenure, a culturally distinct and literate ruling class and advanced religion (see also Iliffe 1987:9).

Iliffe (1987) observes that Ethiopia is a "plough-using, stratified, Christian and literate" society, where poverty has existed along with richness in land. Until the beginning of early the twentieth century, travellers’ descriptions of Ethiopian agriculture indicates the richness of the land and the hard working nature of Ethiopian peasantry. August Wylde (1901), impressed by the farming of the village Yeju, Wello, wrote:

> It produced everything that man wants in this world, tobacco of excellent quality, bananas, oranges, cotton, sugar cane, potatoes, vegetables of all sorts, red peppers, onions, garlic, wheat, barley...beans, peas...plenty of milk and butter, oxen, sheep...the most delicious white honey and everything in abundance..." (cf. Westphal 1975: 71-2).

Irrigation was practised in many areas of the country. European and Arab travellers’ descriptions from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century show the use of irrigation and people’s ingenuity and hard work to maintain it. Bent (1896) made the following observation:

the surrounding hills had been terraced for cultivation and present much the same appearance as the hills in Greece and Asia Minor which have been neglected for centuries; but nowhere in Greece or Asia Minor have I ever seen such an enormous extent of terraced mountains as in this Abyssinian valley [Yeha](cf. Westphal ibid.).

How to account for the contradiction of coexistence of poverty and richness of land in
Ethiopian society? Ethiopia was and continues to be a predominantly agrarian society. Over eighty percent of the population subsists on agriculture and pastoralism, and food production is the single most important occupation in the country. It is this section of the population - the peasants and the pastoralists, the direct food producers - who are always most exposed to the vagaries of famines. Why so? To find an answer we need to turn to Ethiopia's traditional agrarian structure which kept the peasants in constant poverty. Ethiopia's "extremely complex and enormously diverse" land tenure systems which developed over many centuries allowed the ruling class to appropriate up to seventy-five percent of peasants' produce (Pankhurst 1968, Cohen and Weintraub 1975, Gilkes 1975, Lefort 1983, Levine 1986). It is beyond the scope of the present study to deal with Ethiopia's traditional land tenure system in detail. I may, however, briefly outline the broad features relevant to the present context. Thus, until 1974 the dominant form of land tenure was feudal, which allowed the landlord class (religious and secular) and the state to exploit the peasants to the verge of semi-starvation. In addition to rents they had to pay to the state and the landlords, it was the peasants' obligation to feed and provide services to the feudal lords' relatives, soldiers, and officials as well as the clergy. As a result, they could barely survive at the subsistence level, with no surplus to store for bad days. R. H. Tawney's (1966) metaphor used in the context of the Chinese peasant, "a man standing up to his neck in water, so that even a ripple is sufficient to drown him," can be appropriately applied to traditional Ethiopian peasants (cf. Curtis et al. 1988: 78). As Arnold (1984) notes, due to a combination of low productivity, uncertainty because of dependence on nature, and exploitation by the landlord class, the peasants in general are poorly equipped to protect themselves from environmental calamities, such as drought, floods, and famine (Arnold 1984).

An important cause of peasant poverty in Ethiopia, according to Iliffe (1987), was not the lack of access to land but the inability to exploit land due to lack of labour, caused by personal invalidity or childlessness in the family. In Ethiopian culture, great value was placed on having children, especially male children. A childless woman was an object of pity. One of the central and recurrent themes of Amharic literature has been the helplessness of women who remained childless due to being unmarried, sterility, or infant mortality. The value of children and preoccupation with infant mortality in traditional Ethiopian society is further
revealed by an old popular saying that a missionary who had visited Jerusalem, the holiest place in Ethiopian imagery, was asked: 'if children did not die there' (ibid.).

The kinship structure of Amhara and Tigrean was an important factor in labour mobilisation for the exploitation of land. The Amharas and Tigreans were a bilateral people, seeking inheritance and descent from both paternal and maternal sides. Therefore, instead of being part of a corporate descent group, each individual had a range of choices for social identities and land rights, which made them individualistic and mobile, both socially and geographically. After marriage, it was common for Amharas and Tigreans to leave their parents’ homes to establish a new elementary family at the site of rist. However, one consequence of this pattern of inheritance and settlement was that an individual did not have access to the labour resource of larger kinship group, which in turn restricted his capacity to exploit land. Thus, if an elementary family unit was unable to meet its own labour requirements either due to invalidity or childlessness, it was doomed to poverty, even though it had access to land.

In Ethiopia, the poverty of peasants was made worse by the internecine warfare between feudal lords and looting of peasantry by bands of soldiers. It was observed by travellers that the soldiers were worse than locusts, for whereas the locusts destroyed only what was in the fields, the soldiers also took away what was stored into the house (cf. Pankhurst 1989:135).

Furthermore, the feudal ideology discouraged the dignity of labour, impeding the growth of artisan skill and trade which perpetuated the marginalization of market relations in the country. The norm of Ethiopian feudalism was that a person of "good bones" should preferably be a soldier (warrior), or alternatively, cultivate land, join the clergy, or even beg at the monasteries rather than engage in the occupation of the "despised artisans and traders" (Cassiers 1988; 177). Prohibition of work by the church and state on too many Saints’ holidays also restricted agricultural production (Pankhurst 1968). The result was that a large

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2 Labour shortage is a problem for the commoners (the majority of Amharas and Tigreans) - those who do not have the economic and social power to keep slaves, serfs, or tenants.

3 Unskilled manual labour is traditionally despised by the Amhara and Tigre population. Work for wages is likewise deemed undignified (Levine 1986:81).
section of the population lived a "marginal" existence, clustering around palaces, monasteries, churches, and landlord houses. Until 1974, people looked to ecclesiastical and political authorities for protection during famine (Penrose 1987, Iliffe 1987).

This does not, however, mean that the traditional culture encouraged begging as a substitute for hard work and industriousness among the peasantry. On the contrary, Amharas in raising their children consciously strove to prepare them for independence and self-reliance. They emphasized the virtues of hard work and the shamefulness of being dependent on others (Levine 1986:81). Indeed, abstention from manual labour was a norm only for nobility, the people of "good bones." Industriousness, on the other hand, was a reality of the peasant life duly sanctioned by the norms.

c) External Aggression, Loss, Poverty, and Famine

In seeing famine as a process, one important factor that needs to be taken into account is the devastating impact of wars in causing rural destitution. Going back to the late nineteenth century, Northern Ethiopia was suffering from acute economic difficulties unprecedented in its recorded history as a result of foreign invasions. The country had been ravaged by war against the invading Egyptian army in 1875 and 1876, which in addition to introducing the "the latest techniques in the science of warfare" also had "veterans of the Confederate Army in the American Civil War" commanding the battle against Ethiopia (Bahru 1993:52-53). At the beginning of 1889 a great cattle plague had broken out, as a result of the importation of infected cattle by the Italians in their attempt to expand from the port of Massawa towards the coastal lowlands in Ethiopia. It swept away the entire stock of plough oxen, rendering cultivation almost impossible, and an acute famine resulted in which the starving peasants fell easy prey to cholera and smallpox (Pankhurst 1986: 58-59).

This was followed by the Italian invasion and the Battle of Adwa in 1896, where the Italians were defeated. Although the Italians lost the battle and were pushed back to the coastal areas, its impact on Ethiopia’s countryside was devastating. The legacy of the Battle of Adwa for Ethiopians had two contradictory repercussions. Ethiopians proudly celebrated

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4 The marginals are Amhara and Tigre ancestry.
their victory and their historic independence from foreign subordination. Subsequently, they had to face the heaviest and most brutal European army ever on African soil. For Italy’s colonial ambition, the memory of the defeat at the Battle of Adwa and desire to overcome it partly fuelled the viciousness of the second round of attack in 1935. During the occupation (1936-1941), racist and fascist atrocities were committed on innocent Ethiopians for simply defending their society and territory. How did Ethiopians face one of Europe’s most well-equipped army with no modern military and no machinery? As Teshale Tibebu (1995:108) rightly notes, "Ethiopian nationalism was a popular consciousness in times of foreign aggression." It was the collective will and determination of the entire society that worked as a shield to defend their freedom. This is evident from Steer’s (1936) observation of the Ethiopian army of 1935-36:

Dressed each according to his taste, wearing no military insignia; followed by a welter of pack-animals, donkeys and mules, and by their womenfolk who acted as an Army Service Corps; by their children who carried their rifles and other lumber, and finally by their servants and slaves, this army looked more like the emigration of a whole people (cf., Teshale 1995: 299).

The Northern provinces of Ethiopia in particular never fully recovered from the reckless destruction of Mussolini’s fascist troops. Sylvia Pankhurst was among those Europeans who were actively involved in the movement against fascist atrocities in Ethiopia. She describes the situation in the country after liberation from Italian occupation:

...schools had been closed for seven years. The population had suffered appalling hardships; orphaned children, sick, wounded, homeless and destitute people of all ages presented a grave problem. Revenue was at zero, communications were disrupted, farms laid waste, homes destroyed (551).

One eye witness whose account provides an insight into how the Italian invasion and occupation (1936-41) brought destitution to the population in the Northern provinces, particularly to women, was provided by Aba Isa Ahmed Hussein, a Sudanese, who was brought to Ethiopia by the Italians as a labourer for the road construction. Aba Issa was the only Sudanese left in Alem in 1994. He has lived in the region for fifty three years. At the time of the interview he was 104 years old. His biographical account gives an idea of the larger picture of the changing history of the region during and after the Italian invasion. He reminisces about the invasion as follows:
I was hired along many other Sudanese, Somalians and some from Eritrea by an Italian constructor named Borceli to build the road from Assab (the port city the Italians colonized first) and link it with Addis Ababa. The road was built in order to capture the capital city. There were nine of us from Khartoum, who were recruited by the Italians to work in Kassala. We were then taken to work in different towns and regions, Tasanai, Keren, and Aqordat. Eventually, they took us to the town of Adwa, where the construction of the road to Addis Ababa began.

Along the way we met a lot of women. Most of the men were either hiding or fighting. We met so many poor women along the way that it was easy to choose the most beautiful and young ones to come with us. We all got women from Antcharo and Bati, and brought them with us to cook for us pasta and make bread with food ration provided by the Italians. In Sudan where we came from, we used to eat porridge, not *kisra* [Sudanese crepe made from sorghum], so it was easy for us to eat pasta and bread instead of *injera*.

While we were building the road, there were lots of *shifṭa* (bandits) and the resistance was strong. Fighting was taking place side by side with the construction of the road. Many people died in Northern Shewa. Eventually, the fighting stopped before we reached Addis Ababa.

Once the road was finished and Addis Ababa was captured, the Italians told us that we could stay or leave (depending on our choice). Many returned back to Sudan, while four us decided to stay on. We left Addis and returned north to the town of Kombolcha in southern Wello.

Aba Issa’s account reveals the social and economic devastation Ethiopian society faced as a result of the Italian invasion and occupation. The fact that he witnessed so many destitute and orphaned women in Wello indicates the level of social dislocation and poverty caused by the invasion which contributed to the disruption and deterioration of peasant life in Wello.

There is another important factor which must be taken into account in considering the problems of famine and food crisis in Ethiopia, that is, the escalation of the civil strife and aggressive warfare following the Revolution of 1974 which disrupted food production and increased destitution. It is, however, beyond the scope of this study to deal with this issue.

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5 Both Antcharo and Bati are towns located in central Wello where the Great Shaykh and the people of Berekha came from. That the Sudanese chose to bring women from these areas indicates among other things religious affiliation. Even after settling in Northern Shewa, the fact that the Sudanese chose to marry Welloye women.
d) The Perception of Famine and Peoples' Determination to Struggle

Historically, famine in Ethiopia was perceived as divine punishment for human misdeeds. This was the perception not only of the popular masses but also of the ruling elite. Thus, over a thousand years ago, the Christian Emperor of Ethiopia wrote to the Patriarch of Alexandria: "Great tribulation hath come upon our land and all our men are dying...our beasts and cattle have perished and God hath restrained the heavens so that they cannot rain" (Hancock 1985:63-64). It was the same story with the famine of 1540, when the chronicler of Emperor Galawdiwos wrote: "God had in his fury lit a fire which burnt to the very depths, devouring the soil and its fruits..." (Pankhurst 1989:136). The famine of 1888-92 coincided with the death of the Emperor Yohannes IV in 1889, and many people in his home province of Tigre considered it an act of God. The popular belief was that natural calamities accompanied the death of great rulers (Pankhurst 1966:98-9). Famine and other disasters are often attributed to failure to perform the customary rites properly. Thus, during the Great Famine of 1888-92, Emperor Menelik II of Ethiopia thought that the rains were not returning because the peasants were not praying hard enough or not praying properly (Curtis, et al. 1988: 79)

Arnold (1984) in his discussion of the rituals of drought and famine performed by the peasants in Madras (India), argues that religion is an essential and integral part of peasants' discourse. It is a mediator between them and supernatural forces, benevolent and malevolent, that lie beyond their control. Thus, for the peasants, timely and adequate rains, soil fertility, and good harvest are as much a matter of empirical observation and inherited wisdom as that of divine disposition. Through their rituals, they seek to ward off the malevolent forces as well as to secure the blessings of the beneficent ones. Their prayers and ceremonies are expected to elicit divine response. Arnold argues that interpreting the cause of famine in religious terms enables the peasants to give it a meaning intelligible to themselves, while the rituals aimed at influencing the supernatural entities constitute an "appropriate" cultural response seeking to end their sufferings.

It would, however, be wrong to conclude from the above that the peasants in Ethiopia
were passive and fatalistic in the face of drought and famine. On the contrary, the resolve of the people to struggle in times of distress is expressed in many Amharic poems, among other things. As the following extract from a poem about the Great Famine of 1889-92 illustrates, Ethiopians stubbornly struggled to resolve the famine problems:

Not with a strong ox or a sharp plough  
Do we till our fields today  
We work our land with our naked hand  
Imploring the grace of an angry God  
As we bend to our barren toil...  
And we dug the soil in vain  
Old men, green youths, and even young girls...
(cf. Pankhurst 1966:115)

In fact, many of the rulers of Ethiopia encouraged the peasants to work hard by symbolically participating in labour themselves. Thus, Emperor Menelik II encouraged his subjects to till land with whatever resources they had at their disposal. In accordance with the age-old Ethiopian tradition of a ruler setting an example by action in time of emergency, he took to the manual work himself. Realizing that the cattle were decimated, he prepared himself a pick-axe to dig the soil and a hatchet to cut the wood. He formed a big camp where, assisted by his soldiers, he tilled the soil with his own hand telling his people, "Imitate me!" (Pankhurst 1989:143). In a culture where the aristocracy, as a norm, abstained from any kind of manual labour the impact of the Emperor’s action on the people was tremendous and they responded enthusiastically, in some cases going to the extent of volunteering to be harnessed to the plough (ibid. 144). What is noteworthy here is that the country finally recovered from the disastrous famine of 1889-92, virtually without any form of international assistance (Pankhurst 1989: 144). The enormity of this success can not be fully appreciated, unless one is reminded that Ethiopians had to face the Italian invasion in the Battle of Adwa (1895-96) shortly after the famine. The fact that, in spite of its technical backwardness and the ravages of famine, Ethiopia was able not only to defeat the Italians but also subsequently to "revive the ruined lands," was due to its long tradition of dealing with calamity through hard work and collective action involving the state, church, and peasantry.

e) Cultural Nexus to Deal with Famine: Traditional Moral Economy
Austerity, fasting, self-mortification, and charity were given special places in Ethiopia's Christian tradition, so much so that fasting was considered by many as the very essence of their religion. Many European travellers were struck by the perpetual abstinence of religious figures in Ethiopia. Even the Jews of Ethiopia, contrary to their own religious tradition, were influenced by the monastic practices of Ethiopian Christianity (Leslau 1951:xxv-xxvi). There are many instances where even the ruling elites, including the Emperor, took to austerity renouncing luxury food or indulgence in abundance in times of calamity (see Pankhurst 1989:143).

Charity and austerity, the two cultural solutions to the recurrent food shortages caused by frequent famines, were incorporated in the basic norms of the two principal institutions of traditional Ethiopian society - the church and state. They were also reflected in the literary and oral expressions (songs, religious and mythical legends). Austerity in traditional Ethiopian culture was part of a general sense of humility, epitomised in ritualised begging, sanctioned by the church. Begging was sanctioned and generosity towards beggars was treated as a spiritual virtue. When the people affected by famine congregated at the church begging for food, they did so without a feeling of shame or guilt. Ritualised begging was in fact considered a performance of the "Six Commandments of the Holy Gospels" (Iliffe 1987: 19).

It is reported that in a major famine in 1706, affecting the entire country, the peasants came to the capital begging the ruler at the time, Iyasu I, "save us from death from hunger!". He provided relief to a large number of people for two months until the new harvest, without any discrimination (cf. Pankhurst 1989:137). In the famine of 1891, the Italian diplomat, Martini, found that many people were dying of starvation in churchyards, along the routes, and in the compounds of the nobility (cf. Hancock 1985: 67)

Poverty and famine were seen as an act of God and the poor served a purpose by enabling others - especially the rich - to be charitable. While poverty was not glorified, it was nonetheless welcomed as an opportunity for giving and allowing one to obtain redemption. There were several charitable clubs (e.g., Sembete, Serkehebest, Mahibare
Mariam). In fact, various other forms of charity in traditional Ethiopia on the occasions of marriage, and particularly funerals and death rituals, may in this light be interpreted as normative sanctions to give and share. Alms were given on the third, seventh, thirtieth, and fortieth days after the person’s death. The most important ones being the Teskar banquet after six months, the Mut Amet (death anniversary), Sebat-Amet (seventh year), and Asra-Hulet Amet (twelfth year). Observing these expensive ceremonies were at times burdensome, especially to the peasantry. As Mesfin (1984:17) states: "In Ethiopia, the dead are a tremendous economic burden on the living, for they exact their own heavy taxes in the form of expensive services of remembrance." An Ethiopian proverb says: "The living pay tribute to kings and the dead pay theirs to the clergy" (ibid).

f) Change in the Traditional Moral Economy: Twentieth Century Ethiopia

One feature of traditional Ethiopia that distinguishes it from most other African countries was its relative isolation from the outside world. Ethiopia’s isolation was, however, broken after World War II. The most important development that is relevant to the present context was the involvement of multinational corporations in the Ethiopian agrarian and pastoral economy. As a result, Ethiopian agriculture began to be transformed along the capitalist pattern moving towards large scale cash crop production for export. It all happened very quickly: from being an isolated and an undeveloped country with a weak and undeveloped state administration, Ethiopia was suddenly 'integrated' into the world capitalist system (cf. Bondestam 1975). What made this 'integration' even more precarious for Ethiopians was the destruction resulting from the Italian occupation (cf. Pankhurst 1955: 551).

The absence of domestic markets for manufactured goods (for mass consumption) provided further impetus to foreign investors to get heavily involved in the agricultural production for export. This resulted in the expansion of commercial export agriculture, by expropriating small and medium peasant producers leading to a shrinkage of land used for domestic food production (Hussein 1976:125-9). Additionally, it created a large surplus labour

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6 These are Charitable Clubs whose members took turns to bring food and drinks to their church and distribute them to the poor and to travellers (Iliffe 1987).
in agriculture, which could not be employed, since there was no industrial development. Most importantly, changes in the Post-War period did in no way mitigate the vulnerability of the Ethiopian masses to famines. In fact, in most cases, the introduction of capitalism into the traditional agrarian structure of Ethiopia made things worse. One may, for instance, mention in this context the plight of the nomads inhabiting the Awash River Valley in Central Ethiopia. In the 1970’s, at the behest of foreign multinationals, the entire Valley was converted into cotton, sugar cane, and tobacco plantations. This change led to an expropriation of the nomads and their cattle from the area, taking away their traditional form of subsistence. These pastoralists and their cattle were among the main victims of the Wello Famine of 1973-74 (Hussein 1976).

During this period a number of changes appeared in cultural patterns as well. The aristocracy turned towards an increased consumption of luxury goods imported from the developed countries. Import of luxury goods for consumption by the ruling class and the growing modern state bureaucracy had far reaching implications for the relations between the ruling elite and the masses. With the introduction of Western technology and business into the country and the influence of Western ideas and values on the aristocracy, the traditional feudal relations and obligations were weakened and partially replaced by market considerations. The state, landed aristocracy, and educated classes became alienated from the majority of the population. In addition, the traditional close relationship between the church and state was weakened due to the increased power of the state through international connections. Along with this shift, the traditional form of charity became less important. In contrast to the previous famines, when the famine victims of 1973-74 came to the capital to report to Emperor Haile-Selassie I, instead of being received and provided with relief, they were expelled from the city. This marked a clear breakdown of the old moral order which prescribed imperial charity during times of famine. This in turn was one of the major factors in precipitating the Revolution of 1974.

IV: INTERNATIONAL MEDIA AND THE FAMINE OF 1984-85

In understanding Ethiopian famine it is important to be aware of the media filters that have shaped Western perceptions. Hancock observes that Ethiopian peasants possessed a
particular attitude and poise which was evident in the way they conducted themselves during
the famine:

... it was the calm, the dignity and the fortitude of the starving Ethiopians in
the face of avoidable death that appealed most directly to the imagination,
conscience and sympathy of the West and that set in motion one of the
emergency aid efforts of modern times(12).

It is rather ironic that the dignity and poise of Ethiopian peasants is recognised during
famine and death, but not during their resolute struggle to avert these catastrophes. However,
in the international media representation of the famine victims. These victims were denied
dignity and poise. Why? I want to discuss briefly the various pressures and counter-
pressures shaping the international media representation of the 1984 - 85 Ethiopian famine
and famine victims.

The modern, clean, orderly, and polished images of people from the developed world
in commercials were juxtaposed on the television screens with pictures of Ethiopian peasants
in their hand-made white cotton toga soiled with sweat and dust. The appearances of the
peasants and the clothes they were wearing were not tailored for media impression
management. Hand-made, by their women to protect them from the highlands' dry wind and
cold, these clothes were not designed to make an impressive image. On the contrary, they
spoke of poverty and destitution.

During field work in Northern Shewa, I found the visual beauty of the region (both the
population and the landscape) striking. I was continually contrasting this beauty and the
images of the region and its population with what I had seen on television. The two were
worlds apart.

a) The Cold War and the Ethiopian Famine of 1984 -85

Another element shaping Western perceptions was the cold war temper of the times
and Ethiopia’s position, caught between East and West. During the 1970s and 80s, the Soviet
Bloc and the Western countries were competing for media attention. Hancock observes that
while the American and the British media personnel were doing their job, their respective
governments were engaged in public relations, taking every opportunity to point out how
much more worthy their own efforts were than those of the Soviet Block. The Soviets’ first reaction to news of the famine was to accuse the Western media of a plot to darken the name of Ethiopia. Their government claimed to outdo the West in every aspect of disaster relief. Thus, the Soviet and Polish camera crews were seen struggling ruthlessly with BBC, ITN, and NBC in an ongoing battle for the best angles from which to film the efforts of their own teams. In the midst of all this “it often seemed that the real reason why everyone was there had been forgotten and that the Ethiopian famine had become nothing more than a hot new front in the Cold War” (Hancock 13).

The famine was thus transformed into a media event with its own rapidly evolving plot. In this plot, "the heroes of the Ethiopian epic-tragedy were Western governments and relief workers making all kinds of noble sacrifices, taking all kinds of risks, to rescue the hapless drought victims" (ibid.). The most tragic element in this plot was that the efforts of the famine victims to help themselves and one another were completely ignored. Small gestures of generosity, mutual help, and dignity of ordinary Ethiopians in the midst of the wasteland were often observed by many of the journalists and relief workers but did not appear on the international television screens. Hancock (1985) mentions the case of a housewife who had taken in an orphaned baby. While standing on her doorway, she saw an emaciated peasant carrying a ragged bundle. Asked what he was carrying, the man replied, "it is a baby whose mother and father died and I am carrying it until it dies also. It’s a human being like you and me, so I can’t throw it away" (Hancock 1985:11). At her request, the peasant gave her the baby, saying, “God’s blessings on you.” This story is just one testimony to the ways that people helped each other during crisis and did not simply rely on outside help.

In reporting on the 1984-85 famine for The Times of India, Said Naqvi observed, that despite all the media publicity about the famine, the actual long-term aid Ethiopia received from the Western countries was considerably less than what Sudan and Somalia received. It has been argued that the Derg regime’s bad image and unpopularity gave the Western countries an excuse to deny Ethiopia long-term aid. Despite all the public sympathy generated in Britain, America, and elsewhere as a result of the emergency, official policies towards Ethiopia remained unhelpful and unsympathetic. Ethiopia had been shunned for ten
years because of its affinity to the Soviet Union and hence in all other aspects of long-term
development, did not receive the major bilateral assistance that Western governments
normally extended to projects in developing countries. Hancock stressed that while Ethiopia
might have received some extra food, its position at the bottom of the Third World league as
the lowest per capita recipient of development aid did not change (Hancock 1985:113).

This is not to deny the positive role of the media in exposing irresponsible
governments including that of Ethiopia. Sen has noted the vital roles of the media and
democratic political system for preventing famine. He specifically cites the Indian case to
illustrate his argument. In the 1972-73 famine of Ethiopia, the international media exposed
the corruption of the officials of the imperial government. The BBC journalist Jonathan
Dimbleby’s documentary *The Hidden Hunger* exposed the deliberate efforts of the imperial
government to hide the famine that had slowly affected the highlands of Wello for two years,
killing 200,000 people. Similarly, in 1984 the Derg’s callousness and lack of political vision
in celebrating extravagantly the tenth anniversary of the Revolution while millions of
Ethiopians were facing famine was exposed by the international media.

b) **Famine Victims and Sensationalizing of the Famine**

In *Consuming Hunger* (a film critically documenting the media representation of the
Ethiopian famine of 1984-85),\(^7\) the opening shows crying women: mothers crying and
mourning the death of their children. There are scenes of children crying and dying of food
shortage. David Klien, a CBS field producer, visited the famine-affected areas in the late
summer of 1983 (cf., Ziv 1987). The first time he brought the report, the producers at CBS
felt that the images were not strong enough and the famine was not well documented: "So
few people were dying. It was not a Biafra, where people were dropping dead... The images
are not strong enough...The starving kids in Africa, that is not a story, it is a fact of life"
(Klien 1983, cf., ibid.).

\(^7\) Ilan Ziv, "Getting the Story", in *Consuming Hunger* Part I (New York: Catholic Foreign Mission Society
of America, 1987).
Cheryl Gould refers to the media mentality and the unfortunate situation that the images must be sensational to appear on the air. Since there is only a limited amount of time to produce the news in any given day, there cannot be news that seems ordinary: "We need dramatic pictures." Interestingly, it is not only in North America that the media subsists on dramatic pictures, but all around the world, and people are conditioned to believe it. For the Western world, as Brian Winston commented, famine is a Biblical word which is now alien to the people in the West. It is not something that the Western World shares with the Third World any more. Famine could not come to Western consciousness collectively. Winston asserts that it is therefore wrong to blame the journalists alone because they are in a two-way street with their audience. The audience will respond - it will come to consciousness - only if people are dying on camera. In accordance with this logic, the Biblical Famine was recreated in the twentieth Century Korem, Wello, Ethiopia. As Markus Thompson, Oxfam Emergency Coordinator, put it, the cynical logic of the Ethiopian experience is that if you are a government minister, you make sure people in distress are crowded together and accessible to Western media (cf., Ziv 1987). This is necessary to get the sympathy of the Western government and receive aid.

c) The Ethiopian Famine and Live Aid

Live Aid was a rather unique event organized apparently with good intention to help the victims of the 1984-85 famine in Ethiopia. It is therefore appropriate to look briefly at this event in terms of its representation of the famine victims and its ultimate outcome. The West is used to only two images of Africa and Africans: one is the Tarzan image, representing barbaric Africa; the other is the image of poverty of Africans perpetually begging for food, stretching hands to the West without dignity, responsibility or self-determination. The Live Aid contributed to a perpetuation of this image.

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9 A statement made by Brian Winston, Dean of Pennyslvania State university, School of Communication. On The BBC news broadcast of the 1984 famine in Ethiopia, Winston further stated: "that shook the world had a footage that carried a Hollywood panorama. It was so dramatic. It was a great moment; it was apocalyptic" (cf., Ziv 1987).
As David Marsch, a Rock critic, put it, Live Aid was tailored to an American audience and emotionally communicated with the public. The American audience was not going to identify with the Ethiopians but with Americans working with Ethiopians. Moreover, Americans like celebrities and tend to identify with them. It was all a matter of making the situation authentic; celebrities' authenticity is unquestioned. If celebrities say "we were there and this is what we saw," no one would question the reports and that will motivate the public to donate.

Neither the Ethiopian state, the activists, intellectuals or peasants, but celebrities from the West speak for the starving Ethiopians authentically. The Ethiopians thus ended up becoming the object of Western compassion. The theme of Live Aid was: "Someone whose only hope is you...Reach out, Reach out...Give a helping hand...You know what love can do!" Totally dehumanized, the Ethiopians in this portrait had no individuality, dignity, or history, but were viewed just a mass of begging people. As Marsch put it, the Ethiopians served as "the classic under-text of the negative reverse of Judeo-Christian Charity." That is, "there is poverty in the world so that we could be kind to them."

Larry Hartstein of Live Aid provided another perspective, that of the organisers of the program: "We never saw it as a political will, but as a popular will... We were interested in a popular will movement that will begin to move the politicians." However, as David Marsch observed, "Live Aid came on television and deliberately misinformed people. What was particularly [lacking] was the perspective that people were starving to death in a world of plenty. He rightly observed that hunger cannot be solved by placing a phone call. Live Aid's claim, he pointed out, was: "We are here to end hunger. After today, the world will not be the same."

How did the Ethiopians receive the media images? First of all, no Ethiopians were present at Live Aid. Dead bodies were portrayed nude on the television screens in ways that were particularly shocking. This was a most severe assault on one the oldest and sacred values of Ethiopian tradition, and its psychological impact on the entire society was devastating. Even in Consuming Hunger, intended to provide a critique of the media representation of the Ethiopian famine of 1984-85, nude dead bodies of Ethiopians are replayed. The display of dead bodies, irrespective of the film's critical stance, is stressful to
Ethiopians. Moreover, while others are given the chance to comment on Ethiopian crisis, Ethiopian voices are conspicuously absent. Finally, very much like the media representation it criticises, Consuming Hunger ignores Ethiopians' own initiative to help themselves.

d) Corporate Interests and Food Aid

Every fund-raiser knows that pictures of starving children are 'good for business'. Many other have realized that they are also demeaning, encourage racist stereotypes, and undermine the viewer's motivation to ask questions about what is really causing the suffering so clearly depicted (Moore 1990:1).

The largest communications organization, AT&T, together with Kodak, Pepsi and Chevrolet sponsored Live Aid. It provided an opportunity to all the Companies involved to make specific commercials on hunger to reach out to people, to reach out and touch someone. The lyricists were instructed to write new words for the commercials which could go well with the old jingle of each company's previous advertising. The commercial on hunger was then supported with footage from the BBC's production on the famine - the footage of starving Ethiopians. To this was added the footage of performers. As Stanley Aronowitz, Professor of Sociology, Graduate Centre, CUNY, put it "the three put together produced tasteful commercials for the people that brought tears to viewers' eyes. More significantly, he further pointed out, "while showing its commercial, AT&T did not show its products, but left on the viewers a lasting impression that AT&T cared."

The international emergency food aid saved the lives of many Ethiopians, who were threatened by starvation. Another positive aspect to it was that it created an opportunity that the ordinary people in the developed world could sympathize with the people of Ethiopia and want to help them during a difficult time. However, there are many problems associated with the organization and distribution of food aid. On the basis of the interviews I had with the people of Berekha and my own observations, I would like to point out three serious shortcomings of food aid. First, the aid arrives after people have exhausted all their material and non-material means. People are given food aid usually after their livestock, houses, utensils, jewellery, etc., have been disposed off. Many of them are given aid after they have already lost their family members, and those that are surviving are physically exhausted.

Second, even after the aid has arrived the affected area, aid receivers must look very
weak, or they must carry ailing children with them in order to be eligible for aid. In other words, to receive aid people must be in pitiable conditions. The people from Berekha several times went to food distribution centres looking for food aid, many times they were returned because they failed to meet the requirements to receive it. In the middle of a massive population that needed help, the people of Berekha did not look to the aid workers sick or emaciated, nor they did carry ailing and malnourished babies. Therefore, they were denied aid, even though in their conditions they very much needed help. During the field work, some of the women said they solved this problem by being innovative: they borrowed sick and malnourished children of women from another village in return for a share of the food aid they will thus receive. The villagers told me that they made a social satire to depict their predicament, that in order to qualify for food aid, mothers must carry sick children.

Finally, the aid does not go to the villagers that are affected. Instead, they have to come to a central shelter. The shelters holding thousands of sick people become centres of communicable diseases. As a result, instead of saving lives, a shelter turns into a place where hungry people die. There is a direct relationship between famine, hunger, malnourishment and epidemic. Every famine creates epidemics, like cholera, dysentery. The major cause of epidemics during famine is the nutritionally weakened state of the rural population in combination with unusual concentration of migrant destitute from different locations in towns and relief shelters. Even Malaria could easily turn into an epidemic during famine. Alula Pankhurst’s (1992) work provides a detailed description of how the peasants of Wello during the 1984 - 85 famine, being aware that the shelters were centres of disease, avoided entering them. Moreover, his depiction of the peasants’ response is a proof of their endless struggle to face the challenge on their own until the last minute. He writes:

...for every living corpse the cameramen homed in on there were a hundred dignified undernourished people awaiting their fate. Likewise, for every person who decided to walk to the shelters, there were hundreds who sought different ways to eke out a living: gathering wild plants, rationing reserves and selling assets, migrating in search of wage-labour, seeking assistance from wealthier relatives in less affected areas, taking part in food-for-work projects...anything to avoid coming to the shelters, usually a last resort and an admission of defeat (25).
If aid is administered before the conditions of the peasantry deteriorates, it can be productive. Peasants don’t want aid for nothing. They are willing to work for it. For instance, I have seen in them a great enthusiasm and dedication towards Food For Work Programme organized by Save the Children Federation, USA (SCFUSA), where men and women of all ages, including children and the elderly, were working hard to earn what they carried.
CHAPTER TWO

PEASANT SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND CONSCIOUSNESS

In this chapter I will review the main features of peasant social structure and consciousness. Using both theoretical and ethnographic material of earlier studies of Ethiopian peasantry as well as other societies, an effort is made to develop a framework for an analysis of my ethnographic data. In David Arnold's (1988) terms, historically famines have intimate connection with peasant societies. It is therefore necessary to situate famine in the context of peasant society and culture. What is important to keep in mind when discussing peasantry and famine, he notes, is that the earlier literature on the subject relates to medieval and pre-twentieth century Europe. Although by the twentieth century almost all of Europe had freed itself from it, famine continues to be one of the major problems facing the least-developed countries with predominantly peasant populations. In this chapter, my main concern is to discuss briefly the main features of peasant social structure and consciousness with an aim to develop a conceptual framework for an analysis of the ethnographic data.

First I will briefly discuss the view of peasantry in the writings of the nineteenth-century classical thinkers, Thomas Malthus and Karl Marx. Malthus’s views are relevant because he is the proponent of the view that famine is caused by overpopulation rooted in peasants’ irrational thinking and action. Marx’s understanding of peasantry influenced the course of debate on the agrarian question in Russia and the subsequent policy and agrarian reform in the USSR. These developments had direct influence on the political-economic reforms in Ethiopia after the revolution. Next, I go on to discuss the characteristics of peasant society and consciousness found in the social science literature, particularly from the later half of the twentieth century. This discussion is not exhaustive. It is rather selective based on its relevance to my study.

I: FAMINE AND PEASANTRY

a) Marx and Malthus

Nineteenth-century thinkers, Karl Marx and Thomas Malthus shared a rather negative view of the peasantry as the repository of conservatism and an obstacle to the economic-
political transformation taking place in Europe. Thus, Marx in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* described the contemporary peasants as devoid of class consciousness. Malthus, albeit from a different ideological standpoint, shared Marx's disparaging view of the peasantry, particularly reflected, among other areas, in the discussion of famine in agrarian societies. Famines were frequently attributed to the peasants' intrinsic weakness, to the deficient social and economic values, and to the characteristics of indolence and improvidence typically associated with peasant cultures. In his *Essay on the principles of population*, Malthus attributed to peasants some of the mankind's most undesirable traits. Commenting on the Irish peasantry, for instance, he noted how the discovery of the potato - which could be grown in sufficient quantities to provide for a family's subsistence needs and nourishment - merely brought out the worst in them. The potato's plenty, he remarked, simply prompted the ignorant peasantry to follow its reproductive inclinations with no other purpose than bare subsistence. As a result, the population outgrew the industry and existing resources by the turn of the nineteenth century, eventually causing the Irish famine. Malthus ignored the conditions of tenancy and the wider social-political factors that were responsible for the 'impoverished and miserable state' of the Irish peasantry. Instead, he dwelled upon what he took to be the "innate character of the peasant, the almost lemming-like self-destructive inclination that hurled the lower classes of the people over the precipice of hunger and want" (Arnold 1986:57).

b) The Revival of Social Science Interest in Peasantry

The peasant question continued to occupy the interest and attention of social scientists and political activists throughout the twentieth century. However, as Shanin (1987: xx) notes that there was an increased interest in the 'peasant problem' in the 1960s and 1970s. Although the literature generated during this period did not directly address the question of famine and peasantry, it is still relevant to this study in so far as it deals with the issues of peasants' livelihood and struggles. He points out that during the post-war years, it was the first time that the English-speaking core of Western intellectual culture had an extensive encounter with peasantry (ibid. 1). This is not surprising in light of the fact that in the post-war period, most Third World societies were peasant societies (Wolf 1955). The character, livelihood and fate of the peasantry in the least-developed countries came to be perceived as
one of the most potentially explosive and crucial issues of the time.

Peasants attracted the attention not only of social scientists, but also of revolutionaries and politicians. Peasantry became a dominant issue in analyses of issues as diverse as the Chinese Revolution, the Vietnam War, India's industrialization, Latin American guerillas and Africa's stagnation and underdevelopment (Shanin 1987).

There was another reason why peasantry became a popular subject of study in the post-war period: because of their revolutionary potential and leading role in the anti-colonial struggles of the Third World. As Ranger (1987: 315) states: "...students of African peasant consciousness have paid much attention to peasant political and revolutionary potential, a question which is of significance to activists as well as to academics." In my view, this particular concern created a trend in peasant studies to be resistance-biased, i.e., most of them focused on proving or disproving if peasants were revolutionary. As a result, how ordinary peasants of African societies lived their daily lives was ignored. The study of Ethiopian peasantry is part of this general trend, that is, it focused on peasant-landlord contradiction and peasants' involvement in politics. The meagre material available from earlier studies of Ethiopian peasants tends to be narrow. This is partly because the studies have high political overtones trying to prove, or disprove, if peasants were resisting the landlords and the state. In post-revolution Ethiopia, peasants were studied from the point of view of their capacity and inclination to revolt against the feudal system, or for their positive/negative response to the changes resulting from the Revolution (see Dessalegn 1987, Lefort 1981, Vivo 1978). There are however some exceptions: Levine (1986), Hoben (1973), and Bauer (1985), all studied Ethiopian peasantry's internal dynamics and daily lives.

In this context, the literature on the peasant question in Russia on the eve of the revolution marks a significant departure. While the issue of the revolutionary potential of the pre-1917 peasant and possible impact of the revolution on peasantry was central to the discussion of the peasant question, at the same time it provided extensive data on traditional Russian peasant economy and society (see Shanin 1972). The debate on the peasant question in Russia also raised serious questions about the theoretical framework and conceptual tools that can be relevant to the analysis of a peasantry in the process of transition from precapitalism to capitalism (and socialism). The significance of the Russian case in this context
is summed up by Shanin as follows:

The importance of the study of Russian peasant society is very much increased by the unusually high quality and the extensive nature of the data gathered in rural Russia in the last decades of the nineteenth and first quarter of the twentieth centuries - the result of an historically extraordinary encounter between a highly sophisticated and deeply committed intelligentsia and a massive traditional peasantry. These studies by Russian rural economists, sociologists, and ethnographers were, in their day, the leading works in this field in the world (1972:4).

Unfortunately, on the eve of the 1974 Revolution, Ethiopia did not have a well prepared intelligentsia who understood the concrete conditions of the rural society (see Levine 1986:55-94). Nor has there been a serious effort to make up for this lacuna in the post-Revolutionary period. Thus during the Derg, Ethiopia suffered not only from the underdevelopment of the material and infrastructural conditions, but also from a serious lack of understanding of peasantry in different regions of the country. Indeed, the understanding of the peasantry in different regions of Ethiopia remains inadequate until now. There is an urgent need for research showing historical specificities and variations (economic, political, and cultural) found in the peasantry of the different regions.

II: CONCEPTUALIZING PEASANT SOCIETY

Here I will briefly discuss the main characteristics of peasant social structure and peasant consciousness noted by earlier studies. This discussion is important so as to situate my study in the wider context of social science literature on peasantry. At the same time, the findings from my study will be used to reflect on the existing literature.

Peasant societies tend to show remarkable similarity (Shanin 1987) in terms of 'the persistence of certain attributes' even if they are geographically far removed (Erasmus, 1967:150). There is something 'generic about [peasantry], [a] type without localization', wrote Robert Redfield (1956:23, 25). Eric Wolf (1977) characterized these attributes of peasantry as 'a recurrent syndrome.' While it is useful to be aware of the common, persistent features of peasantry, it is equally important to be sensitive to their regional and historical particularities (Shanin 1987:3).

The main characteristics of peasant society on which there is general agreement among
scholars are as follows:

a) The Centrality of Land Question

The family farm is the main unit of property, production, consumption, social reproduction, identity, prestige, and well-being. Working on the land is not seen by peasants in terms of investment and return. Rather, it is an end in itself. To an outside observer, this attachment to land may appear irrational and responsible for peasants' conservative and "apolitical" nature. From the point of view of peasants, their attachment to land is not instrumental. This point is articulated in Maxim Gorky's words as follows:

The burden of the work, linked to the insignificance of its results, deepens in the peasant the instinct of property, making him unresponsive to those views which place at the root of the sinfulness of man that very instinct... (383).

The notion of peasants' attachment to land is directly relevant to the Ethiopian case. Peasants in Ethiopia are not used to the idea of land as commodity (Hoben 1973; Hussein 1975; Bondestam 1976). Given the low level of industrialization and urbanization, they do not treat land and cattle as commodities for sale. Land for the majority of the peasants is everything. Ethiopia is a land of mixed nationalities, peoples and religions. This diverse tradition coupled with lack of development resulted in low level of integration, allowing the continuation of many layers of loyalty to pull people in different directions. But what united them, cutting across these diverse loyalties is their common agrarian culture rooted in their attachment to land. This sentiment is particularly central to the consciousness of the Amhara peasants, as expressed in many Amharic popular proverbs and songs.

b) Household and Family Labour

Peasants' economic action is based on family relations, even though they might be involved in daily exchange of goods and services in the labour market. It is the division of labour and the consumption patterns within the family that define the basic strategies of survival and use of resources (Shanin 1987, Wolf 1977, de la Pena 1982).

The typical peasant household is characterized by the dominance of the male - the individual is socialized to conform to a patriarchal authority and familial role-behaviour. A
male peasant normally proceeded through the prescribed stages: childhood, premarital adolescence, marriage, a headship of his own household, and, eventually, retirement and death. Only by becoming the head of a household could he rise to the full status of a man. Thus, marriage was an absolute necessity and a precondition of social maturity and status mobility for the individual. Another necessary condition for status was the availability of land holding and equipment that could be passed from one generation to the next (Shanin 1987:23-24).

The dominance of male authority and the demographic cycle within the household discussed above are relevant to peasantry in Ethiopia. Thus, parenthood is the most important defining criterion of being a full person. In a society characterised by limited material resources, having children and raising them is a source of empowerment for peasants, especially for women. For women it is by being a wife or a daughter of a good farmer and most importantly, by being a mother that high status is achieved. Terms of address like the mother of, and the father of so and so to address the wife and the husband after their first child is born illustrate the high value given to having children.

c) Primitive Technology and the Drudgery of Farm Labour

In most peasant societies, given the primitive nature of technology and reliance on human (family) labour, farm work is drudgery (Shanin 1987, Fei 1987, Arnold 1986 and 1988, Williams 1987). Gorky (1987) wrote: “The technically primitive labour of the countryside is incredibly heavy; the peasantry call it *strada* from the Russian verb *stradat* - to suffer” (383). He sees a connection between drudgery and peasants’ attachment to land. It is because the peasant loves his land (is attached to it) that he is able to overcome the drudgery. There is little escape for peasants from the drudgery of farm work. In the Chinese case, Fei (1987: 58) suggests that in order to get away from "drudgery", peasants relied on developing improved tools and utilizing animal and natural power, or on exploiting the labour of others. The binding nature of making livelihood from the land and hard conditions of farming life make peasants of necessity hard working and resilient.

Because for centuries Ethiopia’s agricultural technology remained backward, the drudgery of farm work is very much part of peasants daily life. The recurrent droughts and
the decline of soil fertility have made farm work even more arduous. In this situation, subsistence becomes more difficult taking toll on the time, energy, and imagination of the peasantry. In fact, the gradual economic and environmental degradation has created a steep decline in technology, on the one hand, and the high demand on the productivity of labour, on the other. As time passes, peasants are forced to work much harder and longer to obtain a much reduced harvest on the same plot of land.¹

The drudgery of farm work can be reduced by developing improved tools and techniques. But this depends on the state's ability to allocate resources for development rather than military and the country's overall development. In this regard, the combination of Ethiopia's lack of industrialization and the decline of its rural economy articulated with one another in inhibiting the development of improved farming techniques.

Historically, due to the lack of industrialization, the availability of wage labour or other forms of employment to complement farm income were extremely limited. One common form of escape from this problem was migration to the south, where the lands were fertile and the population density was low. The initial clearing of the land and preparing the fields for crops require high labour input. But once the fields were cleared, farming in the southern fertile area required less labour to get the same amount of produce - or even more - than they were able to harvest in their original place. Hence, until 1974, the most notable feature of peasant migration in Ethiopia had been from one rural area to the other rather than from rural to urban areas.

d) The Distinctiveness of Peasant Economy

Long established in the literature is the contrast between the peasant household as a production unit is very different from a capitalist enterprise. This difference is due to the heavy reliance on family labour, combined with the 'traditional' methods of production, the high levels of home consumption, the relatively low marketability, and the lack of rational

¹ Here we need to do many years of in-depth study with compiled quantitative study and analysis of labour and land productivity, on the one hand, and the decline of crop yields, on the other. Only then could we be able to ensure that the hardships and struggles of peasants will not be lost and that the extent of the drudgery of farm life in Ethiopia will be appreciated.
bookkeeping. As a result, production strategies and economic solutions in the case of the peasant economy differ considerably from the urban-industrial economy (Shanin 1987:23).

The distinctiveness of the peasant economy has been long noted by contemporary anthropologists. Thus, Wolf (1951:60-61) states that the starting point of the peasant is the needs which are defined by its culture. The engagement of peasants in production of cash crops for the market is prompted largely by their inability to meet these needs within the social-cultural segments of which they are a part. They sell cash crops to get money but this money is used to buy goods and services which they require to subsist and maintain their social status rather than to enlarge their scale of operations. Drawing a line between the peasant and the capitalist "farmer," Wolf points out that the latter views agriculture as a business enterprise, that is, investment. On the other hand, the aim of the peasant is subsistence (Wolf 1951, see also Gillermo 1987).

One serious controversy in the area of peasant studies originates from the Russian context, following the debate between Lenin and Chayanov. It relates to the persistence of peasant production and culture confronted with capitalist system of production. To repeat the well known thesis, Lenin argued that the penetration of capitalism in the countryside will eliminate peasant form of production and culture. Chayanov, in opposition to Lenin’s thesis, stressed the resilience and persistence of peasant form of production and culture.

Chayanov’s argument was that in a peasant economy, the household is both the centre of production and consumption. The main objective of production is to satisfy the consumption needs of the members of the household (to ensure their survival). Hence the logic of production and consumption on a peasant holding is distinct from that of a capitalist farm (where the main objective of production is expansion and accumulation of capital). Therefore, budgeting in a peasant household is highly qualitative as opposed to quantitative. It is not the quantity of profit but the satisfaction of the daily needs of every single unit in a household that takes precedence. This form of budgeting defies rational capitalist calculation. For instance, Chayanov articulates how it is difficult for peasants to determine whether growing hemp or grass would be more profitable or advantageous. For these plant products
are not interchangeable and cannot be substituted for each other (Chayanov 1925:XX).

The Marxists, on the other hand, believed that capitalism will inevitably enter into agricultural production and, as a result, the rural social structure will be polarized into two antagonistic classes - the rural capitalists and the proletariat. With the completion of this process, peasant production based on the exploitation of family labour and oriented primarily to the satisfaction of the consumption needs of the family members will eventually disappear. This view was contested by Chayanov, who stressed the rationality of the peasant farm and its resilience in the face of internal and external forces of change (Shanin 1972).

According to Williams the assumptions that rural agricultural production will disappear as a result of industrial/capitalist development "is not really true at all" (Williams 1987:388). Contrary to these assumptions, "rural production will remain central to an effective future of human kind - not to be associated only with the [European] past or with distant lands [the Third World]" (ibid). The issue of food and population crisis have been widely publicized, and if we are to survive at all, we shall have to develop and extend our working agricultures stressed Williams (ibid).

One implication of the above debate on peasant and capitalist economy is that the concepts and categories which are relevant to the study of capitalist production can not be uncritically transferred to the study of the peasant household. Chayanov (1925 cf in Kerblay 1987) stressed that most peasant farms in Russia and outside, including European states, are unacquainted with the categories of wage-labour and wages central to the capitalist economy. Shanin (1972:6), endorsing Chayanov's stand, observes that the concepts and categories which have been used in the field of peasant studies have often been transferred uncritically from the analysis of a qualitatively different urban capitalist society. In general, these concepts have acted as blinkers rather than sources of illumination, limiting our knowledge of peasant social structure and culture (see also Kerblay 1987:177).

The debate around Chayanov views of peasants are directly relevant to the situation in

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1 Chayanov (1925: 5-7) wrote: "...The significance of each rouble gross income for consumption is increased in a household burdened with members incapable of work. This makes for increased self exploitation of family labour power....Thus the objective arithmetical calculation of the highest possible net profit in the given market situation does not determine the whole activity of the family unit: this is done by the internal economic confrontation of subjective evaluations".
Ethiopia and the rationale for this thesis. Peasant household production analysis is being conducted in Ethiopia by highly trained agricultural economists, economists, statisticians, and policy analysts, that have made it possible for government officials and donor agencies to assess food production and consumption of peasants. These quantitative studies designed to generate data at the macro level, however, ignore the qualitative aspect of peasant household budgeting. Quantitative studies alone do not tell us how a peasant household struggles to save for leaner times, decides what particular crop is to be produced in preference to what, how to adjust family consumption needs according to the cultural demands, and hardships of drought, and so on. While it is important to take into consideration the quantitative aspect of peasant household budgeting, it is imperative for the study to be careful not to avoid the risk of ignoring the qualitative aspects of budgeting. Furthermore, quantification has the risk of objectifying peasants. With burgeoning rural poverty and economic instability following every famine episode, there is a greater need for qualitative and interpretive studies in order to bring out the historical and cultural dimensions of peasants' struggle to maintain their livelihood. In Ethiopia's small scale and insecure peasant economy, qualitative research has a much more powerful role in illuminating the problems in day-to-day lives of the peasantry. To take just one example, there is also the issue of honour, where people may hide the extent of scarcity. Qualitative research enables one to be sensitive to such cultural nuances which are important so as to avoid the wrong assumption that a given household has no problem, while in reality it may already be on the edge. The dissertation has thus tried to be reflexive and sensitive to the continual environmental, political and, economic instability and changing conditions of the rural economy and society.

III: THE DUALITY OF PEASANTRY

The "duality" of the peasant position is an extensively discussed issue in the literature on peasantry. As Shanin points out the main duality of the peasants position in society consists in their being a social class (one of low 'classness' and on the whole dominated by other classes) and at the same time "a different world - a highly self-sufficient society in itself, bearing the elements of a separate, distinctive, and closed pattern of social relations" (1972: 213). This unique duality ('class' and 'society') leads to conceptual difficulties
rendering Marxist identification of class problematic. Shanin states: "Operational definition of social classes together with the making of analytically valid socio-economic differentiations constitutes one of the most complicated where peasantry is concerned" (Shanin 1972:132).

The issue peasant class position and class consciousness became part of an important controversy over the differentiation of peasantry during the New Economic Policy period in the former Soviet Union. Bolsheviks assumed that the rural society in Russia polarized into rural capitalists and proletariat will fight against each other to defend their interests. The political implications of this development will be that the rural proletariat will be aware of its class interest in opposition to that of the rural capitalist. The rural proletariat will have more in common with the urban proletariat (Shanin 1972:1). The Bolsheviks assumed that the kulaks would prove a small and isolated minority hated by the mass of peasants who would come out on the side of [the Soviet] government(Shanin 1972:137). However, this did not happen. Rather than being antagonistic to each other, "rich farmers and poor peasants...in spite of the apparent differentiation..., [they] went on showing remarkable political cohesiveness and unity of action" (Shanin 1972:1-2). The Soviet government underestimated the cohesiveness of peasant communities, which led to a serious discrepancy between the objectives of the policy-makers and the outcome of their actions (see Shanin 1972: 1-2, 131-2, 137). Another important feature of the Russian countryside was that the rural economy and society showed wide diversity in peasant wealth in different localities. These diversities were blurred in the national and regional figures, which overestimated differentiation between social strata and differentiation between localities (ibid.132, 136).

Shanin (1972: 212) is not denying that the peasantry is class-like. He acknowledges that "in history, the peasantry many times has acted politically as a class-like social entity". It has shown an ability for cohesive political action to defend its interests not only when facing traditional landowners in pre-capitalist systems, but also against capitalist land owners, townsmen, and the modern state. But he is critical of the widely accepted belief held by the Marxists in Russia that due to capitalism, the countryside would inevitably develop an economic polarization. This view according to him was an oversimplification of rural stratification.

In summary, the main limitation of the Marxist approach to class consciousness is to
ignore the non-class ties and sentiments which bind the landlord and peasants that have serious political and economic consequences. The quantitative approach focuses on economic indicators while ignoring the day-to-day adjustments of peasant life conditioned by cultural factors that cannot be quantified. The Chayanovian approach with its emphasis on the significance of the self exploitation of labour and the culture of consumption shows greater sensitivity to these aspects of peasant consciousness overlooked and unaccounted for in the Marxist and quantitative approaches. The significance of class contradictions between peasants and landlords, and their wider political, economic and cultural implications cannot, however, be ignored.

The above discussion of peasant class consciousness is particularly relevant to Third World societies like Ethiopia which tried to follow the Soviet path. In the Ethiopian context, although the rural class structure on the eve of the Revolution was divided into landlords and peasants, polarization between the two varied widely: it was sharper in some regions and among some nationalities than others. In the north and some Oromo regions, while there was a class division between landlords and peasants, at the same time they shared a common bond in terms of religion and language (Amharic, Oromifa, and Tigrigna). In Northern Shewa and Tigre, there was cohesiveness between lords and peasants in spite of the class differences, which under certain circumstances united them against a common adversary. This for instance is what happened in the resistance movement against the central government soon after the revolution. Lords and peasants of these areas joined against the Derg. Right after the Revolution, in Northern Shewa the resistance was so serious that it required heavy military deployment and intensive bombardment to eventually suppress it.

In addition to peasant-landlord relations, the location of an area is an important factor: if the area is closer to the centre of power, the resistance will be weak. On the other hand, if the area is remote from the centre, or is located in a mountainous terrain, the resistance can be strong and last longer. Thus, the Derg was successful in defeating the resistance in Northern Shewa partly because of its proximity to Addis Ababa. Nevertheless, its mountainous districts of Menz and Gishe-Rabel sustained local sporadic resistance until the fall of the Derg in 1991. In fact the EPRDF was able to exploit the strategic location of these mountainous regions along with the anti-Derg sentiment of Northern Shewa to its
advantage in fighting the Derg. This is however not to deny the class division between landlords and peasants in many parts of Northern Shewa and elsewhere, which was exploited by the Derg to its own end.

There is another component of peasant consciousness that was analyzed by Gramsci (1971). The peasantry in Italy, he observed, was aware of its adversary class, "the so called signori". In addition to landlord and peasant antagonism, the concept of signore consisted of "the old dislike of country for town." One of the fundamental elements of distinction between the peasants (rural society) and the townspeople is dress [peasants envy the way city people dress]. The peasants often have a contradictory attitude towards city people and the civil servants. They are both a signore (even if they are not better off economically than peasants) and at the same time morto di fame\(^3\). Gramsci states:

This 'generic' hatred is still 'semi-feudal' rather than modern in character, and cannot be taken as evidence of class consciousness - merely as the first glimmer of such consciousness, in other words, merely as the basic negative, polemical attitude. Not only does the people have not precise consciousness of its own historical identity, it is not even conscious of the historical identity or the exact limits of its adversary (273).

The relevance of country and town antagonism as a component of peasant consciousness in Ethiopia will be shown in Chapter Seven in the discussion of peasants' reaction to the inclusion of the small towns people into the Producers Cooperatives.

Another problem in understanding class division and class consciousness of peasantry in Ethiopia was the regional variation. Some regions of Ethiopia are more drought prone, eroded and less suitable for peasant agriculture than others. These variations affected the consciousness of the peasantry. Peasants of these relatively infertile regions are more impoverished and vulnerable. Peasant-lord contradictions in ecologically degraded and impoverished regions were much sharper than those in relatively better off regions, even though in purely objective terms the class divisions in both regions were basically similar.

The poverty and insecurity of the impoverished regions was responsible for the

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\(^3\) The morto di feme is a heterogenous stratum of people who initially came from the rural bourgeoisie. They are the stratum of the impoverished rural bourgeoisie whose property vanished due to the breaking up of holdings among generations of large families (272 - 73).
development of what Gramsci called a "negative consciousness" among peasants from these areas rendering them hostile toward the centre (Gramsci 1972:273). Because in this case the poor regions are endowed with so much of old Ethiopian history, the peasants from these regions were not only hostile to their lords but they were even resentful of peasants residing in the fertile regions. The relevance of this "negative consciousness" is shown in Chapter Six while discussing the evolution of the relations between the Welloye new comers and the earlier inhabitants of Efratana-Jille.

The Derg regime with its narrow understanding of class consciousness in terms of objective class positions alone failed to grasp the implications of these variations in peasant consciousness and their wider (political and economic) implications. Rather than solving the problem of poverty and underdevelopment of the countryside, the Derg policy focused on an exaggeration of class contradictions of the pre-1974 socio-economic structure. The post-Derg regime is making a similar mistake of emphasizing the contradictions while ignoring the problem of the social-economic underdevelopment of the country. The only difference between the two regimes is that, instead of class contradictions emphasized by the Derg, the EPDRF regime emphasizes ethnic divisions.

IV: INDIVIDUALISM, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY CONSCIOUSNESS

Peasant culture and consciousness are conditioned by the pattern of the way of life of a small rural community. Because the basic group of economic and social activity is the small family unit, social attitudes of peasants are unaccustomed to formally organized larger units of production (Fei 1987:59). In peasant community, family is the basic unit of interaction and interrelationship. Individual relationships are mediated through the family. In Chinese society Fei (1987) notes that the individual is recognized as a member in a family group, which is a self-sufficient and self-supporting group. The traditional ideology "suppresses individualism in favour of familism." That is why descent is valued highly by the society. Emphasis is placed on the continuity of the family line so much so that getting a male offspring is considered the most important role of a "dutiful son" (Fei 1987: 58-59).

The above characteristics of peasantry have immediate relevance to my study, in so far as peasants in Ethiopia are traditionally accustomed to interacting within a small community
setting. However, after the Revolution, with the introduction of the Producers Cooperatives, the age-old universe of small community social interaction was suddenly shattered and peasants were drawn into a much larger unit of social interaction. This created enormous problems for peasants to adapt to the new conditions which the state and the Party failed to understand. The fact that peasants were used to small groups and a particular way of living did not go well with state socialism which required grandiose central planning. This problem is very important and will be addressed later in Chapter Seven.

The problem of peasant individualism has been raised in the context of agrarian reform and collectivization in many societies. A case in point is peasant's response to cooperative production in post-independent Zimbabwe. Ranger (1985:322) points out that Zimbabwean peasants had difficulty in understanding and accepting a situation where they were not working either for wages or for their household. It is important to point out that this sentiment of peasants need not be interpreted as individualism in the modern bourgeois sense found in advanced industrial societies. Rather peasants' individualism is family bound. Their resistance to collective work/villagization is not because they are individualistic but because they are accustomed to expressing their collective consciousness differently - they express it in the form of their commitment to the family or household. They are not used to working in secular, impersonal and bureaucratic collective arrangements. Given their experience of domination by outsiders, they fear that working in this type of set-up will perpetuate their subordination.

Another feature of peasant consciousness is the sense of attachment to community (for example village community or parish/mosque). Next to the family, the village is the unit to which peasants have primordial loyalty. A community is a forum where peasants are engaged in argument over common strategies and ways and means to resolve misunderstandings and conflicts (Sabean 1984:29). It may be noted that for the peasant the idea of community is not a fixed or eternal entity. Rather, the notion of community is historical. Chatterjee (1986:201) points out that "for Indian peasant the idea of community is a mobilizing myth rather than a historical statement". The bonds defining the community are historically evolved rather than being given once and for all. Similarly, for West German peasants, "community was not something pre-modern, unchanging, structural, but was constructed, changed with time, and
could only be grasped as historical process" (Turton and Tanabe, 1984:3; cf in Ranger 1987:312).

Are peasants individualistic or community bound? Contrary to the assumption of their individualism, the peasant world is very much family and community bound and controlled. I found most of my informants were controlled by social pressures from the family and community. The moral and social pressures could be expressed in a gossip form or any other way. Hence individual interest is always subordinate to the interest of the wider community. For instance, the rearing and socialization of children, and taking care of the elders are not exclusive responsibilities of the family. It is very common to see children being fed, looked after, and disciplined by different households other than the natal family. On the other hand, the children also grow up learning to respect not only their family members but also their neighbours and other members of the community. A family that does not take care of its elders can be a target of gossip and even isolation. In Chapter Six I discuss how the villagers of Berekha were able to take care of each other by following the mutual obligations and expectations endorsed by their religion. The ritual sharing of coffee and food at the village shrine bolstered the community spirit and provided a safety net during times of food scarcity and famine.

V: PEASANT CONSCIOUSNESS AND SUBSISTENCE ETHIC

Central to peasant consciousness is the notion of 'subsistence ethic', summed up by Tawney's (1931) famous observation about the conditions of the Chinese peasantry living on the edge mentioned in Chapter One (p. 23). This observation applies to the conditions of peasants in many societies cutting across geographical and cultural boundaries in so far as it places 'secure subsistence' and 'fear of dearth' at the centre of peasant way of life and struggle.

The peasant is constantly haunted by the fear of "subsistence crisis", and seeks to avoid it with all possible means at his disposal (Scott 1976). The fear of dearth explains many otherwise anomalous technical, social, and moral arrangements in peasant society. To emphasize how dearth can impact on peoples' consciousness and action Scott writes:
If the Great Depression left an indelible mark on the fears, values, and habits of a whole generation of Americans, can we imagine the impact of periodic food crises on the fears, values, and habits of rice farmers in monsoon Asia? (2).

The centrality of subsistence ethic in peasant life can be understood in the context of the concrete conditions in which peasants live their daily lives. These conditions are small plots of land, primitive techniques, uncertainties of natural factors such as rain and drought, in addition to the obligation of paying rent to landlords, or the state. The influence of nature upon the peasant economy was powerful and direct; the smallness of peasant resources magnified its impact. The difference between a good agricultural year and a bad one was the difference between prosperity and famine, if not death and the extinction of family (Shanin 1987:23). The fear of food shortages in most pre-capitalist peasant societies has given rise to what might appropriately be termed a "subsistence ethic," a "consequence of living so close to the margin"(Scott 1976:1-3). The main preoccupation of peasants', as Scott observes, is to produce enough to feed the family, buy a few bare necessities (such as salt, cloth) and pay the tribute. That is why "the notion of subsistence [is] at the heart of peasant consciousness" (ibid.). As a result the spectre of hunger, dearth and occasional famine perpetually haunts the peasantry (see also Fei 1987). This point is relevant to my research problem, since resource limitation is a serious problem for the peasants of Berekha. Despite their hard work and taking pride in the dignity of labour, they are always living on the edge. Even when there is no drought, the people of Berekha are so exhausted by the routine hard work of farming that they are easy prey to malaria, and other contagious and seasonal diseases. The spread of flu, TB and other communicable diseases interferes with their lives. For many, it is very difficult to recover fully and resume their routine work once they have had a malaria attack. In all cases they make a direct relationship between having enough to eat in averting sickness and recovering from it. The degree of poverty and helplessness of peasants (living on bare subsistence) shocked many of the relief workers during the 1984 -85 famine relief.

The objectives of various technical and social arrangements prevalent in peasant societies are to ensure subsistence. The commonest form of some of these arrangements are; patterns of reciprocity, (forced) generosity, communal land, and work-sharing. These technical and social arrangements help out those who in adverse times might fall below
subsistence. The peasant tenaciously relies on these social-cultural arrangements rather than being helped out by (urban) experts and social workers coming from outside. Even peasants' politics is governed by "subsistence ethic" and need to be analyzed accordingly. The central economic dilemma of most peasant households: living close to the edge (due to a host of natural and social factors) has little scope for the profit maximization calculus of neoclassical economics (Scott 1976: 2-5). Their main preoccupation is to avoid disaster with no room to think of maximizing economic gains.

There are critical issues that are not addressed by Scott's analysis of subsistence ethic. To begin with, at what level is subsistence defined? Is subsistence mere survival, or is it a healthy living? Bare subsistence renders peasants vulnerable to starvation and famine when drought and other calamities strike. They might survive these calamities, but afterwards face enormous obstacles to rebuild their life and community. In a predominantly agrarian society like Ethiopia, where the majority of the peasants are faced with frequent famines and consequent destitution, the entire society declines. Due to the frequent droughts and famines, for the majority of peasants in Ethiopia the most serious concern is survival. Consumed by their concern to stay alive peasants are left with little room for making sacrifices for the collective good of the wider society - at least beyond the family or the village. Under stressful conditions, immediate interest to survive takes over the long-term vision of building a more secure social system. One may thus agree with the notion of "subsistence ethic" as central to peasant consciousness. It must however be emphasized that peasants, given the opportunity, would surely like to improve their lives and move beyond bare subsistence.

VI: FATALISM AND PEASANTRY

It has been argued that peasants are characterized as fatalistic when faced with misfortunes, or prospects. Both good harvests and crop failures are generally understood in terms of fate. This attitude pervades other areas of their social life (Ortiz 1987:300, see also Arnold 1988). The degree of uncertainty pervading their mode of subsistence makes peasants prone to explaining events in terms of fate. Their main occupation is agriculture and animal husbandry and given the underdeveloped nature of technology, there is heavy dependence on nature, which creates uncertainty and causes anxiety. These uncertainties include crops
suffering from drastic climatic changes, attacks by pests, rodents, damage by animals, etc. that result in a wide variability of yields. The vagaries of nature affect crops as well as cattle, particularly draft animals on which peasants depend for their occupational survival. Peasants can formulate an expectation about their harvest only if they can have a mental picture of the outcome and if they have any confidence about the likelihood of their prognosis. But their dependence on nature and uncertainties of their occupation do not allow them to plan in advance. Ortiz (1987: 300-301) compares the responses of farmers in Peru who had access to irrigation with those who did not. Those who did not have access to irrigated land responded with "what God wishes." On the other hand, those who had access to irrigated land had a concrete plan for the future (ibid 300-301). Fatalism is thus not necessarily a negative response of resignation but a response which is understandable in terms of the uncertainties imbedded in peasant way of life.

VII: PEASANTS' CONSERVATISM

In human social and cultural life, Dobrowolski (1987) observes there are always two fundamental and contrasting tendencies. One is conservative which aspires to preserve and maintain the existing social order based on past experiences. The second tendency is a desire to change the existing social and cultural order for something better. This creates a tension between what is existing and the desire for a new and forward looking life. This tension becomes the driving force in human action for change, which involves at least a partial destruction of the old (Dobrowolski 1987:262). While this may be true as a general tendency of human society, peasants are considered more inclined towards conservatism. They want to retain their customary way of life, which raises a number of important questions. Why do peasants want to retain their customary way of life? What are the conditions under which peasants resist change? At what stage of the social transformation do they resist change? Are they active agents or merely passive objects of social change?

Using Poland as a case study, Dobrowolski (1987:264) provides a particular context of peasant conservatism. The legal and economic framework of feudalism in Poland was oppressive and restrictive for peasants. It hampered their economic growth and barred them from actively participating in the national politics and culture. The type of social and
economic life they led narrowed their outlook and consciousness. Dobrowolski notes that, even after feudalism was dissolved, this outlook of peasants continued for a long period of time. Similarly, another study from Peru shows how the outlook of serfs in the haciendas of highland Peru has been restricted due to repression by landowners. It resulted in limited opportunities for peasants to improve their lives and provided them with little protection against domination by their superiors: "The 'culture of repression'...discourages social change. Poverty is accepted as inevitable and innovation is regarded as pathological behaviour" (Oritz 1987:301). This however is not to imply that peasants are inherently resistant to change. Peasants respond favourably to changes which are in their interests. I agree with Oritz’s observation that the passivity and distrust of peasants should be understood in the context of uncertainty and social and economic repression rather than as an innate tendency of peasant consciousness.

A similar observation has been made by Dessalegn (1988) in the Ethiopian context. After the Revolution of 1974, feudalism was legally abolished. That did not, however, entirely change peasants’ outlook in Ethiopia. Centuries of poverty and feudal rule had made it difficult for peasants to understand some of the changes introduced by the Derg (Penrose 1987: 115-18). While it is important to recognize the impact of the past experience on peasants response it needs to be based on concrete ethnographic evidence. My research shows that despite the weight of centuries old tradition, peasants’ response to the changes introduced by the Derg varied according to their understanding and interpretation of their interests. This is clearly evident in their differential response to the Land Reform and the Producers Cooperatives (see Chapter Seven).

It is important to note that, in addition to political repression and economic exploitation by the ruling class, what made Ethiopian peasants conservative was the fact that the peasant mode of subsistence was and continues to be isolated and limited to small scale organization, with primitive technology and limited social horizon. Secondly, and more importantly, the lack of resources coupled with eroded soils, particularly in the highland regions, have profoundly affected the consciousness of peasants.

Ironically, whereas conservatism implies the retention of the past, peasants struggling in conditions of uncertainties within their immediate surrounding tend to be continuously
alienated from their past. In this context, Maxim Gorky's description of the Russian peasantry is applicable to peasants in many other societies, including Ethiopia.

Round about lie endless plains and in the centre of them, insignificant, tiny man abandoned on this dull earth for penal labour. And man is filled with the feeling of indifference killing his ability to think, to remember his past, to work out his ideas from experience (Gorky 1987:382-383).

Peasants from those regions of Ethiopia (such as Tigre and Wello) which are the important centres of its civilization struggling to eke out their livelihood in their immediate surroundings of drought, famine, and war appear to have lost the sense of being connected with their rich history. The constant struggle to face natural and human obstacles has created in them a sense of relative insignificance and powerlessness. The recurrent droughts and famines have eroded both the physical and social environment which produced and sustained their rich history. As a result, there is a rupture between their past and present. The harsh reality of the present, on the one hand, and the struggle to keep the memory of the past, on the other, creates tension. As a result people from these regions are left with feelings of nostalgia (see Chapter Four).

Another aspect to peasant consciousness that is extremely relevant to this study relates to their response to situations of crisis. When confronted with crisis, peasants in some cases may resist, in others, revolt, in yet others, they may respond differently. In order to avoid the possibility of misinterpretation, or distortion, the specific response of a particular peasantry must be seen within its specific cultural context and nature of crisis. In this context the Tuaregs and other agrarian groups of the Sahel region analyzed by Franke and Chasin (1980: 8-9) provides a relevant example. Their analysis is based on a case reported by Claire Sterling, a journalist documenting the Sahelian famine and the response of the pastoralists of the region. Sterling (1974: 100) wrote:

The region abounds in tales of suicide by men unable to support their families. Herdsmen near Asjoujt, Mauritania, tell of nomads who got tired of waiting for relief supplies and just walked out into the desert to die. In Niger and Mali there are numerous accounts of Fulani cattle raisers who, sitting in the sands near where their cattle had perished, said they were waiting for death themselves.

I agree with Franke and Chasin that it would be wrong to view these peasants and
pastoralists "as simply passive victims of a tragedy" (1980: 9). Rather, many of these people struggle hard to adapt to the changing environment to ensure their survival. They preferred work to charity even when the work involved doing jobs they were not accustomed to and traditionally considered "low status." I want to take this point further. Even when they chose to die quietly, it must not be interpreted as passivity. Instead, it needs to be interpreted within the context of their system of meanings and social relations. The notion of protesting, rioting, stealing, or waiting indefinitely for the food aid to arrive would be one set of response. In their cultural context however, all that may be perceived as undignified. The response of Tigre and Wello peasants to the 1984 - 85 famine relief reported by Graham Hancock is parallel to the case of the Tuaregs discussed by Franke and Chasin (1980). In the case of Ethiopian peasants they did not agitate or riot against the ruling classes and the state/authorities. Nor did they steal - even during famine. This is not because they are passive. Rather, they are acutely aware that they have to rely on their own resources to overcome their problems. That is a specific characteristic of the response of peasants in Ethiopia.

Hancock (1985) expressed his amazement over the way the people of these regions who were not receiving the relief supply stood quietly, watching and waiting:

...they just stood there and watched what was happening without any kind of greed or resentment. I think it was this calmness, this passivity, that got to me because I knew that if I had been in their position, with may be my own child dying, I would not have just stood there and watched others be given the chance of life, I think I would have done anything, rioted, killed, to get the food I needed (9).
CHAPTER THREE

INTRODUCTION TO FIELD SITE

This chapter starts with an introduction to the village of Berekha, the field site. Next I provide a description of the district Efratana-Jille, its brief history, population distribution, and some of its social-cultural features. This is followed by a brief description of the physical characteristics and topographical variations of the Northern Shewa region. I provide a brief introduction to the population and modes of subsistence, language, and religion found in the region. A brief account of the region's political history is provided to show how the state has impacted on the local social and economic life of the population and vice versa. This account is necessary in order to understand how the various national/ethnic groups in the region were shaped by the history and topography of the region, as well as to provide a picture of the geographical setting in which the events and the processes that surrounded the people (the subject of my study) took place. In providing these physical and historical accounts, I am following local peoples' characterizations of the topography and the inhabitants of the region at large. The account will show how the settlers faced the challenging social-political landscape of the region, as much as its difficult physical terrain.

I: BEREKHA, THE VILLAGE OF STUDY

Migrating about 180 kilo metres south from an area of land shortage and recurrent famine, the people of Berekha brought their habits of hard work and traditional skills to Northern Shewa. Generally, given the economic, social, and infrastructural underdevelopment of Northern Shewa, landlords did not invest in tools or other improvements. So, the Welloye migrants had only their labour, age-old skills of farming, and the drive and determination to clear the bush and convert Ifat into one of the agriculturally productive areas of Ethiopia.

The people of Berekha settled between the Alem and the Jewuha Rivers valleys. These are breeding grounds for Anopheles mosquitoes that spread malaria, which, for instance, took a heavy toll of the first settlers of the village (see Chapter Six). Others went east, west, north and south, where they found distinct settlements at places chosen for the availability of good soil for farming, girar (Acacia) trees for making charcoal, water, and
pasture.

Settlement pattern and land use followed in the old tradition of Amhara farmers of Gidim and Ifat. Amhara prefer to live in mountainous areas or hills and use the valleys strictly for farming. Settlement concentrated on the hilly and less fertile part of the land, carefully allowing a buildup of population without destroying the productive capacity of the valleys and flat lands. Initially, settlements for the majority of them were temporary and insecure. This gave way in time to more familiar social and political organization as the population density rose due to further migration. Before the 1974 Revolution, the Welloye settlers were relatively isolated and fearful; with no status, and the victims of discrimination (discussed in chapter six). However, after the Revolution and the Land Reform Act of 1975, they were transformed into social and political actors in several ways. They became integrated and began to play active social and political roles in local and national affairs. This is an important theme I shall deal with in detail when discussing the political and social character of the village of Berekha in chapters six and seven.

a) Conflict and Malaria: the Naming of the Village

Berekha village is a settlement, chosen for study because it was entirely inhabited by Welloye peasant-emigrants. They followed the Great Shaykh from a village called Tekhulede in Southern Wello and settled in this area as tenants of Oromo and Amhara landlords in the mid 1940s. The korepta (hill) site was picked by the Great Shaykh and according to the villagers, was revealed to him through a dream. By the time of the research, the village of Berekha had been established in the area for fifty-two years. The Great Shaykh is addressed by the residents of Berekha as getochu (the lords), a plural form of address that carries a combination of both religious and secular feudal moral sentiments. He exercised a great moral authority over his poor peasant followers.

After arriving in northern Shewa, the Great Shaykh and his followers built a shrine

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1 Hutu-Gela (temporary shelters) were common (see Chapter Six).
2 Some informants claim even longer time-depth, tracing it back to the times of Yohannes IV (1872 - 89) and Menelik II (1889 -1913).
which was similar to what they had in Wello. Their departure from Wello and arrival in Shewa are filled with many tales that are both of a supernatural and practical nature. The tales are related to how they came, stood up to the lowland diseases, cleared the land, and pursued their livelihood peacefully. In these tales, the assistance the Great Shaykh provided them is elevated to saintly deeds.

A sharecropping arrangement was made between the Great Shaykh and I. Dima, one of the most prominent Oromo landlords of Efratana-Jille. The Great Shaykh also exercised a religious authority over the Oromo landlord himself who respected and feared his indignation/curse. The Sufi philosophy the Great Shaykh adhered to - emphasizing modesty, peace, and harmony - contributed to his popularity, providing an aura of saintly charisma. As a result he was able to mediate between his people and the Oromo landlord and to protect his followers. Even the Christian Amhara of Gidim, the neighbouring mountainous region, speak of the Great Shaykh and the village of Berekha with respect. Some of them also went to him for help, because he was perceived as a sacred and learned leader. The village of Berekha is viewed with respect and fear by its residents and tolerance by its neighbours. It was important to create this aura of awe and fear, in short, sacredness, about the village so that powerful outsiders could not overstep the boundaries of the potentially vulnerable community.

It is important to understand that before the Welloye settlers came and cleared the area for farming it was historically a site of conflict between Oromo pastoralists and Amhara peasant farmers of Efratana-Jille. The area of settlement was carefully selected by the Great Shaykh for its rich soils that have washed down from the peripheral highlands of Menzina-Gishe and Gidim. It is endowed with fertile soils and water, conducive both for farming and grazing. The deep and broad valleys of Efratana-Jille with its rich soils compensated for the suffering caused by the qola (lowland) heat and malaria. The Ifat valley became a perennial lure for Wello peasants in search of subsistence and autonomy. In addition, the news travelled north about the fertility of Ifat. So, the relatives who heard about the prosperity of those who had migrated south also followed.

The name Berekha in Amharic means blessings. In Amharic the lexicon Berekha can be conjugated to be used for blessings and good wishes. Blessings are the most important
popular method of expressing peace, harmony, and civility. A person who does not greet with blessings is considered to be uncivilized.

The particular spot where the village of Berekha is built lies on the traditional boundary. The Great Shaykh named the site Berekha. Previously it was called Tchir (deserted). It was a neutral ground, dividing the two communities. Their village was situated between these and the new migrants had to negotiate with the two groups while at the same time pursuing their settled agricultural life in the midst of malaria and lowland heat. The Great Shaykh was able to protect his people by declaring: "may selam (peace) prevail in Berekha". In Ifat's frontier area of social instability and malaria, giving this name Berekha and wishing peace to the village was very symbolic. It was intended to protect his followers broadly from three persistent dangers: agrarian exploitation, political instability, and natural calamity. The first factor was responsible for their departure from Wello: land shortage, unjust administration, and the severe form of exploitation. The other two were associated with the hardships of farming life in the new physical and social environment.

The bush and forest covering the creek and the river below the hill where Berekha is located were infested by *Plasmodium falciparum* and *Plasmodium vivax* malaria. People, particularly from the highland regions, did not dare to come to this area. The settlers believe that the Great Shaykh had the power to propitiate and chase away the *jini* and protect them from sickness. Before the arrival of the Welloye settlers forests were used to generate fear among the local population due to the natural calamity of malaria and the conflict between Oromo pastoralists and Amhara highland farmers. The fear was related to the infestation of the area by malaria, which was locally associated with a *jini* (evil spirit). The illness from malaria is also understood and termed as *weba* (malaria) and *worershign* (epidemic-invasion). In fact, the spread of malaria in the lowland of Efratana-Jille is even popularly termed as *Ye-Ifat worershign* (Ifat's epidemic-invasion). From the discussions and interviews I had with a wide section of people of the area, symptoms such as patients having hallucinations, sleep-talking and sleep-walking and death were identified with this sickness. It is probable that this symptom was caused by high fever induced by malarial illness. Infection by *plasmodium falciparum* which is the most lethal parasite causes many deaths (Krogstad 1992: 1973).

The people of Berekha believe the Shaykh also protected them from the *jini* (the evil
spirit) of the area. He blessed the hilly site where the village is built. He proclaimed that peace, harmony, and prosperity shall prevail in the village. There shall never be war, adultery, and alcoholism in Berekha. He also prescribed strict ascetic norms for his followers such as no singing at weddings other than religious hymns. He prescribed that people defecate and urinate far away from the village. This kept the village hygienically clean and its residents healthy. It saved the poor villagers from various communicable diseases.

When the Great Shaykh picked the spot between a jirat (creek) and a wonz (river), it was a calculated move. Despite the fear of malaria, coming from drought prone woin-ade~a districts of Ambassel, the potential benefits for farming in the fertile valley with plenty of water outweighed the negatives. This was the most important part of the whole migration and the reason why the Great Shaykh's directives were strictly followed. The availability of water enabled them to withstand the 1984-85 famine. Until the drought got serious, the river provided irrigation for growing vegetables. As the drought continued, people were still able to walk further following the river route to collect reeds for cattle fodder. Women from poorer households were able sell the reeds in the nearby towns.

b) How they Maintained their Cohesive Identity

Though the Welloye migrated to Northern Shewa to become tenants of Oromo and Christian Amhara landlords, they kept a strong regional history and identity. Their persistent desire to use their rich agricultural knowledge along with their determination to live by tilling the land served as a foundation of their strong culture and identity in the new environment.

The cohesive identity of Berekha villagers arises out of a solidarity based on three factors: fear of poverty, their outsider status, and their rural isolation. These key factors served as an important shield during turbulent political times. Their food sharing and death rituals are the two manifestations of their struggle and determination to maintain their old way of life.

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3 However, the cattle may be saved temporarily when they were fed reeds. But, eventually they all suffered from dysentery. This combined with the drought, reviving them from dehydration was difficult.
II: INTRODUCTION TO THE DISTRICT OF EFRATANA-JILLE

The site of the fieldwork is Berekha village which is part of the PA Alem, located in the woreda (district) of Efratana-Jille, in the awraja (sub-province) of Ifatna-Timuga, Northern Shewa region, Ethiopia. Ifatna-Timuga awraja is surrounded by the awrajawoch (sub-districts) of Tagulatna-Bulga in the south and Menzna-Gishe in the west, and by the kifle-hagar (provinces) of Harar to the east and Wello to the north (see map 3). The people of Berekha village migrated from Wello, a province endowed with a rich history and an ancient tradition of agriculture.

The administrative town of Efratana-Jille district is Alem, situated 278 kilometres north of Addis Ababa, on the main road linking Addis Ababa with Dessie, the capital of Wello province. Alem is located in a valley enclaved on the West by the mountains of Efratana-Gidim. The historical market town of Sanbate about 15 kms south of Alem, is a weekly market centre where all the different communities of Northern Shewa meet every Sunday to exchange their different produce. This area was severely affected by the 1984-85 famine and was a recipient of food aid (both national and international). One of the feeding centres for the 1984-85 famine, where villagers of Berekha went to receive their ration, was located in Sanbate (see map 4).

a) The Peasant Association, Alem

The village of Berekha is part of a PA, Alem in the district of Efratana-Jille. Alem is a small sub-town, an extension of a district town located approximately 5 kilometres out of the district town. The PA has a population of about 2,515 people living in 511 households scattered roughly into four villages. The majority of the PA members are from the village of Berekha. In 1993, out of the 511 households, 119 (23.3%) were headed by women and 392 (76.7%) were headed by men. The PA residents get their water supply from nearby streams, wells, and rain water. The wells were dug by Save the Children USA which has been involved in famine relief work since 1985. While the district town is electrified, the PA is not; its inhabitants rely on kuraz (kerosene based candles and lamps).
b) Population Distribution in Efratana-Jille

My mother is an Amhara Christian highlander from the house of Menegne’e in the mountains of Menzina-Gishe. My father is an Oromo Muslim from the lowlands. My mothers’ first family arranged marriage was with an Amhara Christian from Gishe. He was cruel to her, but my mother couldn’t divorce him. So, her uncles secretly arranged a marriage with a small Oromo balabat (landlord) of the lowlands of Efratana-Jille. My wife is Muslim from Wello.

Yimmer Aliye, a state official in Efratana-Jille.

The district of Efratana-Jille is inhabited by diverse ethnic groups - Afar, Amhara, Argobba, Oromo, and Welloye settlers. The Welloye settlers, the subject of my research, have been gradually settling in this area over the past five decades. Afarigna, Amharic, and Oromifa are the three common languages spoken in the district. In towns, Amharic is spoken more frequently. While the others represent a very large ethnic groups in the wider Ethiopian mosaic, a few facts have to be said about the Argobba. The Argobba are one of the small minority groups found in Ethiopia. The majority of them are dispersed through Northern Shewa, while a few are settled in the province of Harar. Most of the people who frequent the small towns and market areas of the district are bilingual. Some even speak all three languages of the region fluently. The Argobba language is almost extinct. Depending on the population that is found around them, the Argobba have adopted Amharic and Oromifa in place of their original language⁴ (Chernet 1990:303). In the district of Efratana-Jille, some Argobba of the older generation speak the language in a pidgin form.

The diverse inhabitants of Efratana-Jille can be distinguished from one another by the kinds of weapons or instruments they carry, and by the hair style and dress codes. For instance, the male population of the Oromo and Afar carry sword and rifle while the Christian Amhara carry the yoke, plough, and rifle. The Welloye migrants carry the axe and sickle which they use to cut trees and expand the farm potential of Efratana-Jille and maintain a strictly rural (peasant) identity, life style, and speech patterns. Until 1974, the Welloye-

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⁴ The Argobba of Harar speak both Aderi and Oromo language. But, “they are more affiliated to the Aderi than to the Oromo (Chernet 1990:307). This is one evidence showing that ethnic boundaries were fluid, adjustable to local material conditions and history.
migrants were not allowed to carry rifles, which according to the local custom, indicated the low status assigned to them and by the earlier inhabitants (the Amhara, Argobba, and Oromo). After the 1974 Revolution, however, except for those who turned to shiftanat (banditry), the entire civilian population was disarmed. The measures taken by the Derg to disarm the civilian population was received with great enthusiasm by the Welloye settlers. This is not surprising for the people whose status in the district was insecure and whose preoccupation, as they say, was mekeseb (tilling the land). The disarmament of the civilian population during the Derg period relieved the settlers from fear and repression. For instance, in 1994 when a feud broke out and some people were killed, many of the residents blamed the EPDRF government for being indifferent to the rearmament of the civilian population. In their uncertain position, the abundance of ammunition in the district and the rearmament of the civilian population increased their insecurity and distracted their attention from the pursuit of their livelihood.

c) Intermingling of Diverse Ethnic and Occupational Groups

In the market town of Sanbate located south of Alem, the Afar bring their herds of camels loaded with amole tchaw (salt bar), goats, and lowland sheep; the Amhara, their cereals, legumes, hops, vegetables and spices; the Argobba, mainly coffee and fruits; the Oromo, butter, chicken, eggs and cattle. The Welloye, who are engaged in diversified petty trading, also specialize in incense and aromatic tree barks. The aromas from the wild limes of Ifat, the incense that was being marketed by women from Wello, the coffee and banana area dominated by the women of Argobba, the butter chicken and eggs by the Oromo, the cereals and pulse from the Amhara highlanders, the amole-tchaw (salt bar) goats of the Adal (Afar) are neatly displayed and arranged by their respective specialists, according to their terra (order). The buzzing sounds from the market are impossible to miss from the main highway. Highlanders and lowlanders, people from as far as Majete in the north and Mehal Meda in the northwest and as far east as the Afar depression come to trade in this small town called Sanbate, rich with history and relevant to the people of the Welloye settlers.

The Afar for centuries kept the Ethiopian highlands connected with the outside world. In addition to supplying the inhabitants of the hinterland with amole tchaw (salt bar) and the
most essential ingredients of daily diets of people, they also supplied hides and skins, cattle, camels, and goats. They helped link isolated villages and small towns together, acting as catalysts, extending formal commerce, long-distance trade and economic processes. The Afar added joy and grace to the principal rural markets of Bati in Wello and to the Sanbate market in Efratana-Jille, Northern Shewa. In Sanbate, they arrive in the early evenings of every Saturday, the eve of the market day, just before sunset. Their arrival revitalizes the town as everyone looks forward to Sunday, the market day.

d) Contestation and Accommodation

The inhabitants of the Efratana-Jille district represent an important component of the complex and multiple layers of Ethiopian social history. For centuries, all forms of religion, linguistic and cultural groups have lived and intermingled with one another in this region. As a result, national and religious identities have been mixed and cannot always be clearly defined. Broadly, the Cushitic and Semitic heritages predominate the area. Amharic and Argobba belong to the Semitic branch of the Afro Asiatic language family, while Afar and Oromifa are classified as the Cushitic groups found in the country.

Historically, the entire Ifat region (which includes part of Efratana-Jille), has been a scene of divided loyalties and endemic conflict over land for pasture, farms, rivers, and lakes. It is a frontier area contested between different faiths, people following different livelihoods, and regional aristocracies. It has been contested between Christian and Islamic principalities (see Tadesse 1972, Trimingham 1976). The Christians claim that the region was first occupied by them and accordingly give the towns and villages names that carry religious connotation. Hence, most of the names of towns and historic sites have been given names found in the Bible. The Christian names include Efrata (Euphrates), Iyarko (Jerico), Nazret (Nazareth), Gelgela (Galilee), Kebraon (Hebron), and Alem.

Along with the constant contestation and competing claims, there has also been a tradition of compromise and accommodation. This is clearly seen in the evolution of various traditions of giving names to administrative villages and districts in Northern Shewa and Wello. One may mention in this connection a particular form of political-administrative tradition of drawing and naming the political boundaries and administrative districts by giving
recognition to two (or more) communities. Hence it is common to find a combination of both languages in naming a place, such as, Efratana-Jille: Efrata denotes the Amhara Christian and the Semitic heritage, while Jille denotes the Oromo and Cushitic heritage. The same can be said about others. Using Efratana-Jille as a reference point, this system of naming is found from southern Tigre’s district of Rayana-Azebo in the north to most of the province of Shewa in the South, and to Adalna-Gara Guracha and Isana-Gurgura in the province of Harar in the east. Within the administrative zone of Northern Shewa, it is common to find district names like Tegulatina-Bulga, Manzina-Gishe, Ifatina-Timuga, Efratana-Jille, Rayana-Qobo in Wello.

The lowlands of Ifat are the breeding ground for malaria, creating a particular hardship for the highlanders who are unaccustomed to such environmental stress. The hardships of life in Ifat caused by both natural and human factors is aptly captured in the Amharic couplet:

"Ifat/Yifat"
"Tirfu Lifat"

Ifat
Its reward is toil/fatigue.

When the settlers from Wello came to this region, they had to deal with the hardship of the physical landscape and climate as well as human aspects of the area. This latter issue will be addressed in chapters five and six.

e) The State and Shifting Boundaries

Due to the social diversities in the region (where Efratana-Jille is located) and the contentious claims made by the ruling classes the region has always attracted the attention of state authorities as well as of various leaders of social and religious movements. Historically, we find both the central state and local powers trying to manipulate the local diversities to their advantage, and the local people in turn trying to use the diversity to carve out space from these local powers and the central state to their advantage. This has resulted in continuous shift and alterations by the central state to define the political-administrative boundaries of the districts and provinces, depending on the changing political and economic interests and relative strength of the local powers vis-à-vis the central state. Thus, in the late
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the area was contested between Wello and Shewan aristocracies (Bahru 1993). Immediately after the Battle of Sagale, the southernmost sub-province of Wello, Wara Ilu, was annexed by the province of Shewa. In the particular case of Fursi, the district predominantly populated by Oromo, it was returned to Wello in 1925 (Asnake 1986:2). The districts of Dawe, Artuma, and Siye Gula, which were taken from southeastern Wello and incorporated into the province of Shewa after the 1951 conflict in the area, were returned back to Wello in 1960.

Ato Mangasha and Tsegaye describes the boundary changes and reclassification of the provinces and sub-provinces as follows:

Between 1933-1960, the old awraja, was called Manzna-Ifat, with the awraja town in Debre-Sina about 80 kilometres South of Alem. Irike Artuma, bordering Afar the district of Bure Mudaitu, was administered under Jara awraja Administration. This was the case until 1951, when it was elevated to an Awraja status so that it could receive more military and administrative support from the centre in order to exercise an effective control, and it was given an Oromo military officer, Abebe Gamada, who had a the reputation of an efficient and strict administrator.\(^5\)

M.I. Dima used to administer the Jille Oromo together with Bure Mudaito, the Adal (Afar) district all the way up to Awash River. While Ras Kebede used to administer Efrata and Gidim, all together. In 1960, there was change again. Manzina-Gishe Awraja and Ifatna-Timuga (Fursi) Awraja were introduced. Qewetina-Mafud became Ifat while the Oromo side became Timuga. Jointly the two became Ifatna-Timuga Awraja.

State intervention in drawing and redrawing of the boundaries was resisted and continually challenged by the local population and hereditary rulers. This was especially so during the process of centralization under Haile Selassie I (1941-74). The form of centralization introduced during his period was a new experiment. It involved the displacement of old hereditary rulers and the introduction of "modern" educated administrators appointed by the central state. In the process, along with new forms of political administration, there was redefining of political boundaries to facilitate the modernization of the state. However, these measures were resisted by the local aristocracy. There were many instances of continuous negotiations between the forces of centralization

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\(^5\) He is remembered locally by the many poems composed to reflect on these characteristics.
and local powers, such as the land settlement in Efratana-Jille (see chapter five). While the impact of centralization was felt by all regions, in the border regions of Northern Shewa and Southern Wello its impact was more serious. As a result, between 1941-1974 many administrative changes were introduced and the awraja and woreda boundaries of this area were drawn and re-drawn.

The significance of the boundary changes and political conflict/tension can be appreciated if we are reminded that it was in such a turbulent area, uncontrollable even by the central state and local landlords, that the Great Shaykh and the Welloye settlers came from outside, took the virgin lands, brought them under cultivation, and reconstructed their new community. More than the state and the landlords, it was the creative combination of their social skills and habits of hard labour that turned a historically turbulent region into a relatively productive and peaceful community. Their Sufi Shaykh was more effective in creating peace and harmony between different communities of the region than the combined forces of the local landlords and the central state. It will be useful to understand how community and state formation is a two-way process involving the interaction between micro and macro forces. More than the conquering army of the state, micro level social and economic processes have contributed to the integration of Ethiopian society. Through more ethnographic oriented research it is possible to learn how grassroots efforts by the people on their own initiative have benefited the expansion of the state and its ability to integrate different nationalities, linguistic, and religious groups into a single territory and wider Ethiopian society.

The process of centralization and redrawing of boundaries continued during the Derg period with the introduction of PA as the smallest unit of government at the village level. In the early 1980s the Derg, with the declaration of Peoples' Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, introduced new political-administrative boundaries. During this period, the awraja (sub-province) of Ifatna-Timuga was organised into five political-administrative districts (see map 5). They were from south to north respectively: Mafoud, Qewet, Bure-Mudaytu (dominantly Afar), Efratana-Jille, Foursi (dominantly Oromo), and Gamza (dominantly Amhara).

Subsequently, after 1991 the current government used ethnicity as the basis to redraw the internal boundaries of Ethiopia into different kililotch (isolates). Accordingly, kilil One
was Tigre, Two, Afar, Three, Amhara, Four, Oromo, and so on (see map 6). The official rationale of this new policy was that each ethnic group should remain within its designated territory and boundary so as to administer itself locally and use the local language for its administration. Within each kilil, even small villages were being divided on the basis of this criterion. Even the Kebeles (Neighbourhood Associations) and Peasant Associations in the district of Efratana-Jille and some in Fursi were being redrawn on ethnic lines.

Northern Shewa was ethnically redefined and its political boundaries were again redrawn. However, northern Shewa, given its history of coexistence of two (or more) communities (reflected in the pattern of naming districts and administrative boundaries, discussed above) did not easily fit into these schemes. Though the overwhelming majority of the population was not supportive of this new scheme, restructuring and redefining on the basis of ethnicity was nevertheless still going on.

f) A brief History of Alem: Diverse Perspectives

The history of the town of Alem is closely linked with the Welloye settlers of Berekha. This history is seen differently by the various actors - the government officials, the Welloye settlers of Berekha, and the landlord. The bureaucrats who were brought by the state for administration purposes and collection of tax remember vividly the details of the decisions of government such as who proposed or approved which policy, and on what date, and so on. Here is how Ato Tsegaye, who worked at the Ministry of Finance for the district, recalls the history of the town:

In Ginbot (May) 1953 (according to Ethiopian calender, which is equivalent to

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6 For instance, the awraja (sub-province) of Ifatna-Timuga until 1991 had five political-administrative districts, Bure-Mudaito, E-J, Foursi, Gamza, and Quet (see map). This administrative boundary was created on the basis of development potentiality and administrative feasibility depending on the number of Peasant Associations, population and natural resources. All the above districts are still in Region Three and administered by Northern Shewa Administrative Zone office in Debre-Birhan. However, Foursi is a predominantly Oromo district, and according to the new administration division it does not fit into Region Three, which is supposed to be entirely Amhara. On the other hand, however the incorporation of Bure-Mudaytu, a predominantly Afar district, has been incorporated into Region Two (Afar) has been relatively easier, because it is located on the border of Afar region bordering Northern Shewa on the East side.
1961), Ifatna-Timuga awraja (sub-province)\(^7\) was hit by an earthquake. The earthquake destroyed the town of Kara-Kore, which was then the woreda (district) Efrata-Jille, within the Awraja of Jara. The Emperor came to visit the disaster area of the earthquake in 1954. Because Kara Kore was located in an area prone to volcanic activity, other woreda town in a different area had to be chosen. The local notables selected and nominated different towns of their choice to be the next awraja town and sent letters to the Emperor. Ras\(^8\) Mesfin Sileshi, who was the administrator of the province of Shewa nominated Jara (in Fursi). Qagn-azmatch\(^9\) Abeba-Ayehu nominated Chefa-Dere/ Qori Meda, since in addition to their location on the border of Shewa and Wello they are situated at an equal distance from both Amhara and Oromo. Nadew Belete on the other hand suggested Alem as good both for the degegna (highlander) and golegna (lowlander), both for the Amhara and Oromo. Moreover, it also had a potential of expansion and growth. Then it was given to the mahandis (civil engineers) to evaluate the various areas suggested for the new town. The mahandis (civil engineer) backed Alem after investigating that the area is relatively free of volcanic activities and close to the Alem river. (Mangasha, field notes 1994).

The new town became Alem, which is named after the parish of Alem- Kidane Meheret south of Kara Kore that was destroyed by the earthquake. However, it was much later in Tir 1957 (January 1964), that the administrative office and people moved to Alem. Since Alem was covered with forest and the river was infested with malarial bacteria, people feared. Until then Alem was inhabited by Oromo bal-abbat (landlords), a few people of Berekha and the Sudanese. At this time there were just about 5-6 houses in the village of Berekha (Tsegaye 1994).

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\(^7\) Ifatna-Timuga Awraja is a an administrative term used prior to 1974 to indicate a different administrative division of the sub-province. Depending on its physical and population size, a province may be composed of many Awraja.

Many Mikitil (sub-district) form a Woreda (district). Many Woreda combined together constitute an Awraja (sub-province).

\(^8\) Ras, both in Amharic and Tigrigna literally means 'head'. It is one of the highest feudal title next to the Negus (King) given to a person of aristocratic heritage. Ras Mesfin Sileshi was one of the fifty-eight officials exceeded by the Derg in 1974.

\(^9\) Qagn-azmach is a "polictico-military" title used in the Ethiopian feudal system. It means commander of the right and is above Gra-azmach (commander of the left). See also Bahru Zewde (1991).
What the Welloye settlers remember of the town is that it is built on the farm land they cleared entirely with their own labour and tools. The way they remember and narrate its history and they relate to it is different from the narration of the landlord whose Gult land they came to cultivate. It was this fertile land that they cleared, where their hard labour produced the first few optimal harvests, on which their future depended. The hope for continued rich harvest compensated for the initial problem of social insecurity and fear of Malaria in Alem. Their land hunger, enthusiasm for farm work, and skilled labour were exploited to clear the area that was soon taken over for the settlement of bureaucrats, traders, and town elites. The district town has since expanded west of the main road towards Berekha appropriating more farm lands. As pioneer settlers, who had invested so much of their labour, the settlers resent the expansion of the town towards their village. The town is electrified, while they still use kerosene candle. Their village is conveniently located on top of a hill on the periphery of Alem, where every evening they will sit outside of their tukul and stoically watch the town turn on its electric light.

Neither the official description nor the settlers' labour in developing the area is given weight in the landlord's account. Instead, what he emphasizes is that he brought the settlers from Wello and gave them the land to farm and eat.

g) Social Diversity

The district exhibits rich social diversity. The rich and diverse social heritage of the town reflects the region's complex history in which wider national and international political, economic, and cultural forces have interacted with the local history. This experience is very much part of the consciousness of the inhabitants of the region. Aba Issa Ahmed Husain is a Sudanese who was brought by the Italians along other Sudanese as road construction (from Asmara to Addis Ababa) labourers during the occupation (1936 - 41). He has lived in this region since the days of the Italian occupation. His life history shows the dynamics of peasants' economic and political life in Efratana-Jille in the midst of major historical changes brought about by the impact of national and international forces. He shares a similar historical experience of sharecropping contract. Like the people of Berekha, his initial contact
with A.I. Dima was made on the basis of a common religion (Islam).\textsuperscript{10} Aba Issa confirms that all the other Sudanese including himself married and remarried many Welloye women, which makes his narrative relevant here.

Moreover, his narration shows that his foreign (Sudanese) nationality has not been an issue either for the local population, or for the state under the successive governments of Haile Selassie I, the Derg, and now EPDRF. He lived and continues to live witnessing the radical transformation of Wello and Northern Shewa rural society since the late 1930s:

After the liberation [1941], the emperor said we could stay on if we wanted to. From Kombolcha we moved South to the town of Kara Kore in Shewa north of Alem. We lived there until the earthquake hit the town in 1953. After the earthquake, the district town shifted to the new location and I followed. When we came here, Imar Dima granted us land on basis of sharecropping tenancy. I also got involved in trading farm products, such as butter, honey, grains, etc., which were in plenty during that time.

Now there are just two of us still alive. The other Sudanese lives in Zuti with his son who is married to an Adal woman. He makes his living by farming. We both got married to Welloye women and brought them here with us. I got married twelve times, but only had two children. All of my wives were Welloye. This is our country. During seba-sebat [1984-85 famine], we received ration from the Derg.

Wars, droughts, and famines have made their contribution to the ethnic composition of the region. The major wars involved the mobilization of large populations. Thus, the Battle of Sagale brought different people to the area, and the Italian invasion brought people even from outside Ethiopia (see the narrative of Aba Issa Ahmed Husain in Chapter One). In addition, the frequent droughts have induced internal migration in search of better farming and grazing land bringing together people from different areas belonging to different ethnic groups.

h) The Welloye Tradition of Tolerance and Coexistence

As Muslims, the Welloye migrants tend to be assimilated with the local Oromo on the

\textsuperscript{10} It is important to note that there were also sharecropping contracts between Christian Amhara landlords and Muslim Amhara tenants as well.
basis of a common religion. They also share a common language and other cultural norms with the Amhara of Northern Shewa. Nevertheless, as migrants searching for livelihood the Welloye migrants in Northern Shewa are put down by both the Amhara and the Oromo of the District. This subordinate status has forced them to recreate a new sense of identity and social cohesion so as to adjust to the demands of the social reality of the new area. For the people of Berekha, the creative combination of the teachings of the Great Shaykh and the Shrine, and their traditional occupation as experienced cultivators served them both as symbolic and material resource. These significant cultural resources helped them to recreate a new community with a strong identity.

There are three significant features of Wello that need to be underlined in the context of the Welloye settlers’ migration and successful adaptation. Firstly, the province of Wello is the centre of Ethiopia’s rich and old agricultural history. Until 1973-74 it was called the bread basket of Ethiopia. The surplus extraction from its peasantry supported the foundation of Ethiopia’s modern infrastructures, like education, health, roads, some industries, and the modern army. Secondly, and paradoxically, it is also a province that has been deeply and permanently affected by the two major famines of the twentieth century in Ethiopia; those of 1973-74 and 1984-85. The peasants of Wello are just as familiar with drought and famine as they are with the physical landscape of their province. Thirdly, it is the home of the Amharic speaking population. But, it is also a place of diverse language, religion, lifestyle and nationality. It was because of their experience of this diverse historical-cultural context that the people of Berekha were equipped to face the social landscape of Efratana-Jille seeking a better livelihood by farming.

Wello is the place where the Amhara nationality evolved and the Amharic language originated. Yet Welloye national identity is tolerant and even elastic. The Welloyes’ longterm interaction with the Adal (Afar), Agaw, Oromo, and Tigrean made them tolerant of ethnic diversity and create a tradition of mutual respect among the Christian and Muslim communities. As a result, "differences are respected as a matter of fact....[Wello] is a region where bigotry is hard to find, and where the only taboo is inhibition" (Mesfin 1991: 18). The Great Shaykh and the residents of Berekha came from Hayiq, an area where some of the earlier and important Christian monasteries and settlement in Wello are found. Coming from
a typical area in Ethiopia, where the two main religions, Orthodox Christianity and Islam, coexisted side by side, the Welloye were able to adjust easily in Northern Shewa. Along with the Christian population of the highland, they participate in celebrations of some of the important Christian holidays, such as in the jubilant celebration of *timkat* (Epiphany), in which the men escort the *tabot* (the holy ark, the replica of the ark of covenant) to a stream/pool for an overnight stay, singing, and dancing. The mood at this time is celebratory, and ethno-religious differences are blurred with the sharing of *difo dabo* (Ethiopian bread), and drinks (coffee and *tella*) and the Muslim settlers’ participation adds colour to the celebration.

i) **Marriage Alliances**

Since they are mobile both socially and geographically, the Welloye settlers create a web of social and economic network for the area. Women are an important element in creating and sustaining these networks through marriage alliances with different ethnic groups. Since the Welloye women are considered beautiful they marry easily to all the different ethnic groups of the region.11 Wello is a land of poetry, where in day-to-day interaction and use of Amharic local dialect, terms of endearment are generously used. This cultural disposition has made it easy for them to interact widely and establish alliance with the different communities of Efratana-Jille.

j) **The Spread of Welloye Migrants in Efratana-Jille**

Initially, part of the lowland of Efratana-Jille adjacent to the valleys was used by pastoralists. There was no settled agriculture. Throughout, as both recorded evidence and oral history show, the Northern Shewa region has been a dynamic and volatile frontier region, an area of transhumance, where highland agriculture and pastoralism blend. The Welloye migrants added another dimension to the complexity. For the land hungry Welloye migrants

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11 The most common is with the Argobba, Yemenites, and Christian Amhara.
the area was all taf maret\textsuperscript{12} (virgin land), a land which is not under cultivation: "waiting to be cultivated." More importantly, the taf maret of Efratana-Jille also provided them relative freedom from the mislene (deputies/substitutes of magistrates) and chiqa shum (local judge and tax collector) who were particularly repressive in Wello. Due to the absence of settled agriculture, landlordism was not entrenched in this part of Northern Shewa, as was the case in Wello. Relying on their labour, ancient agricultural knowledge, and political wit, the new migrants came in search of land and livelihood.

The wave of Welloye migrants settled on the lowlands of Ifat, the foothills of Menzina Gishe mountains, East of Gidim. They made their connection with different landlords, Christians, Muslims, Amhara, and Oromo and made their new homes in different parts of Northern Ifat up to the Jewuha River.

III: SETTLEMENT PATTERN, AND SOCIAL DIVERSITY

Ethiopia is a land of great physical diversity, with altitudes ranging from 116 metres below sea level, in the Danakil Depression, to a 4,620 metres mountain peak. Desert occupies about one-third of the total area. The country has a climate varying from cold continental to temperate, subtropical, and tropical with an average annual temperature of sixteen degree celsius in the high plateaux and with average of thirty degrees in the lowlands.

In terms of altitude, the lowland area ranges from sea level to two thousand metres. The highland area lies above two thousand metres. The total areas of the lowland and highland regions of Ethiopia constitute about sixty percent and forty percent of the land surface, respectively with forty percent of its territory situated over more than 1,500 metres above sea level. Many streams and rivers rise from these highlands and flow towards the arid regions of neighbouring countries. The Blue Nile (Blue referring to the muddy colour of it), the largest tributary of the Nile, also originates in these areas.

The topography of the country has an effect on the diversity of population settlement

\textsuperscript{12} Taf Maret in Amharic include all land that is not cultivated/farmed. It can include forests, shrubs, and land under nomadic use.
and social organization in Ethiopia. Due to the diversity of social and physical landscapes, the Northern Shewa region can be taken as a microcosm of Ethiopia. Most of the diversities found in other parts of the country are contained within the boundaries of the region, including all the five agro-climatic divisions of the country are found in this region. The major agro-climatic zones, as perceived by the local people on a vertical scale, comprise of wuritch (frost area of high elevation), dega (temperate/highland), woinadega (grape growing, or semi-temperate), qola (lowlands), and bereha (desert). These distinctions are further accompanied by variations in the rainfall patterns, temperature, and soil types. Furthermore, variations are seen in terms of crop types, crop production, and the availability of pastures and access to rivers.

Northern Shewa’s Menzna-Gishe and Gidim terrains are marked by steep hills and deep valleys, which create widely different environments within short distances (see Reminick 1973: 14-18). This is the case especially with the narrow steep gorge, named Nefas Mewtchia (wind exit) Gamiso Gadal13 (half-cliff), just north of Tarma-Ber, which is one of the highest mountain peaks found in Northern Shewa, above 3,500 metres. Close to the East of this road is a steep drop to the Afar Valley.

The topography of the region had played a crucial role in shaping the diversity of lifestyle. Traditionally the highlands were inhabited by cereal farming Christian communities, and the lowlands, by pastoralists. About the settlement pattern of the (Amhara) peasants in the highland regions, Hancock (1985) wrote:

When I was in the Simens in 1983 I was astonished to find, not much below the 3,000-metre mark, numerous signs of human habitation; small, tidy villages, grassy meadows providing grazing for sheep, goats and cattle, and terraced hill -sides planted with cereals. The traditional inhabitants of this region are the Amhara...Farmers in a sometimes arid, often cold and none-too fertile environment that suffers bitterly from erosion, they have a proud code of honour, of hospitality and of self-help which makes them a match for this high and remote homeland (20).

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13 Oral history from the area testifies that it was in this steep valley (Nefas Mewtchia), where the Italian Fascist army used to throw down the inhabitants of the region who resisted the invasion.
The lowlands are mainly populated by Afar and Oromo pastoralists and semi-pastoralists, the highlands, by Amhara peasants. At the same time the transhumance of the Afar and Oromo pastoral population kept a widespread interaction between the population of the district in continuum. In addition, the settlement patterns and population distribution have been continually changing due to drought and environmental changes. Since my study is concerned with peasants, I shall not be dealing with pastoralists' way of life and settlement pattern in detail. Rather, I will focus on the subsistence and settlement pattern of the former. Pastoralism will be brought to discussion only in so far as it is relevant to the life of the peasantry.

In addition to the isolated plateau blocks and mountains surrounded by deep gorges there are the smaller tablelands locally known as amba (massifs). The amba isolated by river-eroded gorges make up a large section of the Northern Shewa and part of the Wello landscape. They constitute numerous separate farming villages and communities. As a result, many of the village names in Northern Shewa and parts of Wello attach the name of an amba as a suffix. For instance, in the district of Efratana-Jille close to the village of Berekha, are Muz-Amba inhabited by the Argobba, and Sar-Amba inhabited by a Christian Amharic-speaking population.

The topographical variations and the limited technological development were partly responsible for the existence of autonomous social and cultural groups. As a result, we find different modes of subsistence and ways of life within each agro-ecological zone. Topography has played an important role in defining population distribution and ethnicity. Trimingham (1976) wrote: "...the valleys grow more numerous and give an individuality to smaller massifs which is reflected in the history and social life of their inhabitants" (2).

a) Topography Restricting the Movement of People

The topography interfered with the political and economic development of the region. The steep mountains and hills were labour intensive and were not conducive for expansion of farmlands. They also restricted communication and travel between villages.

The ambas had isolated the different villages and limited the interaction between the residents restricting the potential of expansion of farm lands. During the rainy seasons people
even feared crossing the rivers. In the words of an eminent Ethiopian historian:

The ruggedness of the country and the un-tameableness of its rivers and streams became additional factors which discouraged peasant mobility (Merid 1986:118).

The British foreign office comparing the highlands of Ethiopia with Switzerland wrote:

In Switzerland, the heights are barren peaks, the valleys fairly broad and fertile. In Abyssinia, all this is reversed. The heights are mostly open plateaux, the valleys jungle-choked gorges or canyons of great depth. The population lives on the plateaux, and the lines of communication follow the high ground, the valleys being formidable obstacles to traffic (Handbook of Abyssinia, cited by Trimingham 1976:2)

Furthermore, Ethiopia’s traditional land tenure restricted mobility. Merid (1986) notes that the rugged mountains and the rivers "conspired with the rist system of land tenure to prevent the Ethiopian peasant from leaving the small and narrow community to which he belonged in search of betterment. The combination had the effect of fixing the Ethiopian peasant to the ancestral or descent land" (118). The rist land tenure system in the highland regions thus articulated negatively with topography in perpetuating rural poverty and preventing development.

The restrictions and limitations imposed by the physical environment on people’s movement and communication have created in its inhabitants a particular sense of attachment to the mountains, rivers, deserts, etc. of their locality. In this sense, the big rivers have played an important role in creating political and cultural boundaries for Ethiopians. They served as markers of physical and geographical boundaries in terms of which localities were identified by peasants and pastoralists. In Northern Shewa, in addition to its importance for the livelihood of the pastoralists, the Awash River serves as an important boundary between the Afar and the Oromo population of the Efratana-Jille district and the Amhara and Afar population of Mafoud and Qewet district. Similarly, Abay has separated the Amhara population of Gojjam from Wello, Begemdir (Gonder), and Shewa. The Oav Abav wonz (the Blue Nile River) is termed Qay Abay (Red Nile) in contrast to Natch Abay (White Nile), because of the mud and silt it carries from the highlands of Ethiopia to deposits in the valleys of northeastern Sudan and Egypt. Thus while the Nile provides the Egyptians a natural source of fertile soil, it creates erosion for Ethiopian highlands. Because Awash and its
tributaries originate in different parts of southern and south-central Ethiopia, and end in the Afar Depression, it is called *tamagn wonz* (loyal) - a name to symbolize the contrast with Abay River. It passes through the heart of Ethiopia serving many diverse communities and nationalities, settled farmers and pastoralists. The Afar population depends heavily on the Awash River and its basins.

Another significant feature of the landscape of the region to note in this connection is that it is not conducive for river delta formation. Hence, peasants are not even able to find on these rivers fertile banks to plough. There is hardly any ground which could be irrigated with their waters (Merid 1986: 118). Even in some areas of Gojjam, where it could have been possible, the task of building it can not be left entirely to individual peasant initiative. It requires public (state) intervention.

b) A Positive Note on Topography

The ambas have played an important role in Ethiopian history, because they form natural self-supporting fortresses. Hence, historically, they have been used for establishing monasteries, castles and autonomous administrative villages. Because of their isolation, the ambas were used as prisons to segregate males of the royal house and political offenders. They have also served as "the last strongholds...of Abyssinians themselves when their country has been invaded" (Trimingham ibid.). The ambas, canyons, plateaus, and gorges have proved great obstacles to communications and have thus isolated one area from the other providing them the characteristics of an island (Handbook of Abyssinia, cited by Trimingham 1976: 2-3). On the one hand, the ambas have given the people in these isolated areas a degree of autonomy and freedom from direct control by the central authority. In the post-1941 period, they have also been neglected and overlooked in general. As a result, the general attitude of the state/central authority towards the highland region, was characterised by suspicion, indifference, and neglect which impacted negatively on the peasantry both by perpetuating poverty and political insecurity.

c) Topography, Politics, and the State

The precipitous canyons give their inhabitants either hazardous descents and climbs or
else a long and a slow detour. Hence they too have played their part in history. All the
country's regions are defined by the great gorges the major rivers and their tributaries have
carved. These have proved great obstacles to the central state to effectively intervene. Thus,
each region has been a unity in itself whose people have maintained their own individual
characteristics. It is these natural regional divisions which have made the unification of the
country such a difficult problem, so that Abyssinia has always been a federation of countries
whose ruler has rightly styled himself 'king of kings' (Trimingham 1976: 2-3).

These same mountains, while they severely restricted the movement of the local
inhabitants, provided a conducive environment for banditry, making it difficult for the
state/central authority to control the entire country effectively. Ethiopian mountains and hills
were good hideouts for the shifta (outlaws/bandits). The topographical characteristics and the
autonomous nature of peasant production were further responsible for the harsher control of
the state.¹⁴ The rugged terrains made transportation difficult and limiting for the
administrators who tried to move their army to bring these areas under effective control. As
a result, the common way soldiers were able to sustain themselves until World War II was by
billeting. Peasants' plight was thus worsened by soldiers plundering them (cf. Pankhurst

d) Highlands and Lowlands Distinctions

During my first trip to Efratana-Jille to select a research site, I was struck by the way
the people of Ber-Gibi and Yimlo Peasant Associations (PAs hereafter), all Amharic speaking
Christians from Shewa, maintain distinction among themselves in terms of Degena
(highlanders) and Qolegna (lowlanders). This mode of identifying people with the vertical
gradation of the physical landscape of their habitation is typical of the region. During my
first visit to Amisto PA, I was surprised to find in a tella bet (beer house) a crowd of people -
highlanders and lowlanders together, but sitting in separate rows and distinguishing
themselves. I wanted to know on what basis they distinguish themselves from one another.

¹⁴ Shanin (1966) points out that it was "the potential for peasant self sufficiency which made direct and harsh
political control a necessity for the rulers"(358-9).
Their reply was:

The degena are reserved by temperament. They are wise and dependable. They take time to be friendly and must take enough arege (hard liquor) and tella to warm up for conversation. The qolegna on the other hand are warm, open and friendly, but unstable.

There are other areas where locally the two communities distinguish each other. For instance, the highlanders make tella (black beer) from barley malt (see also Reminick 1973: 18-24). The lowlanders, on the other hand, make netch tella (light beer) from sorghum. Highlanders distinctly wear suri (short trousers) that are above the knee allowing the free movement of the legs for walking up and down the steep hills and mountain terrains.

Locally, status hierarchies were constituted not only on the basis of political and economic relationship, but also on the basis of the different topographical spaces occupied by the different communities as well as the type of cereal harvested and livestock raised. Almost all rituals and festivals in the highlands are marked by each household slaughtering a sheep. The memories of the taste of Debre-Sina lamb from sheep that have grazed on thyme and oregano covered mountains of Tarma-Ber in the Mafoud district are important. Their sheep are highly valued and famous throughout Ethiopia and the highlanders who raise them take pride in the fact that their sheep are highly valued. Residents of Berekha village and all other people (government officials, urban based professionals, and traders) I spoke to openly admitted their preference for sheep that grazed on thyme and oregano on the mountain hills of Tarma-Ber. For most of the elder informants of Berekha the past good times - the times of relative prosperity - are the times when they were able to buy the Debre-Sina/Tarma-Ber lamb for festivities and Dua (communal prayer) at the shrine. In general slaughtering of lamb for a festival was an indicator of household wealth and economic stability or decline in household income. It is used as a reference point to show the further decline of the rural society because currently Debre Sina lamb is only available at the markets of Addis Ababa.

e) Lowlands, Transhumance, Common Resource, and Conflict

For the pastoralists of Efratana-Jille it was necessary to move their cattle seasonally from one type of pasture to another, the distances ranging within the eastern border of the
woreda (district) of Efratana-Jille and the western border of Bure-Modayitu. This movement for pasture land was organized around the Awash River and its tributaries. The fact that the pastoralists had to remain constantly on the move searching for fertile grazing meadows and water/river, made the regions inhabited by them typically lacking lasting order and stability which was in sharp contrast to the areas occupied by settled agriculturists. The district of Efratana-Jille in particular fits into this category. During bega (dry season) the Oromo pastoralists bring their cattle to graze near Amhara farmlands of the western valleys, usually resulting in conflict between the two communities. In kiremit (the rainy/winter season), they move east to the Afar territory. The conflicts between the Oromo (pastoralists) and Amhara (peasants) and between the Oromo and Afar are not only limited to land and water issue.

f) Overlapping Modes of Subsistence: The Value of Draught Animals

It may be noted that sedentary and pastoral ways of life are not mutually exclusive. Rather, there is an overlap between the two, the extent of which depends on physical proximity. In the specific areas where a pastoral way of life converges with sedentary subsistence, one can see the accommodation between the two ways of life coexisting and sometimes intermingling with varying degrees. The pastoralists (Oromo) in some areas also supplement their livelihood with occasional farming on the side. For instance, in the district of Qewet, south of Efratana-Jille, even the Adal (Afar) have opted for sedentary life side by side the Amhara population. As a result, the occupational, ethnic and religious boundaries between groups are not permanent and unalterable: boundaries are not fixed but are dynamic and fluid. The fluid boundaries are constituted by people who are constantly facing natural and social calamities and who in order to survive, must be capable of transcending both physical and symbolic boundaries. The recurrent droughts are one of the important factors that have continually created and recreated these fluid boundaries.

The Amhara Christian peasants are predominantly highlanders and mixed farmers. They breed and keep some livestock for draught animals, dairy, meat, and as a form of investment. Their diet heavily depends on cereal growing (wheat, barley, teff, pulse, sorghum, millet). The notion of manhood in the highlands’ rural setting is defined in terms of a man’s capacity to feed his household. This capacity is dependent on his access to land
and a pair of oxen. McCann goes as far as emphasizing the greater value of having plough oxen rather than land. These two - land and oxen - are the pillars of peasant households. McCann (1984) has argued that the work capacity and adaptability of oxen to work in all altitudinal zones made them favoured by the population of the entire region of Lasta (in Wello) and the surrounding northeastern regions. As a result, access to draught animals is more important than anything else. According to him, for farmers in these regions, "the key unit of production was neither land nor labour, but capital in the form of plow oxen" (3-4). It is so because "the labour power of oxen could be transferred directly into access to land and control over human labour and hence could contribute to the greatly valued goal of household independence" (4-5). What made McCann emphasize the importance of draught animals was perhaps the labour intensive nature of farming, especially of teff production over the eroded highland regions of Wello, on one hand, and the excessive rural poverty of the area, on the other. Even in conditions untouched by droughts and famine, draught animals are indispensable for their role in production. In a society exposed to drought and famine where most households might be lacking the sufficient intake of food/nutrition to sustain/reproduce the labour the farm life needed, the draught animals acquired special significance. That is why the loss of cattle during drought is so devastating both materially and symbolically. It is demoralizing not only to pastoralists but also to peasants since livestock is a source of wealth for both communities.

g) Dependence on Rainfed Agriculture

Peasants and pastoralists of Ethiopia depend on two rainy seasons for their livelihood. They are the belg/bega (the short rain season) and the meher/kiremit (the long rain season). The belg begins in Yekatit (February) and ends at the beginning of Ginbot (May), but the time can vary. The meher begins in Sane (June) and lasts up to the end of Maskarem (September). Lowlanders traditionally plant long-maturing crops such as maize and sorghum during the belg season. Highlanders, in the different climate of the mountains, take advantage of the belg rains to plant short-maturing crops such as barley and wheat which are harvested in June and July. The meher rains allow the planting of long-maturing grains in highland areas and the resulting crop is normally harvested in November/December.
The topography (the lack of land for irrigation) has forced the highland population to depend, to a large extent, on rainfed agriculture. Thus, for the population of the highland, success in agricultural production is strongly dependent on the availability of adequate rainfall. The meher and belg (the long and the short rainy seasons respectively) rains received by the Ethiopian highlands, especially in the southwestern and southeastern parts, two of the main physiographic regions of the country, in the end rapidly run off to low-lying areas thus grossly limiting production of food-grain for the large section of the population crowding the highland regions of the country. The high run-off from the deqa (highlands) has made irrigation agriculture practically impossible. The drought problems afflicting the country for the past several centuries in part emanate from these regions.

As mentioned in chapter one, there are historical accounts showing the development of successful terracing system in Ethiopia. Why in spite of this traditional knowledge and the practice of terracing in the past, Ethiopian highlanders were not able to retain the rain water and prevent soil erosion is surely an important question for further investigation.

In Northern Shewa the belg rain has three major impacts on food production:

i) sustaining the belg crop production. Short cycle crops (mainly teff, wheat, barley, and pulses) are planted with belg rains and harvested beginning in June. In aggregate, the belg harvest accounts for only a small proportion (around seven percent in 1992 for example) of the yearly national cereal production (Henricksen and Durkin 1985). But at the local level, especially in regions like Ifat and in the district of Efratana-Jille, belg production is extremely important. Its harvest can provide more than half of the annual food. The failure of the belg harvest can therefore have a significant localized impact on food availability. In the past, major famine episodes have been associated with the failure of the short rains combined with a short meher growing seasons. The settlers of Berekha as well as many peasants of the region were always keen to remind me that the famine of seba-sebat (seventy-seven)/1984 - 85 began in Yekatit (February), not in the months of Hidar-na Tahisas (November and December), when the famine was reported by the international media. What they allude to is the failure of the belg harvest in February which was more critical than the failure of the meher harvest in the months of November-December. The failure of the belg had already created conditions of famine which were further accentuated by the failure of the meher.
ii) the *belg* rain softens the land for *Meher* crop production. Even in areas where no harvest is produced during the *belg* season itself, the short rains soften the earth and enable farmers to cultivate the fields for long-cycle crops (mainly sorghum, millet, teff, and some maize) in advance of the main rains: this maximizes the length of the growing season for the *meher* harvest.

iii) finally, the *belg* rains are important for the replenishment of pasture and water in the livestock areas. They are essential in providing pasture and fodder to last until the *Meher* rains begin in June.

Even the rainfall pattern adds diversity to the region. Every time I travelled between my field site and Addis Ababa, I noted the change of season in the fields as I passed. Thanks to the variability of rainfall patterns, green barley and fava bean shoots thrived in some patches of the mountainous area of the highlands and the teff fields barely came up in the *woinadega* and *qola* regions.

h) **Diversifying Agricultural Strategies**

The topographical and rainfall variations are reflected in the multiple and mixed cropping systems peasants have evolved over the centuries to suit their needs. The variations in agronomy are created by the stress on peasants to maximize their chances of survival. Thus within a single village or Peasant Association, different households specialize in different crops. The result of multiple and mixed cropping is that the rain patterns do not always suit everyone equally. For instance, those who planted *teff* wanted less rain in August as the late rain would crush the half-mature crop, while those who planted *begolo* (*Maiz*) wanted more rain during the same period so that their plant would flower and form husk.

Multiple cropping is not a new phenomenon. It has been recorded in early European travellers’ accounts of the land and society in Ethiopia. Jerome Lobo in 1626 noted:

> The climate is so temperate that at the same time I saw in some places ploughing and sowing, and in others the wheat already sprouting, and again sowing, the land never tiring of continual production of its fruits or failing in this readiness to produce them (cf. McCann 1995:5).

In multiple cropping different crops do not only need different amount of rain, but also for the rainfall to fall at different times. During fieldwork, I was able to appreciate
peasants' varying needs regarding the time and the amount of rain they needed, depending on
the types of crops they were growing. The old institution of megazo/megazat (sharecropping)
developed and widely adapted over large areas, is a creative agrarian survival strategy. The
people of Berekha depend on this institution of sharecropping. A household may sometimes
contract as many as seven sharecropping arrangements, depending on the number of healthy
adult sons it has, where each household may be used to growing a particular crop. For
instance, a peasant engaged in many sharecropping arrangements may have sown teff for
someone, while he has planted mashilla (millet) for himself. Each of these crops requires
rain/water at different stages of its maturing process and different degrees of sunlight and soil
moisture intake capacity. This shows how dependence on rains alone renders them vulnerable
even if there are no total rain failures. However, there is always a constant fear of rain
failure and the majority of people take recourse in prayer. If the rain gets delayed by a
couple of weeks even the townspeople who are not directly involved in farming join in
prayers organized at the church and mosque.

This dependency on rainfed agriculture coupled with antiquated farming tools and
methods have kept the peasantry in perpetual poverty. It is very common to experience total
or partial harvest failure and food shortage, and other problems, when the rains become
irregular. Northern Shewa is predominantly a belg producing area. In 1993 (during the time
of my fieldwork) a large part of the area planted with belg crops had to be reploughed
because the belg rains came too early, while in the other areas of Northern Shewa (Menzna-
Gishe), West of Efratana-Jille, there was a food shortage due to the heavy frost damage to the
1992 meher harvest. At the same time, the rain in the district of Efratana-Jille was quite
irregular creating a high degree of stress for everyone. The memory of the 1984-85 famine
is so vivid and so strong for most of Efratana-Jille inhabitants that it has become a marker of
a cruel time. Residents of the district address it as "seba-sebat" (seventy-seven) - the year of
the famine according to the Ethiopian calendar. There were many prayers and rituals
performed by all communities. The prayers and rituals were directed to God to release the
rain, and not to repeat "seba-sebat." I participated in most of the prayers and rituals.

i) Relative Success in Combating Drought and Famine
Whether the highlands or lowlands form of settlement pattern is better suited and successful in coping with drought has not been adequately studied. In different ways, both highlanders and lowlanders are resilient in the face of the varying material, physical, and climatic conditions found in the country. For instance, in spite of the harsh climatic conditions of the eastern lowlands, the proud Afars survived and prospered in the Danakil depression. There is no adequate information to compare the relative advantages and disadvantages of the two forms of settlements. In this context, Mesfin (1991) rightly stresses the urgent need for researchers in Ethiopia "to pay greater attention to the effect of altitude on human activity and the human impact in different altitudinal zones"(1). Furthermore, the differential impact of settlement pattern in different altitudinal zones is complicated by the ongoing process of spontaneous migration and settlement from one region to the other.

Based on discussions I had with members of the highland, lowland, and pastoral communities, it can be inferred that the common phenomenon during drought is for the pastoralists to retreat towards the foothills of the highland area. During drought the pastoralists follow the flow of rivers and streams to their source of origin in the foothills of the highland regions as well as in search of grains from the highland population. In contrast to the pastoral population, the sedentary farmers store away grains, which can be used for sowing and lean times. Furthermore, the diet of the pastoral population, includes milk, butter and meat - items that are difficult to keep for long. Even when people of both communities in desperation begin to kill their cattle for food, the meat quickly spoils in the heat of the lowlands. In the highland region, the cool temperature provides another advantage to peasants. Furthermore, in the highlands - where sedentary agriculture had deep roots - several methods of preserving food have evolved over the centuries. For instance, the practice of smoking and drying meat and cereals for storage are common.

IV: TOPOGRAPHY AND MIGRATION

a) The Highlanders' Attachment to their Settlement Pattern

During my initial visit in the Efratana-Jille district to select a field site, I started at the
PA/village of Yimula-Wuha\(^\text{15}\) (Yimlo), part of which was resettled\(^\text{16}\) (under the Derg) in the lowlands of Ber-Gibi Giorgis.\(^\text{17}\) However, prior to 1974, residents of Ber-Gibi Giorgis and the surrounding highlands went down to the valley every day for farming. Though some of them were resettled in Yimlo, a large proportion still remained on the mountain. Their sentiments and determination to remain in their highland settlement are strong. Even at the end of the day, during their return from a day of hard work in the valley, one could not miss noticing on their faces the determination and stoic confidence even though walking behind their oxen, they all look tired. They travel back and forth, up and down the steep hills while carrying on their shoulders the yoke and plough, agalgil (lunch basket), rifle, and, on their heads a pile of hay head every day on a five to six hours long round trip. Another important consideration for the highlanders to continue residing in the highland village Ber Gibi is the fear of tropical communicable diseases like Malaria commonly found in the valleys of Yimlo. The fact that peasant farming requires hard work under which malnourishment and poverty weakens peoples' physical capacity to be able to resist communicable diseases and to recover properly from the sickness once they are infected. The relationship between Malaria and proper diet is well understood by the locals and expressed popularly: weba migib tiwodalech (Malaria likes food). In order to survive an attack of Malaria, one must be well nourished. On the other hand, the valleys are more fertile and save people the energy and time of the daily travel between their farm fields and homesteads. The energy and time they can save by not travelling daily could instead be channelled to increase the productivity of farming and improving their livelihood.

b) Highlands and Underdevelopment

\(^{15}\) Yimula-Wuha literally means plenty of water. It is located on the eastern foothills of the Menzna-Gishe and Gidim mountains.

\(^{16}\) Resettlement and Villagization programmes were some of the measures taken by the government to eradicate rural poverty (see Appendix A).

\(^{17}\) Ber-Gibi Giorgis is a historically important parish settlement. The parish is named after qidus Giorgis (Saint George). It is from this parish that Menelik II took the arch of the covenant (for the Patron Saint Giorgis) to the Battle of Adwa to face the Italians and finally defeat them in 1896. After the Land Reform and the creation of All Ethiopian Peasant Associations it was made into Amisto Peasant Association.
The mountains of the highlands look physically beautiful and their inhabitants are deeply attached to them. For instance, about the highlands of Begemdir, Messing (1985: 6) wrote:

Economic botanists have conducted studies which indicate that the highlands of Ethiopia contain a number of indigenous varieties of cultivated cereals and legumes. Some are of the opinion that these highlands even formed one of the secondary centres of the old world agriculture in which the Neolithic economy originated, possibly contributing to the initial development of ancient Egyptian civilization.

However, due to deforestation, soil erosion and decline in rainfall patterns, these highland regions are very limiting to their inhabitants, who are dependent on the productivity of these mountains and hills which are not fertile and demand high labour input. They are moreover susceptible to rain and wind erosion. To provide irrigation for the highland regions during dry season/drought requires financial and technical aid. Because of these factors, settlement and development in the highland regions were discouraged by successive governments, most notably the Derg.

A corrective to the doom and gloom stories usually found regarding mountain people in Ethiopia is provided by Mesfin (1992). He is critical of the view held that the Ethiopian highlands are over-cultivated and eroded and thus no longer habitable by humans. Mesfin, who is a geographer, argues that those who consider the Ethiopian highlands uninhabitable are the ones who are only concerned about the degradation of the land and while ignore the plight of the human beings in these degraded highlands. Because the human occupants of these areas are relegated to the background, there is an absence of plans/projects which envisage alternative uses of Ethiopian mountains. His study contrasts how authorities in Ethiopia and Switzerland make decisions on mountain issues. In Ethiopia, "there are no issues that the authorities consider to be of public concern and that are publicly discussed" (1992:2). Decisions, such as the closure of mountains to any human use, are made solely by the assessment of the authorities. On the other hand, in Switzerland, the public gets engaged in the debate over whether the mountains are better used for agriculture or for the tourist industry. The issue is unresolved because, in Switzerland it is not the immediate monetary gain from tourism that is considered most valuable. Rather, it is the preservation of the
mountains as economic entities, in addition to their cultural value and as an expression of the Swiss spirit. To the Swiss, mountains are a source of food production, a marker of their identity, and a means of their security, in political and military terms (ibid.).

Mesfin raises a relevant question of a balance between public - that is, local peoples’ interests and wider ecological considerations. Furthermore, his observations regarding local peoples’ participation in development plans deserves special attention. For centuries these highland regions have been the home of Ethiopia’s civilization. The people living in this region have maintained a distinct way of life and identity. While the policy makers and planners from the urban areas are totally detached from the local people and their views. This problem is further compounded by the enormous political and economic gap between the minority of urban elite and the masses of the rural poor. While Mesfin touches on an important issue, his comparative analysis of Ethiopia with Switzerland is rather inappropriate for two reasons. First of all, the Swiss are in a better position to appreciate their mountains because they are not confronted with massive rural poverty and famine. The fact that Ethiopia is underdeveloped and its population has to deal with these serious problems, immediate monetary concerns to solve them may take precedence. Secondly, Mesfin does not discuss how the global political and economic forces interact differentially with these two societies. In other words, what gave the Swiss their internal autonomy, but not Ethiopians? Had he compared Ethiopia with another third world society which is not in as powerful a position as Switzerland, Mesfin’s comparative analysis of mountain settlements could have been more appropriate and insightful.

c) Spontaneous Migration and Diversity

There has always been a movement of population from one region to the other induced by drought and ecological hardship. Merid (1986) suggests that as far back as the end of the thirteenth century, the Horn of Africa and the surrounding areas have suffered from severe droughts, which created "a westward movement into the highlands by nomads and
pastoralists of the eastern and south-eastern lowlands" (118). He asserts that "in the highlands themselves the severity of these droughts may have added to the instability of social and political systems" (ibid.). This demographic reality of the overpopulated highland and the underpopulated lowland areas of Ethiopia is a historical creation and a manifestation of a continuous process of population migrations (Abir, 1968: XVIII). It is these highland regions that have been most vulnerable to famine afflicting the country for the past several centuries.

On the basis of the available records and extrapolation backwards from the current trends, McCann suggests that settlement patterns of the majority of the population before the nineteenth century in this area concentrated on the 2000 - 3000 metres range, avoiding the areas above 3500 metres which are frost prone and less fertile and the lowland malarial valleys which are more fertile.

Due to the recurrent droughts, soil erosion and land fragmentation in the middle range (2000 - 3000 metres), the recent trend of spontaneous migration is in both directions. McCann’s (1984) study is again relevant here. On the basis of interviews he conducted in Lasta and the aerial photography of the adjacent regions, the recent trends of spontaneous migration show movement in both directions - up the vertical landscape to the wuritch (frost area) above 3500 metres and to the hot malarial and cattle disease infested areas below 2000 metres.

The spontaneous migration of people from drought and famine prone highland regions, from dega (highland) and woinadega (grape-highland/semi-highland) to qola (lowland) have in particular created a diverse form of intermingling composition of populations. It has also created competition and conflict on fertile land and water resources between different nationalities and cultural groups who follow different modes of subsistence. How different

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18 Merid speculates that the high pressure conditions in Eastern Europe and Central Asia generally caused cold and dry winds to blow across Arabia into Ethiopia. As a result drought has become prevalent as a result of the Little Ice Age, the effect of which became noticeable in Europe in the middle of the sixteenth century (cf. LeRoy Ladurie, 158 - 216).
groups manage common resources such as water and pasture land is an important area of research for the future. In particular in the continual rise of environmental degradation, how local people manage common use of resources needs more attention.

d) Transhumance, Cooperation, and Conflict

In Efratana-Jille during kiremit (winter/the long rainy season), the Oromo move their cattle downslope to graze in the district of Bure-Modayitu, and it is then that the conflict with the Afar pastoralists starts. Overall it is the Afar whose customary movements of cattle and way of life have been most disrupted. For instance, the fertile valleys of the Jawuha River about 25 kilometres south of Berekha, have been an area of tension between the different communities. After 1941, this area was developed under the patronage of the galt holding landlords. It has been successfully mechanized. The fertility of the soil and the flatness of the terrain created a conducive environment for mechanized farming. After 1974, it got nationalized by the state and Peasant Associations were created on the property. The membership of the Peasant Associations were constituted from agricultural labour, sharecropping tenants, and the semi-employed wage labourers who were particularly active in the post Land Reform (1975) political process. Because of the development of the area and the fertility of the valley the Peasant Associations were well organized and integrated with the state’s socialist plan of agricultural development of the area.

e) The Revival of Traditional Conflict

The most violent form of conflict in Efratana-Jille takes place in the form of gadu (an Oromo term for ambushing), in which, in order to be eligible to marry, an Oromo man must first kill an Amhara or an Afar. If the Oromo man kills an Afar, he will receive the highest honour in his community. An Amhara man who avenges the killing of a fellow

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19 In the woreda of Qewet and Mafoud, where the Amhara and Afar share common boundaries, conflict over pasture land and water could arise during dry season.

20 See also Ahmed (1987).
Amhara by shooting and killing an Oromo will be recognized for his valour. It is interesting to note in this context how the settled agriculturalists and pastoralists had differing views of the state and its moral responsibility to provide for law and order. Traditionally, the settled agriculturists - in particular, the Amhara - believed in the responsibility of the paternalistic state to protect them, while the pastoralists, whose mode of livelihood does not bind them to one locality, were indifferent or even hostile to the state and its law-and-order apparatus.

Many of the residents of Berekha commented on how the tradition of violence was brought under control during the Derg rule. However, after the fall of the Derg, violence quickly re-surfaced. The violence even received impetus during the period of Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Revolutionary Front (hereafter EPDRF) take over when law and order collapsed. During the period of my fieldwork (1993-94) in the region, it was very common to hear of Oromo killing Amhara peasants. In 1993, there was so much killing that a man who was originally from Eritrea, but who had been working for Save the Children Federation U. S. A (SCFUSA) in the district since 1984, commented: "the Oromo are hunting the Amhara like tinchal (hare/rabbit)." As a field-worker he was touring the hinterland where he claimed, thanks to the field jeeps of SCFUSA, to have been picking up the corpses and taking them to their families. In all cases the killings targeted lone Amhara peasants returning from markets or from their farms. Between 1991 and 1993 there were cases where even women suspected of being Amhara were not spared. With the political instability prevalent in the country at that time, no one was brought to justice for his involvement in these killings. In earlier times, the Amhara peasants were able to report to the government anticipating protection. For most Amhara peasants, the state and its legal, juridical structures were and still are important institutions, particularly in Northern Shewa, where peasants have internalized law and order and take pride in referring to themselves as law-abiding citizens (see Levine 1986, Pankhurst 1968). What is comforting, in the midst of this resurgence of violence, however, is that many Oromo elders are trying to stop it. Both male and female Oromo informants from the town of Bete (a town that housed one of the major relief camps during the 1984-85 famine) are concerned about the revival of this tradition of violence.

The increase in violence so preoccupied everybody that it was discussed on every
occasion. During an interview session with an Argobba elder, who was about eighty years of age, our conversation was interrupted by the arrival of three Oromo male elders who came seeking his advice and medicine for some illness they had. This was in February 1994, when the *belg* rains were delayed and the fear of facing another drought was high. The Oromo elders commented how the land of Efratana-Jille would no longer be productive due to the many innocent Amhara peoples’ blood that has been spilled on it. The desire for peace, particularly accentuated by the weariness of war, ethnic conflict, drought and famine, seems widespread cutting across ethnic boundaries and different age groups.

V: ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND FAMINE

Since the highlands are drained by fast-flowing rivers, as a consequence, much of the top soil has been washed away to the lowland areas, in the form of silt, rendering a good portion of the highland regions of the country less productive or totally unproductive. The great majority of the Ethiopian population lives in the highland regions. The population density of these regions is 92 persons/square kilometre, while in the sparsely populated lowland regions it is 20-30 persons/square kilometre (RRC 1985). Overpopulation in highland areas, with all its attendant problems, has further aggravated the situation. The persistent drought problems afflicting the country emanate partly from these reasons.

a) Ecological Degradation and the Productivity of Labour

Ecological factors have played a very important role in the social and economic development of Ethiopian society. First of all, Ethiopia’s success in agricultural production is heavily dependent on the availability of rainfall. Since the rains received by the Ethiopian highlands flow down to low-lying areas grossly limiting the production of food-grain for more than 75% of the population crowding the highland regions of the country (RRC 1985).

Secondly, deforestation causes erosion, with an estimated annual loss of two billion

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21 The Argobba elder was well to do and a devoted pilgrim of Mecca. He received his guests in the old Ethiopian feudal tradition and hospitality, which are rarely seen currently both due to material decline and radical social-economic reforms. Quickly he asked his young Welloye wife to have a coffee ceremony for us. While sipping coffee the elders joined in what seemed to be the most important preoccupation of the inhabitants of the district, that is ethnic conflict and the lack of peace in the area.
cubic metres of soil. At the turn of the century 40% of Ethiopia was under forest, but now the figure is only 3.3%, on account of the need for fuel and construction materials. The country also suffers from the African continental problem of desert encroachment. The location of the country - close to the Sahara Desert which is expanding at the rate of approximately 12 kilometres each-year has also affected the rainfall patterns in the highlands of Ethiopia. Hence, the Ethiopian famine does not stand in isolation. It is a part of the broader problem of drought and environmental change affecting the Sahel region of Africa. For centuries the entire region of the Sahel just below the Sahara desert has been undergoing major environmental degradation. Particularly, "in the last 20 years, this process has produced conditions of almost permanent drought: top soils so denuded that seeds will not germinate, wells drying up, and, everywhere, land that was once good turning to desert" (Hancock 1985:11). This environmental degradation has deprived a large section of independent self-sufficient people the possibility of continuing to support themselves.

For the majority of Ethiopians living in these drought-prone regions, the loss is tremendous. Hancock went so far to say: "As well as their prosperity, they have lost their history, their folklore, their religion and their culture" (11). The increase in population in the highland regions further decreases the productivity of labour and resources because farm plots get pushed into a new previously uncultivated areas of lowlands, and on slopes that are prone to run-offs and erosions.

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22 Forestry Research Service (1985: 2).

23 RRC (1985: 50).
CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

...the meaning and practice of fieldwork in a situation in which the primary
goal is not to create an ethnographic understanding of the "other" but to gather
information in order to be an informed citizen capable of acting in a morally
conscientious manner toward a particular category of persons with whom the
participant observer shares the identity "fellow citizen" (Williams 1995).

I. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

In my study I have combined ethnographic fieldwork with political economy.
Ethnographic fieldwork is guided but not determined by the anthropologist's theoretical
approach. Anthropologists with different theoretical frameworks use different methods and
collect different kinds of data (Van Velsen, 1965: 129). Furthermore, the interpretation of the
data acquired through field research, documentary sources, or oral history is affected by the
researcher's training, theoretical viewpoint, and personal history. The interpretation of
evidence is mediated by the questions asked and by the frame of academic discourse used by
the researcher. To assume that a researcher may not have a point of view amounts to
sidestepping the importance of theory to the chosen methodology for collecting and

This study is guided by the theoretical perspective of political economy. I have
collected data on economic structure (mainly land relations), political system, and ideology at
the macro and micro levels. The ethnography provides a detailed account of how the system
worked at the local level. Seeing the connectedness of micro and macro is essential for an
understanding of peasants' interaction with the state, wider society and their exposure to
frequent famines. In reality, the micro and macro are indeed linked: what happens at the
village level cannot be isolated from what is taking place at the regional and national (or even
international) level. Thus, in the pre-1974 period the nature of land tenure systems, political
control by the landlords and the state, and cultural domination by religious institutions like
the church were important factors in creating rural destitution and famines as well as in
developing strategies to cope with them. Similarly, after 1974 the new system of land
tenure, new political organizations and ideological orientation of the state have had direct bearing on the lives of peasants at the village level. In the theoretical and methodological perspectives of my study, the macro and the micro levels are thus treated as intrinsically connected.

The need to see the connection between the micro and macro is rightly emphasized by Wolf and Cole (1974). They state:

> We strongly believe that the study of small populations which form components of complex societies must take account of that complexity before the interpretation of what happens "on the ground" can become meaningful. Thus we believe that anthropology cannot do without history, for it is only through an anthropologically informed historical account of the genesis and development of the forces impinging upon our social and cultural microcosms that we can arrive at an adequate assessment of the ways in which these forces act upon each other in the present (xi).

The ties between local, national, and international are relevant to this research. One important example is European power competition in the Horn of Africa, more specifically, the colonial rivalry between Britain, France, Germany, and Italy. Each of these European powers, attempting to enhance its colonial interest, tried to create and maintain its local allies. Thus, Germany, by establishing an alliance with the Ottomans, tried to appeal to the Muslim community in Ethiopia. The British response to this was to weaken Germany by seeking political alliance with the Christians, and by exploiting the differences between Christian and Muslim rulers within Ethiopia (cf. Erlich 1994, Pankhurst 1992). It is within this political environment that Iyasu II's desire to unite the Christians and Muslims in Ethiopia to ensure that the Muslim population was not alienated from the state needs to be understood. However, the British (and the French) encouraged a split between those who favoured Iyasu and others who favoured Christian domination of the state. The articulation of the increased internal and external opposition against Iyasu in favour of the Shewan aristocracy eventually led to the Battle of Sagale (1916). This political development had direct implications for the peasantry of Wello (see chapter five).

A political economy perspective is historically oriented. The historical material is provided by archival material and oral history. The significance of ethnography informed by
historically oriented political economy is appropriately noted by Wolf (1982): "The insights of anthropology...have to be rethought in the light of a new, historically oriented political economy(ix)."

Much earlier, the importance of history for anthropology was highly emphasized by E. Evans-Pritchard (1962). More recently, William Roseberry (1987:ix) notes that "...history is a little more than a new terrain into which to extend anthropological practice. Anthropologists seldom let what they know about history affect what they think about culture." This does not, however, mean that history is irrelevant to an analysis of culture. On the contrary, history is relevant as the past is an active shaping force in the present. In this light he rightly notes that the moral economy literature, by renewing the notion of tradition, has created the basis for a new theory of consciousness. Hence, E. P. Thompson (1963:63 cf. Eric Hobsbwam 1971 and Eric Rude 1964) and others in their studies of the moral economy of peasants, artisans, and proletarians in eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century England and France have emphasized the relevance of pre-capitalist traditions, values, and social networks to the present. Similarly, Scott’s analysis of peasant resistance to colonialism in Southeast Asia draws on this interpretation (ibid:56).

I have analyzed the connection between the political and economic structures and the agrarian conditions in Ethiopia in a historical perspective, with a particular reference to local responses to state intervention. By focusing on the connection between changes in agrarian relations following the Battle of Sagale and after World War II their implications for the peasantry in Wello are discussed. In addition, the impact of the Derg’s reform policies on peasants’ capacity to cope with the drought and famine of 1984-85 is examined.

II. NOTES ON CHOOSING THE FIELD SITE AND INITIAL CONTACT

a) Why Northern Shewa?

I chose Northern Shewa as a research site for several reasons. First of all, for a country affected by the revolution, civil war, and political instability, Northern Shewa’s geographical proximity to Addis Ababa and accessibility by road was an important consideration. Secondly, Northern Shewa was one of the regions severely affected by the
1984-85 famine. The rugged mountains of Northern Shewa rendered it difficult to access by trucks and made helicopter landings hazardous. The television images of peasants in Gishe Rabel (Northern Shewa) collecting scattered grain sacks from the fields airdropped by the Polish helicopters providing emergency relief were too powerful to fade away quickly, and they contributed to the choice of this region as a site for fieldwork. Thirdly, I grew up in Ethiopia hearing much about Northern Shewa. I distinctly remember my grandmother and mother telling me stories about the places in the region where they went in to hiding during the Italian invasion in 1936-41. This provided me with a general sense of familiarity and connectedness with the region.

The famine of 1984-85 was not localised in smaller pockets of insulated peasant villages and pastoral areas of Wello. Rather, the entire province of Wello was severely affected along with major parts of Northern Shewa. These regions affected by the famine were also the home of Ethiopia’s old culture and agricultural tradition. I wanted to understand how these regions - the heartland of Ethiopia’s civilization - were caught in the cyclical recurrence of drought and famine. I was particularly interested in finding out from the people directly affected by the famine how they coped with it.

b) Initial Contact

Before I decided to pick a field site in Northern Shewa, I gathered most of the preliminary information about the area from people that were affiliated with the Institute for Development Research (IDR), Addis Ababa University (AAU). Addisu Asmare, the administrator of IDR’s field station in Armania, Northern Shewa, shared his knowledge of the region and agreed to accompany me on my first trip to the region. With the assistance provided by IDR, on March 4, 1993, I began a one-week survey field trip to Northern Shewa to select a field site. I had two letters of introduction from AAU describing my research to the Northern Shewa Zone chief administrator in the town of Debre-Birhan. During this trip, most of my efforts and time were spent waiting for a reply for a research permission from the administrators in Debre-Birhan and Alem. Because of the political discontent and the violence that followed at AAU in late December 1992 and early January 1993, there was an increased tension between AAU and the government officials. As a result
researchers were required to get an additional letter of permission from the Debre-Birhan office to travel within the Northern Shewa zone and to interact with people. This was an arduous process. However, during this process and because I had to deal with so many officials, some of the social dynamics of the area of which I was not aware earlier began to be revealed. First of all once people knew the type of research I was setting out to do, they suggested two villages and areas that had been severely affected by the 1984-85 famine. Both were located in the hinterland of the eastern lowland fringes far from the main highway. I was advised by the local residents, government officials and some foreign and national aid workers to do my research in the Peasant Association of Rasa, Mafoud district, or Fugnan-Dembi, in Efratana-Jille district. Due to the severity of the 1984-85 drought in these localities, the population lost all their cattle and draft animals. When the rains came at the end of the drought, humans were paired to pull the plough and till the drought stricken soil. So, while I was still contemplating whether I should focus my research on these Peasant Associations I continued to visit other villages located on the foothills of the Gidim mountains, which were resettled after the 1984-85 famine. During this period I learned about the success of the resettlement policy of the Derg in these villages. But the infrastructures built during this process were all destroyed in 1991 during the takeover by EPDRF. Hence, the political climate around these villages was too tense and doing my fieldwork there would have been difficult.

Ideally, I was looking for a village that was in between the two extremes, that is, a village neither devastated by the drought, nor totally successful in overcoming it. While I was still weighing the advantages and disadvantages of these sites, I learned about the large number of Welloye immigrants in the districts of Efratana-Jille. Before I made my final decision, I visited the important market towns in the district. During these visits I met many people from Wello who were accessible and easy to talk to. From them, I was able to draw important preliminary information about the surrounding villages. It was here that I found out about the village of Berekha, located five kilometres west of the town of Alem, inhabited exclusively by Welloye settlers. While I was talking to people in the market, a tall, slim man in his mid forties, who claimed to know Addisu Asmare in Addis Ababa came to join us. He happened to be a Shaykh from the village of Berekha. Hearing my queries about the settlers
of Berekha, he assumed that I was looking for a Muslim healer, and became very curious about my research. He suggested that I contact Haji, the village religious elder. On the basis of the information provided by the Shaykh and other people in the market I decided to visit the district town of Alem to find out more about this village and its residents. Eventually, I chose this village for my fieldwork. The real names of people and places used here have been changed.

The first trip I made to the village accompanied by a young male relative was to contact Haji. But he was not home and we were told by his wife to wait for him. While waiting I took a tour of the village and randomly decided to visit some households. The woman of the first house I visited became very frightened despite the fact that we used respectful Amharic greetings. I tried to console her that I was there for research. When I began to ask simple questions about the size of the household, and how she made her living, and so on, she became suspicious of my motives and said she was dengoro (illiterate) and could not provide accurate information. She started to cry. Her attitude alerted me to the vulnerable position of the villagers. Later I found out that she was a widow and had only one son who was sent to war in qey bahir (Red Sea, a local term for Eritrea), and she never heard about him again. Throughout my research, whenever I met her she always cried about her son. By the end of the fieldwork, she became my best well-wisher and took a leading part in organizing the last dua (communal prayer) and gave me the most revered blessings at the ceremony.

Initially, villagers were wary and distant. Because I first went to see Haji the religious elder, there was a rumour in the village that I was seeking a Muslim healer. This rumour was based on the common practice of Christian women going to Muslim learned men for healing and to make vows. Because of the Great Shaykh, this village has acquired a special reputation for faith healing.

After preliminary contacts were made with the local elders and members of the Peasant Association, I tried to establish a rapport with the residents of Berekha by making them generally aware that I was going to stay around for a longer period of time to conduct research. At one of the preliminary meetings, both men and women were briefed about the objective and methodology of my research. With the consent of the residents, eight educated
youngsters (boys and girls) were selected to assist me with the household survey and structured interviews to generate basic information about place of birth, source of livelihood, household size, age, and sex distribution. The youngsters got their primary education at the district town, Alem. In addition to their educational skills, they were also selected on the basis of their willingness to go around with me and introduce me to and generally facilitate my conversation with the village residents. Going around with these young persons from the locality helped in creating an atmosphere of easy interaction.

In order to win their confidence it was necessary to give my informants the chance to familiarize themselves with me as much as I wanted to familiarize myself with them and their way of life. I tried to make myself open and accessible to my informants so that they could know about me and the research I was doing. Once I had won the confidence of my informants, the structured interviews gave way to more intimate conversations and dialogues. Most of the meetings and interviews took place in the informants’ households and the compound of the Peasant Association. There were also occasions when I engaged them in conversation in other settings: while they were on farm duties (protecting their crops from predators, threshing, fetching water) on their way to and from the market, or at weddings and funerals.

Not all informants were responsive to my queries. Some were reluctant, and a few of them even refused to be interviewed, mainly because of their prior experiences with outsiders. Their previous experiences, however, were not with researchers, but with government officials, militia, political cadres, guerilla fighters, aid workers, and politically more powerful urban dwellers. Hence their first suspicions were based on their assumption that I was sent either by the state or some aid organization to give them education and training. Another fear they had was that I might be working for opposition political parties and I was in their village to recruit supporters. They also feared that I was there to expropriate them from the land. I learned about the last fear much later, as Ansha Ali told me at one of the many coffee ceremonies we had.

It was only in terms of religion that I could be distinguished from my informants: I was a Christian and they were Muslims. However, even that distinction got blurred when I found out that some of my own relatives were practising Muslims living in Northern Shewa.
In fact, the boundary between Christians and Muslims in Ethiopia is a fluid one. Conversion back and forth is common, especially for marriage. Both participate in each other’s social functions, like marriage and death rituals. The differences that distinguish the two communities are found in the rituals of fasting and meat eating. Thus, during the fasting periods, Lent and filseta (the sixteen days fasting season in August dedicated to St. Mary of the Redeemer), and Fridays and Wednesdays most of the year, Christians abstain from meat and all other animal products. During these periods Muslims cannot share food with Christian households. Regarding meat eating, the difference between the two communities lies in the blessings at the time of sacrificing the animal. The Muslims begin their prayer with Bismilahi, and the Christians with Besime-ab before slaughtering the animal. According to the beliefs of both religions, the meat from an animal that is not slaughtered in the proper manner is not qidus (holy/blessed), and must therefore be avoided. Thus, siga (meat) is considered the defiling food. If there’s no meat, Christians and Muslims don’t even have to separate their dishes.

Food is the symbol that distinguishes and also by commensalism cements the bond between individuals and groups. For instance, when I visited the Christian households, even the injera and bread that came on the gebeta (the rounded Wicker table/basket in which injera is served) had to be blessed before eating. People who ate from the same gebeta belonged to the same family and status group. Before eating starts, it is required that all those who are eating had to wash their hands so as to avoid defiling the gebeta. Even under severe shortage of water, it was made sure that every one washed his/her hands. A religious figure, or an elder, has to bless the gebeta before anyone touched the food. In such circumstances, Christians and Muslims may not share from the same gebeta. But, they could always share coffee, even though the coffee ceremony also involves blessings.

It is important to note that even the distinction with regard to meat sharing was operative in a limited sense. Because of the continuous drought, famine, and consequent impoverishment, people in both communities could not afford to eat much meat, increasing commensality between the two communities. Thus, the levelling impact of poverty has reduced the social distance between Christians and Muslims in drought stricken areas. It was, therefore, easy for me and my informants to share meals on a daily basis.
After the first round of structured interviews, some informants were selected for focused interviews on the basis of their age, knowledgeability, accessibility, and narrative skills. Variables such as the time they migrated to Efratana-Jille, their memory of the Great Shaykh in Wello and Shewa, information about the sharecropping contracts they had, etc., were the main considerations in selecting them for interviewing. Extensive, open-ended interviews were conducted with them to gather information on specific issues like: how their life changed as a result of the various measures taken by the state. The questions were devised to elicit information about how the government changes affected their lives. Discussions regarding how they perceived the Revolution and the radical reforms introduced by the Derg, the famine of 1984-85, national and international Food Aid, the civil wars, land access, marital and family history were encouraged. Further information was solicited about sharecropping. Direct questions such as: who did the ploughing, how the sharecropping arrangements were made and the kinds of problems encountered were asked to elicit information about their lives. My analysis draws heavily on the information provided by these interviewees.

III. RURAL-URBAN GAP

There is a considerable gap between urban and rural areas in Ethiopia in terms of lifestyle, language, mode of speech, the mode of relating to each other and to an outsider, etc. Even though I was an Ethiopian, I was myself relatively an outsider to the villagers. I grew up in Addis Ababa with little exposure to the countryside. Furthermore, the experience of living in Canada for twelve years had removed me even further from rural Ethiopia. First I had to familiarize myself with the rural social environment and lifestyle, paying close attention to the local Amharic dialect so as to understand and interpret the hidden meanings, subtleties and nuances which are very much a part of day-to-day oral Amharic communication.

Because of the extreme discomfort involved, I had to abandon the idea of sharing a tukul (hut) with a peasant family. I was confronted with the difficult choices of continuing there or finding another village site. By this time, I had already established rapport with some of the residents. So, instead of giving up, I chose to continue working using another
strategy. I made arrangements to remain on the outskirts of the village - about two kilometres away, by renting a room at the field camp of Save the Children Fund, USA for seven Ethiopian Birr per night.\textsuperscript{1} In addition to its convenience, this living arrangement also gave me the chance to observe how NGOs involved in relief and development projects operate at a micro level. I began to learn more about the interaction between local aid workers and peasant aid recipients, some of whom were the residents of Berekha.

Funerals and mourning rituals played an important role in integrating me into the community. On every mourning and death ritual, other dead relatives are recalled. When the women of Berekha used inourgouro (sad singing/lamentation) and emotive poetry to express their sorrow about the kith and kin they lost in the war and the famine in Wello, we shared the common grief of losing those close to us. Coming from a family that has endured much loss, I shared their grief and mourned with them. Sharing these sentiments with my informants was for me not just part of the research strategy. The shared experience revived my own memory of handling the loss of family members and my exiled life in Canada. In particular, they awakened my own grief of dealing with the death and funeral of a close family member in 1991 in the midst of difficult political circumstances. Due to the collapse of law and order, and the imposition of the curfew immediately after the fall of the Derg, we were not able to mourn and organize the rituals in the old way to which we were accustomed. So, when the women of Berekha mourn, what makes the loss more unbearable is not only the death, but the fact that they were not able to provide proper burial and perform all the rituals with family and community members. Due to the dislocation and disorientation perpetuated by the unstable social and political climate in the country, mourning together in the old way was not possible. Nothing can ease the suffering of those - particularly mothers - who have not heard about their sons or those who know about the death but have not been able to arrange a funeral. Under these circumstances the grief becomes more difficult. It increased my sensitivity to the issue of collective suffering. The common pain of loss and suffering cemented our bond of Ethiopianess. We were all comforted when the older women reminded us and recited the old popular Amharic proverb that appealed to all of us:

\begin{flushright}
One Canadian dollar is equivalent to three Ethiopian Birr.
\end{flushright}
If a father dies, it is cried in the country
If a mother dies, it is cried in the country
If the country dies, where could one reach?

What the above proverb conveys is that facing collective loss is far more difficult than individual loss. One can always overcome the loss of an individual. But when the collectivity - that is - the entire society is in trouble, the loss is unbearable. By giving importance to the suffering of the collective over that of the individual, traditional Ethiopian society prepared itself to face moments of crises effectively. The closeness and affinity with the informants I developed in this process was thus based on an unspoken trust and mutual respect.

IV. MY IMMIGRANT IDENTITY IN CANADA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE RESEARCH

Another important factor that was relevant to my fieldwork, particularly in relating to my informants, was my personal life experience. I left home when I was still sheltered and controlled by family. As a female I had a very limited access to the public world. I lacked the experience of dealing with the outside world beyond the circles of family and family friends. In Canada, I had to learn on my own how to relate to outsiders, individuals, and institutions. The way I related to them was not governed by the feudal or semi-feudal household norms of Ethiopian tradition with which I was raised. Therefore, I had to negotiate continuously between the individualistic way of relating to people that I was used to in Canada and the considerations of status, age, and gender that are still important in the way people relate to one another in Ethiopia. My personal experiences of the two worlds thus proved both an asset and at times a liability in relating to people during my research. The experience of living in Canada had prepared me to relate to my informants in an impersonal way without imposing any authority. At the same time I was expected to conform to the traditional norms informants still held. For them, I was an Ethiopian, and that is how they wanted to relate to me and for me to relate to them.

My experience of living in Canada as an immigrant did, however, provide me a
Vantage point to understand the immigrant status of the villagers in Efratana-Jille. It made me feel empathetic to some of the sentiments the Welloye settlers felt as outsiders, particularly their tenacity to retain their sense of history and dignity under the circumstances where they had lower status and limited power. In a different context, Myerhoff (1978:46) beautifully captures this sentiment of being an immigrant minority. She had a keen awareness and sensitivity to how one of her key informants felt about himself and how his answers to her questions were mediated by this sentiment. When she directed a question about her informant’s identity, she recognized that his response "was polite, seeming always to differ but guarded. How much of his life must he have lived this way," Myerhoff wondered. She wrote: "I had seen this stance before, in Indians who hold off the intrusions of powerful outsiders with dignity and persistence, not allowing entry where it would deeply touch them" (46).

V. COMBINING ARCHIVAL MATERIAL AND ORAL HISTORY

a) Archival Material

The archival material was collected from the various government offices, including the district administrative office, the Municipality and the Ministry of Agriculture in the town of Alem, and the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission in the town of Jawuha. Different official papers, correspondence between different Peasant Associations and the district office, provincial and central state offices as well as letters written by peasants to their leaders and government representatives were consulted, thanks to the grassroots organizations (Peasants’ Associations, Women’s Association and Relief and Rehabilitation Commission) created by the Derg regime which left a wealth of recorded historical material. These documents were helpful in studying the interaction between state policy and local response. In addition material from the Birhanena Selam Printing Press, and the libraries of Institute of Development Research (IDR) and Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) at Addis Ababa University were also consulted. The archival sources consulted are not directly cited, but they have influenced my analysis and interpretation.

b) Oral History
As Townsend (1990:351) observes, oral tale provides insights into history. Oral history is a particularly important source of insight into history for a society like Ethiopia. However meticulous the empirical data about Ethiopia’s agrarian conditions gathered by economists, statisticians, and management specialists, they do not tell us about the processes by which the current situation came to be. More importantly, the method is not adequate to represent the perceptions, feelings, and actions of people involved. Hence, we get very little understanding about the lives of the people from whom and about whom the information is being collected. This gap needs to be filled by oral history. The importance of oral history in the context of an agrarian society like Ethiopia is rightly pointed out by James McCann (1995:xv):

After the first week or so of gathering life histories and observing farm activity, it seemed clear to me that what I saw of the landscape and individual farmers' fields and what I heard from farmers about their lives provided a much richer and more complex story than what emerged from the meticulous social science data that my ILCA [International Livestock Centre for Africa] colleagues had collected in the field".

Writing about Poland, Dobrowolski (1987:265) notes, one of the consequences of transmission of culture orally is the possibility of "limited transmission" from generation to generation, even under conducive conditions. The conditions in present day Ethiopia are far from conducive. Hence, it is important to be aware that the oral history presented here will not entirely capture the experiences of Ethiopia’s rural poor under the rapidly changing and often difficult circumstances. In the current conditions, with the rapid pace of social change (due to radical social transformation from above), recurrent famine, migration, and consequent disruption of peasants’ family life, traditional knowledge that has survived for many centuries through oral communication (with no written record, no pictures or graphic representation), is likely to disappear. Under such conditions, the memory of people at times can be fragmented and there is a risk that the information, knowledge and skills of peasants might be irrevocably lost. Therefore, under the current conditions acquiring information from oral history becomes indispensable.

Just as most of the church relics, antiques, silver jewellery and household utensils have found their way to the antique shops in Addis Ababa and Nairobi, Kenya, much of the local
knowledge is disappearing with the death, dislocation and pauperization of the majority of Ethiopian people. In the past Ethiopians in general, and the peasant and pastoral population in particular have confronted many difficulties. During this period, while the transfer of offices, property, and income rights were recorded by the state and church, the day-to-day activities, struggles, gains, and losses of the majority of people were not (see McCann 1995: 8-9). However, given the slow pace of change, ordinary Ethiopians were able to maintain the continuity of their tradition through oral history and popular memory. In the current situation, when the transformation is rapid and disruptive as a result of the changes introduced by the state, direct foreign intervention and internal and external migration, what is going to be retained and remembered is not certain.

c) The Centrality of Oral History to My Research

I have used the oral history as an important source particularly to give voice to the grassroots historical perspective of peasant men and women. The grassroots perspective helps us understand better the social reality of Ethiopia. How do the people think of themselves, their environment, and the challenge of surviving? The oral history has been collected through structured and unstructured interviews specifically with people who have witnessed and lived through the changes introduced during the periods of Haile Selassie I and the Derg. To have a wider understanding I have done extensive interviews with people from different class, status, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.

Oral histories are not just supplementary resources in writing about the lives of the settlers interviewed. They throw light on some of the vital macro issues that are responsible for perpetuating the vulnerability of peasants at the micro level. In addition to providing information to the important issue of livelihood, they help us understand gender, marital and family relations in the lives of the settlers.

In making, individual memory and narration important, I did not just look for reminiscences for their own sake. Rather, each narrative was selected primarily on the basis of how far it represented the viewpoint of the wider group. Thus, while each narrative is unique, it also embodies something of the common experience of the larger social group and history (see Van Onselen 1993, 1996; Keegan 1988:159). Some individuals provided more
information than others. There were those individuals who understood the larger social issues more incisively and could therefore interpret their life experiences more systematically than others. Some individuals’ lives were more representative of the group than others’. I do not claim that these narratives give a whole picture of the complex history and current reality of rural Ethiopia but that they shed light on the dynamics of rural society and culture in a historical perspective.

Nor I do mean to suggest that these extreme conditions will completely erase the past. Even in peaceful conditions, gradual and prolonged social-economic transformation is seldom complete (see Dobrowolski 1987). The past values and ideas will continue to linger on in the present (Marx 1977:398-9). In the context of radical and rapid social and economic change, past values provide a source of comfort. Oral history in such circumstances provides an opportunity to understand the past in the context of the rapidly changing present. It alerts us to the unexpected results and dimensions of social and economic change by revealing some of the contradictions and complexities and local variations of the processes involved. It tells us in what ways these contradictions and complexities transform and improve or distort and destroy the lives of ordinary people. It makes us aware in what ways do contradictions and complexities of social and economic changes empower people, or alternatively burden them. It is because of this that I have paid special attention to memory and oral history.

d) Peasant Mode of Narration

Rather than imposing my theoretical viewpoint, I have tried to elicit informants’ own sense of understanding. I have allowed the content of the interview material to guide my research. Furthermore, I have attempted to follow the informants’ mode of narration and emphasis. Acquiring specific and exact dates and locations from my informants in a straightforward manner was not possible. Thus, when asked about their age and place of birth informants recall some major events, or places as reference points. When stating time or age references are made to someone’s marriage or death. To illustrate this point I shall use the case of Nefisa Ahmed Biru, one of the elderly residents of Berekha. She told her age, which I calculated to be between seventy-five to eighty, as follows:
When Ras Kebede Ruled Wello (1918 - 1925), I was a sadula (virgin) and just got married. I got married to Ali Muhe, who was vegame bale (that is I got married to Ali Muhe at a very early age). Were Becho was the place I got married. During the reign of Queen Zawditu [1916-30], I was newly married. When the newly appointed Were Becho shum (the village chief), Arjo came, I was only a year married.

Another example illustrates how places are described. Aminat Ali was born in Ancharo, Wello. When she got married she moved to her husband’s village. This is how she tells the location of the village:

Our birth place is Ancharo, but my children’s father’s place is in Worsay. The place is actually very close to Bati. It is before you reach Dagan, a place called Muti Qolo from Kombolcha. It is called Worsay, Shinqur dingay atagab (near by drilled stone). If we take a bus, or lorry from Kombolcha, Worsay is the spot we get off. But it is two hours on foot from Kombolcha.

I was able to understand this type of narrative partly because of my childhood experience of growing up in a household which was frequently visited by people from the rural areas. As a child, I was always curious about rural way of life and listened to their stories attentively.

e) Poetry, Proverbs and Puns

In the predominantly agrarian culture of Ethiopia, sentiments which carry deep meanings are expressed through poetry. It is a form of narrative where nothing is stated directly. Rather, everything is said in an indirect, ambiguous manner, punctuated by poetry, pun, and proverb. It is the idiom of popular communication. The rationale for such a style of discourse is that, if everything is put in a straight forward and simple manner, it ceases to be engaging. In other words, verbal play is a characteristic feature of day-to-day conversation that gives it a deeper meaning and makes it more interesting. Among Ethiopian Christians, the more refined form of this word play known as qine is expressed in Ge’ez. As Levine

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2 See chapter five for the changes made during Ras Kebede’s rule of Wello.

3 Unmarried girls’ age before marriage is designated by their hair styles, like sadula and game Nefisa used to tell her age.
(1986:5) pointed out, Amhara peasants' [particularly of the mountain regions] practical
mindedness and limited concerns with aesthetic was compensated with the love and "genius"
for poetry. Anthropologists studying other rural societies have also made similar
observations about the importance of poetry and verbal play. Cole and Wolf in their study of
the village of Tret (Italy) noted the residents' lack of elaborate religious rituals and other art
forms. However, the lack for art was "made up" by their engagement in verbal play"
(1974:11). Similarly, Abu-Lughod (1987:25) observed that the Bedouin "often sang and
punctuated their conversation with short poems." Poetry, when spontaneously recited in a
specific social context, creates and recreates a shared sentiment, a bond and a particularly
shared value. In Ethiopia, the social contexts to which poetry, proverb, and phrases are
related are varied, that is, they are recited to express happiness, celebration, as well as
personal or collective loss. My informants always used popular poetry to highlight their
points.

f) The Role of Poetry in Mourning and Death Rituals

In addition to the droughts and famines, many years of wars and political instability
have perpetuated social misery and have made death omnipresent in Ethiopian society and
culture. Hence, funerals and mourning rituals have become a key task of social relations.
They are one of the most important social activities and a means to express community
solidarity. Participating in these rituals is a moral obligation. One of the highest forms of
offense an individual can cause to the community or to another individual is not to honour
these rituals. Through the common experience of loss of kith and kin, people have become
important to each other. Professional mourners reciting poetry about the deceased and
including all the relatives and family members who died earlier recreate the spirit of
collective sharing of grief among all those who are present to honour the ritual. The poems
recited during funerals make even the strongest and most detached passer-by cry. In addition,
the whole process is highly religious. The elaborate prayers performed as part of honouring
the dead and regenerating religion for the living are an important source of social and moral
force in Ethiopian society.

In Ethiopian society, leqiso (mourning, crying) is equivalent to what Abu-Lughod
(1987) calls "stylized high pitched, wordless wailing". In leqiso women play a predominant role. Leqiso involves much more than weeping; it is a chanted lament in which the bereaved women and those who have come to console them express their grief together. By crying aloud they communicate to the wider community the sorrow and the devastating effects of the loss on their personal and family well being.

VI. THE MEMORY OF WAR AND FAMINE AS HISTORICAL MARKERS

Memory is not like a sponge soaking up experiences indiscriminately. What do people remember? Why do they remember selectively? People remember what is important to them, what has left a deep impact on their life collectively and individually. Famine and war are such events whose effects are permanent and irreversible. Because of its profound impact, war is used by most of the people as the major historical marker of the earlier periods of pre-1974. This is not unique to Ethiopia. It has been argued that generation of Europeans "that have come of age before 1914 were affected in varying degrees by ‘wounds of war’" (Hughes 1966:2 cf., Fink 1980:16). Marc Bloch's (1980) detailed writing, Memoirs of War: 1914 - 15 depicting the destruction and the suffering the World War I brought on French society is a testimony to this.

The events of even earlier pre-1974 periods which are often remembered and referred to by the people of Berekha are the Battle of Sagale and the Italian invasion. The latter of 1936-41 left a serious impact on the people of Ethiopia, and is used as an important marker of history in the narrative of peasants, landlords, and state officials in Efratana-Jille. In addition, the Italian war weakened the provincial nobility. After liberation, Haile Selassie I effectively began to use the political space the invasion has created to launch his policies of state consolidation. In this regard, his policies were a major departure from those of his predecessors and the beginning of the rapid integration of Ethiopia into the international political and economic nexus. Almost every interview and discussion I had with the older generation of informants invoked the memory of the Italian occupation in one form or another. It is commonly used as a marker to tell age or a change in life.

Other events that were remembered frequently included the Liberation of 1941, the earthquake of Karaqore (1961), the Revolution of 1974 and, the Land Reform Act of 1975. It
is interesting to note that the villagers do not so vividly remember the Revolution of 1974, but the Land Reform Act of 1975 glossed by them as maret larashu tabilo sitawe/Derg maret larashu sitawe (when land to the tiller was declared by the Derg] is particularly remembered by all. Also remembered is the escalation of war in the district between the Derg and the EPDRF right after the 1984-85 famine eventually ending up in the takeover of state power by the EPDRF in 1991. With every question I raised, the answers were preceded or followed by reference to one of the above events. Beside being major historical markers, these events are also used to date deaths, births, marriages, migration, sickness, droughts, years of good/bad harvests, disputes, and other relevant issues.

Some of the residents of the older generation of Berekha also remember the earlier times and historically important leaders from Wello. Lij Iyasu II (1913-16) and the Battle of Sagale (1916) that ended his rule and along with it the political autonomy of Wello are clearly remembered. Even earlier periods like the times of Emperor Yohannes IV (1872-79), who tried to control the spread of Islam in Wello, are evoked by the elders of the village again and again. They share a collective sentiment about the destitution of Wello's peasantry as a result of the changes that took place in the process of Haile Selassie I's rise to power. During discussions of important issues that touched their lives - like the lack of access to land or some form of administrative injustice - it was common for them to link these issues to earlier political events, that is, the problems the people of Wello faced: migration, dislocation, and their vulnerability in Shewa. Such historical memories are sometimes used as a form of defense against the discrimination they have been subjected to in Efratana-Jille as new comers.

a) The Significance of Tizita

Famines, like wars, entailing the loss of kith and kin, in addition to the destruction of property, are to a large extent irreversible. Hence people do remember them vividly. Famines become cultural markers of time and space enshrined in collective memory (Greenough 1982, Arnold 1984; 1988, Cassiers 1988). For instance, the seba-sebat (the famine of 1984-85) is remembered by all the villagers. It is used to categorize dates and events.
In highlighting the importance of oral history, I have focused on tizita (popular memory), which has a central place in Ethiopian society and culture. It refers to a way of remembering and re-experiencing ancestry, dynasties, wars invasions, landscapes, friendships, and so on. It is all pervasive and appears in songs, poetry, and all forms of social discourse. In this way the long history of Ethiopia of both the aman gize (good time) and kifu gize (cruel time) is kept alive. I have tried to utilise this local resource from popular narratives to reconstruct how the settlers of Berekha coped with the multiple dislocations caused by wars, state interventions, famine, and migration.

Why do Ethiopians use memory and always remember the past to make comments on the present? Thinking about the past way of life gives people hope when faced with uncertainties of the present. As the prospects of confronting the challenge of the present or ensuring some future becomes more difficult, the memory of the past (that was relatively prosperous and secure) serves an important function as a reminder that life was better at some point in the past and conditions will improve again in future. The argument here is not to make everything in the past "idyllic." However, when people are facing hardship in the present, they remember the past selectively: they remember only what was good in the past. In that situation, tizita (popular memory of the past) acquires a special significance: the past is invoked as a solace for the present and as a strength, or as an escape to confront the future in a realistic way. In circumstances like this, as the moral economy literature shows, the past becomes "a source for protest and accommodation, despair and hope" (Roseberry 1987:58).

In the case of the 1984-85 famine, Hancock (1985:7) observed that famine victims of Wello left their terraces, fields and their land forever. What he did not realize is that people carry with them the memory of their land, livestock, and the whole mode of livelihood left behind. Some might be leaving their place permanently, but its memory is kept, however fragmented it might be. It is the memory that helps them face the unknown in an often socially and physically new and difficult environment.

I am not suggesting that people remember only the good side of the past. In a similar fashion the imagery of the past that is painful is also kept alive. Thus, they remember the famine, war, loss, and destruction. As one family which left Lasta (Wello) for Northern Shewa, after the 1984-85 famine commented, "the people of Lasta remember how famine and
war disintegrated their homes and turned them into nests of spider webs." The Seba-Sebat (the famine of 1984-85) is frequently mentioned by most of the residents of the Efratana-Jille district "as the time when the Derg and the American sindé (wheat) arrived for us to save our lives." Due to the strong community solidarity, until food relief arrived no one died of starvation in the village of Berekha. Nevertheless, seba-sebat is remembered as a beginning of a new kind of impoverishment and decline in the standard of living for all of them. Because of its severity, villagers were distressed by their inability to replace even half of the livestock they lost during the drought. In the surrounding villages, even for those who survive the famine recovery is difficult, particularly when people have sold their assets, migrated - leaving their homes - behind and hence slipped into social destitution. For most of the residents of the district seba-sebat was a "cruel time," when men sold all their farm equipment and women sold all their silver jewellery. Thus, the memory of famine and war and the sufferings they cause also become part of the popular memory.

There are some interesting parallels here to the case of Bengal. Greenough (1982) in his study of the Bengal famine of 1943-44 observes that "the traditional prosperity ideal of Bengal" provider for the popular masses exposed to the famine "a shared vision of the way things should be" (viii). Despite the chronic misery due to the complex combination of war and famine of the 1940s, the idea of the past prosperity of Bengal clung tenaciously in the popular consciousness. India's Mughal rulers described Bengal metaphorically as the "paradise of India" (6-7). Furthermore, as in the past as various other forms of historical evidence and the accounts of European travellers as far back as the sixteenth century attest, Bengal was a land of plenty.4 The imagery of Sonar Bengal ("Golden Bengal"), immortalized in the epic poetry of the nineteenth century Bengali Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore was part of the popular consciousness of the Bengalis. For Bengali peasants with their deep concerns about subsistence and order the "semantic power of paddy, parental indulgence, and beauty" that was embodied in the imagery of 'golden Bengal' constitute an

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4 The famous French physician and traveller, Francois Bernier, who came to India in 1660, wrote that "Bengal abounds with every necessity of life." He unequivocally praised "the order and abundance of Bengal, even including the beauty and amiability of the native women." Similarly, various historical documents relating to Mughal India provide an evidence of how Bengal was rich both in natural resources and manufactured goods (Greenough 1982:6-7).
important element of their moral economy. Holding tenaciously to their past, Bengalis for centuries before and after on continued against the odds of colonial occupation, epidemic, and famine. Irrespective of caste and communal identity, these concerns are common to all Bengalis in their rural conditions (Greenough 1982: 10).

Another parallel to the description of Bengal provided by Greenough can be drawn with European travellers’ accounts of Ethiopia (Tigre and Wello) that tell of the richness of the land along with the skills and hard working nature of the peasantry. The peasants of these provinces were not totally free from periodic episodes of suffering due to poverty, drought and communicable diseases. But compared to the current conditions, they were in a better position to face such periodic episodes in the past. These periodic episodes, unlike the famines of the twentieth century, did not affect the infrastructure of agricultural production. The current agricultural poverty may make it appear that the imagery of the past prosperity described in these European accounts seems remote and unreal. However these descriptions are not purely imaginary. Travellers’ accounts are based on what they observed. Tigre and Wello the backbone of Ethiopian civilization, were once the land of prosperity. The peasants from these regions provided for the palaces and monasteries of Axum and Lalibela. Today, however, the rural population of these regions lives with a reality of famine and destitution. That is where tizita becomes relevant: it works as a means of resistance, against defeat and loss in the face of poverty, drought, and famine. For Ethiopians, it is the exposure to frequent famines, wars, and political instability of the last one hundred years, on the one hand, and peoples’ tenacious holding on to the past, on the other, that creates and recreates tizita. Retrieving the past is so important in Ethiopian society that tizita has an important place in Ethiopian tradition and it is all pervasive. Facing continuous wars, recurrent famines, and authoritarian regimes, Ethiopians have learned to remember the past and keep their hope for the future in a special way. That is where tizita is particularly relevant.

b) Supplementing Oral History with Other Methods

Roberts (1990) warns against the potential risk of distortion in oral traditions and advises backing them up with data acquired through fieldwork (cf. Townsend 1990:346). As Van Velsen (1965:144) points out an ethnographer should supplement her/his own observed
data from other sources such as informants' memories, court records, and other documentary and non-documentary sources. Similarly, Vansina (1985) asserts that a single source or a single informant is never sufficient and that researchers can only begin to approach the factual basis of events in oral traditions if diverse variants support it. It is therefore important to collect many versions of the same response and if variants converge one may feel more secure about historical proof (Vaughan 1987: 119-30).

Thus, I have not relied on a single source of information alone. I have thus combined several research methods of data collection, including archival research and extensive fieldwork, employing structured and unstructured interviews, group discussions, and participant and non-participant observation. During the fieldwork and afterwards, I read more carefully about the social history of pre-1974 Ethiopia. This was necessary in order to contextualize the narratives of my informants. Specifically, I focused on cult land, the state, and religion. Since the focus of my research is on a Muslim community, I have paid special attention to Islam in Wello and Northern Shewa. In order to confirm the reliability of the information collected from oral history, I have cross checked it with documentary evidence from various government offices. Similarly the data collected from government records has been cross checked at the grassroots level in order to find out how far what was officially proclaimed was actually put into practice and how it was received at the grassroots level. In the specific context of the 1984-85 famine, the claims made by the various governmental and non-governmental organizations were checked with local informants for their operational effectiveness at the village level.

VIII. DOING FIELDWORK IN ONE’S OWN SOCIETY

Doing research in the current rapidly changing social, political and economic climate is extremely challenging. The conditions in Ethiopia and globally in the nineteen-nineties were moving faster than my ability to grasp, digest, reflect and interpret the information. In such a short time the premise of my proposal, comparing peasants’ strategies to face crises in the pre-1974 and under state socialist reforms 1984-85 famine and was made in a way irrelevant. As peasants had to face the abolition of socialist policy in agriculture, reprivatization of land, the fall of the Derg regime, the civil war and political struggle to take
control of state power, and the ascendance of EPDRF, and so on.

In spite of my sense of familiarity and connectedness with the region I was however little aware of the difficulties involved when one is doing research on a subject very close to one’s own history and identity. I was confronted by the serious difficulty of the need for practical involvement in the field and the conceptual detachment the process of the research required. Myerhoff (1978) provides an insight into the complexity of this problem. She writes:

Working with one’s own society, and more specifically, those of one’s own ethnic and familial heritage, is perilous and much more difficult. Yet, it has certain validity and value not available in other circumstances. Identifying with the "Other" - Indians and Chicanos, if one is Anglo, blacks if one is white, males if one is female - is an act of imagination, a means of discovering what one is not and will never be. Identifying with what one is now and will be someday is quite a different process (18).

Anthropology as a discipline distinguishes itself by its emphasis on fieldwork and sensitivity to local perspective. At the same time, like other social sciences, it claims to understand its subject matter objectively. The question is, what about a situation where the researcher is from the society under study is going through a difficult period discussed above and even fears about its future. Is objectivity in such a situation ethical, or even possible? What are the implications especially if the researcher is part of that society and identifies with its problems and perils? What is the role of the researcher in a situation like this? These are serious questions to which there are not easy answers. Academic research demands that the researcher be objective and loyal to professionalism in collecting data with a sense of detachment vis-a-vis the people the research is about. At the same time, however, the researcher is left to face the moral dilemma of dealing with feelings and sentiments about the people and culture being studied. Doing fieldwork under stressful circumstances with people whose problems need immediate attention is different from doing research under normal conditions. As a result, the researcher is confronted with the glaring ethical and moral dilemma of doing fieldwork without being subjectively involved with people who are constantly struggling to maintain their livelihood and take care of their family members.

In my case, I neither wanted to - nor could I - distance myself from my informants. I was identified with them at various levels. While as an anthropologist living in a foreign
country, I was an outsider to the informants, we were nevertheless tied through our common
destiny as Ethiopians whose lives one way or the other have been touched by the turbulent
historical developments in the country. The Italian invasion, 1936-41, the 1974 Revolution,
the civil war, and the famine of 1984-85 have touched us all and left their mark on us in
different ways, irrespective of what we are and where we are. As an Ethiopian doing
research in my own society, I could not maintain the distinct boundary between myself and
the people with whom I was doing the research with. We spoke the same language, we
shared similar sentiments about our country and a common concern about its future. My
sense of identification with my informants was much deeper. I was drawn closely to them by
the resemblance in appearance between some of my own family members and the settlers of
Berekha. The young kids running around in the village reminded me of my brothers and
sisters growing up, who looked like most of them. In addition these faces were identical to
the images on the television coverage of the 1984-85 famine. These images remained in my
memory and acted as a powerful inducement to choose this particular topic for research.

Turner (1969) addresses the issue of objectivity in anthropological research and
provides an interesting answer. He does recognize the tension between partisanship and
objectivity, but he does not treat it as a necessarily negative feature. He raises a serious
question: "How could we approach the data without partisanship?" His answer is that,

...in studies of human culture and behaviour the tension between motivation
and scientific objectivity can sometimes prove fruitful. When the deeper levels
of the self, deeply tinctured by culture, are reflexively engaged, the knowledge
brought back from the encounter between self as subject and self as object may
be just as valid as the knowledge acquired by "neutral" observation of "others"
(xv).

Lee (1990) makes an incisive observation in this context. He is aware of the
distinction between "poetic truth" and "data about the world as it is." Anthropological
knowledge is concerned with the latter. As he notes, however, the reality of anthropological
research is more complex mainly for two reasons. First the anthropologist cannot be
completely objective in relation to the people being studied. Second, the people being studied
are not neutral either. Hence the ethnographic knowledge is a product of "a dialectic of
congruent and contradictory elements between observer and observed" (8).

I had to deal with the tension between professional detachment and emotional and political attachment with informants. Being caught between the two contradictory requirements was challenging and at times even confusing. Notwithstanding my good intentions, I was aware of my limitations to do anything substantial which could alleviate the problems of the informants’ day-to-day struggles for livelihood. Eventually, my research ended up being primarily an academic undertaking, a means to fulfill my own intellectual curiosity, a fulfillment of my deep-seated passion for research on rural Ethiopia. At best, I could draw comfort from the fact that I had not kept quiet and remained oblivious and aloof. At least, I did fieldwork among the industrious peasants of Ethiopia who provided me a first-hand knowledge of their day-to-day struggles against a variety of political, economic and, social odds. For they are the backbone of Ethiopian economy and history, they thought me the pivotal aspects of life for the majority of Ethiopians I had not known before - about moral strength, perseverance, generosity, and dignity which is rapidly eroding among the urban section of the society.

IX. FIELDWORK UNDER CONDITIONS OF POLITICAL INSTABILITY, UNDERDEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY

a) Fieldwork Under Conditions of Political Instability

When I picked northern Shewa as the site of my field research, I was confident of the familiarity and the sense of connectedness to the place. I also chose the region on account of its economic, social, and cultural diversity in order to incorporate in my analysis how these socially diverse groups relate to each other, particularly during the crises of drought. However, I was confronted with a serious challenge once I arrived there. The politics of ethnic divisiveness and tension was being pushed down on the rural people from the top by the elites and some of those who control state power. As a result, my ethnic background rather than my political and moral commitment were deliberately raised to discourage my research. It is imperative to note that I personally encountered this pressure from a minority of urbanized Ethiopian males. Although, a tiny minority, nevertheless, they were able to
interfere with my research. Ethnic tension was combined with gender repression. Ethnicity was being used by the state for a new re-configuration of Ethiopia's internal administrative boundaries. This had a limiting impact on my research in various ways. Under these circumstances, considering all the above factors became necessary before picking up a specific location (Peasant Association/village) for a field site, selecting the informants, etc. In making these choices, I had to take into consideration the current political sensitivities of the people and state officials, in addition to my own safety and academic commitments. However, doing fieldwork under these conditions had one advantage: it exposed me to alternative ways of understanding people's struggle and resistance. I was able to witness how vulnerable people manage to diffuse the political problems imposed from above so that they are still able to continue with their lives. The assumptions I had about agrarian social and political issues were challenged by people's ability to recreate alternative ideas and culture to solve the political problems created by the powerful, including the state.

Within this atmosphere of political instability, I was not only worried about my own safety but also that of the people I was interacting with for the research. So, when I was in the field, I was always worried whether my research would add to the political problems the villagers were already experiencing. The fear I had for informants for their association with me was not unfounded. My field research attracted the attention of outsiders from the town. Many of them were just curious why I chose to do research in that particular community, while others were amused that I even went to do the research. Sometimes I had to guard the informants even at the cost of my own convenience against undue attention from these curious outsiders.

Given the conditions of political instability and near breakdown of law and order from time to time, the issue of personal safety, including the safety for life itself, was a prime concern. Under these conditions, as a woman I was even more vulnerable.

Even under conditions of political stability, and in the context of a developed society of Western Europe, doing fieldwork at a place where one is closely tied to the local history is challenging. This point has been well understood and argued by Wolf and Cole (1974) as follows: "Most obvious of all difficulties, however, was the challenge of a field situation that proved too close, both psychologically and culturally" to Eric Wolf's Austrian background.
While Wolf found it relatively less problematic to collect the data on genealogy or family history, it was very difficult to collect the information on political history, especially in relation to past experiences with National Socialism and Fascism. However, the main difficulty he faced was to distance himself from local history so as to meet the demands of academic objectivity. In order to "counteract his self-perceived lack of distance," Wolf invited another Anthropologist John Cole to restudy the two villages that were earlier studied by him.

Another important point Wolf and Cole (1974) emphasized was the significance of political stability as a precaution for balanced field research. They write: "We wanted to avoid areas where cultural and political conflicts were so extreme that we could have worked with one side, to the exclusion of the other" (1974: 7). What this means is that, ideally, for non-partisan research two conditions are required. One, a politically stable community where the researcher is not drawn into the local conflict. Two, a situation where the political instability does not weigh heavily on the powerless population of the society where the research is being conducted. I found it particularly difficult to avoid getting involved in the ongoing local conflicts mainly because these conflicts (that were in fact imposed from the top) were seriously affecting the lives of the people I was studying.

The problem of doing research in a politically unstable society is not confined to the researcher's ability not to be drawn into the local conflict and, maintaining objectivity and keeping distance from the conflicting groups. The mere presence of the researcher could create suspicion and become a problem irrespective of her/his political neutrality. Thus, whether I was politically engaged or had political affinity with any group was not the only problem. Given the stressful conditions, the people in general and those I was working with in particular were suspicious, insecure, and cautious. People were either conspicuously silent or demanding to be assured that they were not going to be exposed or compromised. I was being constantly required to prove myself.

I had the assumption that because of the 1974 Revolution and state socialism, there would be an environment of open political discussion at the popular level on some of the important issues facing the country. Instead, political repression has permeated most spheres of life and there was an absolute silence even at the university level. The Derg left its legacy
of repression and violence to political dissent. Even after the fall of the Derg this trend continued. Towards the end of December 1992, just a few weeks after my arrival in Ethiopia, the government troops attacked student demonstrators at Addis Ababa University. The tight security around the university and the general sense of repression in its aftermath spread anxiety and insecurity. People were distressed, fearful, cautious, and restrained in expressing their opinion. As a result freedom of movement and communication was restricted.

In some respect, the fact that I went from a university in Canada to do research in Ethiopia put me apparently in a privileged position. At the same time, because I went there as a researcher from outside, it was construed by some as if I was working for some foreign governments, Canada or the United States, and hence not to be trusted. This attitude of extreme suspicion towards foreigners and Ethiopians living abroad was a product of the post 1974 period, after heavy Soviet involvement in the country’s affairs.

b) **Political Conflict and its Impact on my Consciousness**

I grew up in a political climate in which most of the writings in Ethiopian studies were dictated by the polemics of the Cold War in which academic and political positions were polarized. Rather than being informed by ethnographic and historical studies, interpretation of Ethiopian society by each side was done ideologically. This climate was not particularly conducive to a comprehensive understanding of Ethiopia’s objective social and economic reality. Given the ideological climate during this period (from 1974 to 1991) neither side was prepared to examine the concrete reality. Rather, each side had its own assumptions which provided many of the answers in advance. The kind of literature generated in the heat of polemic during this period, while it made me sensitive to social inequality and oppression, did not equip me with a systematic ethnographic or historical knowledge of Ethiopian society. To a large extent the emphasis tilted towards social-economic conflict and the question of nationalities at the expense of other issues of the society. Being exposed to this kind of discourse, my understanding of Ethiopian society and history in general, and of Ethiopian peasantry in particular was narrow. It was with this background that I went back to Ethiopia to do research on peasants’ lives and their ability to cope with drought and famine. Once I was in the field and began to interact with the people
who have to deal with these problems directly and on the basis of their own ingenuity, my political and theoretical assumptions began to change. The local reality did not entirely agree with either side of the Cold War politics, and I had to re-examine my theoretical and political assumptions. Arm chair political assumptions do not necessarily correspond to the political reality of the concrete situation and the researcher must be prepared to modify the former in light of the latter. In other words, in the proliferation of radical literature and discourse during the Cold War, the history of Ethiopia as ordinary Ethiopians understood it and lived it in their day-to-day lives was submerged. This research is then a modest attempt to show some sensitivity to ordinary Ethiopians’ perceptions of their history and their present concerns.

The fact that I was removed from the current reality of Ethiopian society affected the way I looked at its economic-political problems. It created a particular form of understanding that was rather academic and abstract. Ethiopian society in general, and the rural sector in particular had gone through a series of difficult, often traumatic experiences. In the particular context of Northern Shewa, these were the Revolution of 1974, the initial armed resistance to the Revolution and the bombardment that followed, agrarian reform, resettlement, villagization, and civil wars. The years of intensified battles between the rebel forces and the government was followed by the collapse of the Derg regime in 1991. The absence of an effective state and the breakdown of law and order during the takeover by the EPDRF took its toll on the rural society. So, when I arrived in Ethiopia in 1992, it was still in the midst of transition and the new regime was struggling to establish law and order. The imprints of heavy militarization of the whole area (a direct result of the Cold War), repression and poverty were seen everywhere - on the landscape, people’s bodies and minds. The experiences of post-1974 were so overwhelming for people that it was not possible to engage them in a systematic, comparative discussion of the two famines. Moreover, the famine of 1973-74 was confined to Wello and the majority of the settlers in the village were already in Northern Shewa. They had no direct experience of 1973-74.

c) Fieldwork within the Context of Wide - Spread Poverty and Dependency on Food Aid

Because I was doing research on poverty and famine, an issue so critical to both me,
the researcher, and informants, people were more cooperative to share their experiences. The
villagers associated my work with Save the Children Federation USA (SCFUSA), a relief and
development agency that has been operating in the region since the 1984-85 famine. After
learning that I had not gone there to distribute aid but to stay on in their surroundings for a
longer time so that I could observe and learn about their life, some of them turned indifferent
and some were even cynical. Due to the ongoing complex political and social problems, in
addition to the diversity and rich history of the region, it was difficult to focus on a narrow or
limited range of a subject, since with every contact some new and unexplored areas emerged
needing further attention and flexibility. Because of vilugnta (to say no directly is to be rude
and disrespectful), the informants would agree to taking time from their busy life in order not
to offend, just to not offend me. It was, however, obvious that I was taking too much of their
time without giving them back anything. This continues to put on me a moral responsibility
on me.

My research brought me face to face with questions which I was not aware of before I
went to the field. First of all, I never thought about my social, economic, and political
position in the "new Ethiopia" vis-a-vis that of the people I went to study. Secondly, I never
reflected on why I was doing that particular research. I was convinced of the validity of my
research and the legitimacy of my role as a researcher. As an Ethiopian concerned for the
collective well being of the people, I had the right and responsibility to do the kind of
research I was doing. Finally, I never reflected on how I could help the people while at the
same time doing my research. They were vulnerable people. They wanted me to speak for
them, to defend them with my research, and so on. I depended on people's cooperation and I
had to negotiate with them continually. From time to time they wanted me to do what they
thought was important for themselves or their community. I was very aware of my own
limitations and powerlessness. It increased the moral pressure on me; at times this pressure
was exhausting.

As a concerned individual doing research with a community of people I cared about,
adjusting to their conditions of living and getting involved with them to collect the
information as they presented it was not difficult. I am writing about people who have been
relegated to the backwaters of Ethiopian and international political economy. These are the
peasants of Ethiopia facing the onslaught of drought and famine, in addition to civil war, and
global political-economic pressures. Their language, aspirations, and future concerns are
fundamentally different from the concerns of academics in Addis Ababa or the developed
world. The problem is how to translate their idioms and communicate their views accurately,
and represent them to the academic world. How could one present the narrative of a
community and individuals that have been marginalized, and yet are a very important source
of their history and political economy, in the mode of accessible ethnography? Because, after
fieldwork, I became extremely aware that a significant source of knowledge about Ethiopian
history and society lies, buried and wrapped underneath the torn and soiled white togas of its
rural poor. In other words, some of the problems I was/am faced with were/are associated
with the fact that I was/am doing research among people who have a strong sense of their
history but are living under conditions of extreme poverty, non-literacy, and hardship. How
could I bring their views, life histories, and future hopes and fears to the attention of
objective and detached academics who have different concerns and who in contrast to the
former are also very secure? In attempting to interpret their history, to translate their
ethnography, I hope my research contributes in whatever modest way to create a more
informed and compassionate understanding of Ethiopia's rural masses among academics and
policy makers both at the national and international level.

d) Gender role Contradictions

In a society where the code of honour-shame complex operates both as a sentiment
and an ideology that governs day-to-day social interaction of people, women researchers are
under heavy moral scrutiny of informants. Women researchers must comply with the moral
standards of the community. Sometimes, these requirements and pressures are more difficult
to meet than putting up with the practical and physical problems of fieldwork. In this
context, Abu-Lughod raises another important question about the relationship between a
(woman) researcher and the people being studied, that is, a relationship which is not
"symmetrical." The researcher wants the informants to be honest with what they tell but the
researcher cannot be totally honest with the informants. In Abu-Lughod's case, she writes
how she could not reveal many things about her personal life in the United States where she
was pursuing her research career. If she revealed more than what she did, it would have been unacceptable to her informants within their traditional world view. So, she has to pretend constantly to them that she shared their values. For the Bedouins what mattered most was belonging to a tribe and family, while the education of girls was something new. It was therefore natural for them to assume if a woman alone far away from her family is pursuing a career, it was because she must have so alienated her family, especially her male kin, that they no longer cared about her. They could not imagine how an unmarried girl valued by her family could be left unprotected to travel alone where anyone could take advantage of her. Abu-Lughod knew that her male kin cared about her; it was only the pursuit of education that put her into this compromising position (1987:12, 14).

As a woman researcher who had freed myself from traditional role prescription and proscription on my own, continually negotiating my position in the field was not an easy one to deal with. Doing fieldwork requires the cooperation of many people just to get through the ordinary routines. From the university to the government bureaucracy, it covered a wide spectrum of individuals and institutions I had to depend on and continuously negotiate with them. Every time I needed protection, I had to "compromise" my sense of independence and personal autonomy which I had developed in Canada. The political tension and instability exacerbated my vulnerability as a woman and made me seek the protection of male kin. The gender awareness I had acquired as an immigrant woman in Canada could not be applied to the conditions in Ethiopia. In Canada, I had developed a different form of consciousness and culture of resistance, which came in constant contradiction with my position in Ethiopia.

It is not very common to find Ethiopian women researchers doing fieldwork in rural areas. According to the dominant norm of the society, women are not supposed to be going around alone and mixing with people freely, especially men who are strangers. But my work required that I interact with men who dominate the knowledge of public sphere. I found out that the obstacles to women doing research are not only limited to rural areas, but extend to small towns and urban areas as well. It would have been easier for people to identify with me and my research if they were exposed to women researchers. The absence of Ethiopian women researchers doing fieldwork in rural areas further contributed to the initial problem of establishing rapport with women informants, who tended to be more critical, subjecting me
to moral judgement, and unable to appreciate what I was doing. On the other hand, the patriarchal attitudes of urban men was much more difficult than in the rural area. At times, I expressed my frustration by confronting the men from the town, who were creating unnecessary hurdles for me.

This condition was further exacerbated by the trauma of post civil war and the continued political instability. The research was moving at a rather slower pace than what I had planned. As a result of the many years of civil wars during the Derg period and ethnic conflict and instability of the post 1991 (EPDRF) period, much of the countryside was not safe nor conducive for anthropological fieldwork. My capacity and opportunities for collecting more and diverse data thus were restricted. As a result, my informants were drawn mostly from the areas where I felt safe to go and from people who were by and large (but not exclusively) Amharic speakers. It is important to mention here that women of different religious and linguistic groups I talked to did not have any hostility towards one another (or to me) on the basis of language or religion. Rather, they were willing to cooperate among themselves to face the common problem of the harsh reality of rural life irrespective of their ethnic and religious identity. This cooperative spirit of the women created a buffer by transcending the divisiveness of ethnic politics. It provided space for me to have a positive and productive interaction with women of other linguistic groups in addition to my main Amharic speaking informants.

In conclusion I would like to raise that as an Ethiopian woman anthropologist, I had to bear the tremendous pressure from the tension between the desire for intellectual pursuit, on the one hand, and the demand of conforming to tradition, on the other. This tension became more acute in the field and followed me out of the field as well. Because I was born and brought up in Ethiopia, it was very easy to slip back into the conventional standards of propriety for women, following all the traditional prescriptions and proscriptions. Within a few weeks of my arrival, the pervasiveness of docility and servitude was beginning to affect me. It was particularly in the field area in Ifat that the gender issue became problematic. I could not walk freely on the streets, take the mini-buses wherever I wanted to go, and visit public places in the town of Alem, where people were more relaxed and open "public" discussion took place.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE MIGRATION OF PEASANTS FROM WELLO TO NORTHERN SHEWA

The main focus of this chapter is to provide the political, economic, and cultural context of the migration of Berekha settlers from Wello to Shewa in search of land. The migration was organized by their Shaykh, who negotiated a land deal with a landlord in Efratana-Jille, Northern Shewa. The landlord agreed to this deal because he needed peasant labour to cultivate his lands. The need for peasant labour was created by the state in the process of centralization which introduced standardized land measurement and fixed tax payment. In this process, religion, state, and land were intertwined, bringing the Shaykh, peasants, and the landlord together. In order to provide an understanding of this process, I will first provide a brief history of Islam in Northern Shewa and Wello.

Next, I discuss the continuity and change in the land tenure system in the two provinces. The most important form of land tenure directly relevant to the study was called gult. A brief discussion of the gult land tenure system is provided. Subsequently, the chapter focuses on two successive periods of Ethiopian history, the period after the Battle of Sagale in 1916 and the period when Haile Selassie I fully consolidated his power, through the process of centralization, after liberation in 1941. The Battle of Sagale and the process of centralization mark points of significant departure in Ethiopian history. The changes that took place during these periods had far reaching implications for the population under study. Thus, I show how the changes introduced in Wello after 1916 seriously affected agrarian relations creating conditions for the migration of peasants. The period of Haile Selassie I, particularly from 1930 onwards, is emphasized for its direct relevance to my research. This is because the change introduced by his government so as to speed up the process of centralization created the space that enabled the Welloye migrants to move and settle down in Efratana-Jille. Towards the end, I analyze how the migration of the Welloye peasants led to the evolution of different and varied systems of land tenure in Efratana-Jille. Finally, I discuss the pivotal contribution of migrant peasant labour to the development of the district.
I. ISLAM IN ETHIOPIA

Peasants in Wello who were under pressure to look for new lands and the landlord in Efratana-Jille who was looking for peasants to cultivate his lands were brought together by the mediation of a Sufi Saint from Wello, addressed by the people of Berekha as getochu (the Great Shaykh). Undoubtedly peasants’ need for land and the landlord’s need for labour necessitated the migration. However, reducing the whole process of migration of the Welloye peasants and their settlement in Efratana-Jille to simply the landlord’s need for labour and the peasants’ need for land will give a narrow and limited economistic interpretation. In addition to land, what lured the Great Shaykh and the Welloye settlers to come to Northern Shewa was their historical affinity with the region that was the old centre of Islam. The Argobba’s continued presence in Ifat kept this tradition alive in Northern Shewa, which further made it conducive to the Muslim Welloye settlers to come to Efratana-Jille seeking livelihood. Most importantly also, the landlord was in contact with the ulama of Wello, which led him to bring Muslim peasants to farm his land. Thus, one has to take into account the wider political and cultural context in addition to the economic motivations of the landlord and peasants.

This raises another question. What was the basis of contact between the Great Shaykh of Wello and the Oromo landlords of Efratana-Jille? The answer lies in the history of the spread of Islam from Northern Shewa to Wello. In Wello Islam spread peacefully in which Islamic teachers played a crucial role. They were in turn treated with deference by the ruling classes and ordinary people even of the Christian community. Furthermore, the hereditary rulers of Wello provided material and political support to encourage the spread of teachings of Islam and the peaceful coexistence of Islam and Christianity. In order to understand this it is necessary to have a brief discussion of the history of Islam in Ethiopia, with special emphasis on Wello and Northern Shewa.

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1 The term getochu in Amharic is the plural form of getoch (lord). In pre-1974 Ethiopia, landlords and feudal title holders were addressed as getochu by their peasants, servants and by common people as well as their own children. The term was used to show respect to the person for his authority in Ethiopia’s feudal gerontocratic tradition. The Great Shaykh according to the narrative of the villagers was of an aristocratic birth. The term getochu in the particular case of the settlers, however, is used more to denote his spiritual leadership, religious knowledge, and moral dedication. The fact that they use the plural form, getochu (the lords) to address him is symbolic of the reverence and respect they have for him. Since they consider it disrespectful to address him simply as the Shaykh, I will refer to him as the Great Shaykh to be consistent with their tradition.
Historically, from the very beginning Islam had a close connection with the people of Ethiopia. The Axumite negus (king), El Asham, who was contemporary with the Prophet, had welcomed the companions of Muhammad who were sent by him to Axum to take refuge from anti-Muslim persecutions in the Hijaz (Tadesse 1972: 34, Erlich 1994: 5-9). It has been recorded that, "when the news of the death of king El-Asahm reached the Prophet in A.D. 630, he is said to have remembered him with affection and pronounced some prayers for him" (Conti Rosini, cited in Tadesse 1972: 34). Hence, for a long time the external Muslim attitude towards Ethiopia was influenced by the hadith attributed to Muhammad: "Leave the Abyssinians alone, so long as they do not take the offensive" (Erlich 1994: 9, Trimingham 1976: 46).

a) Indigenization and Peaceful Spread of Islam in Ethiopia

Islam crossed the Red Sea with traders and holy men, rather than with armies "as an extension of its Oriental political order" (Erlich 1994: 25). However, ever since its arrival in Ethiopia - going back to the eighth century - it has competed with Ethiopian Christianity for cultural and political influence within the country. After the occupation of the Dahlak Islands in 702, Islam continued to spread down the Red Sea coast to Zeila and beyond. The location of Zeila is particularly important since as a trading post it helped to diffuse the Islamic faith to the hinterland of Ethiopia. It seems the Islamic dynasties of Northern Shewa had emerged out of this Zeila connection (Tadesse 1977, Erlich 1994). Between the eighth century and the sixteenth century Muslim principalities established themselves in the southeastern, central, south, and southwestern parts of the country. The most important Islamic principalities were Shewa² (897 - 1285), Ifat (1285 - 1415), and Adal (1415-1577).³ It is important to note that between the ninth and twelfth century traditional religion, Christianity and Islam existed side by side in Northern Shewa region (Tadesse 1984: 430-33).

From the earliest times, Islam in Ethiopia articulated within the predominantly Ethiopian social structure and political culture rather than displacing it. Arabic did not

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² Sometimes also written as Shoa.
³ See also Erlich's discussion of the Walashma dynasty of Ifat (1994: 35).
replace the local languages. The indigenous people in Ethiopia who embraced Islam preserved their language and their ethnic identity. They barely developed the advanced Islamic educational system based on Quranic schools. Nor did Ethiopia develop urban centres which are essential for the spread of the universal message of Islam. The only exception was the town of Harar (Erlich 1994: 26). Instead of urban centres, it was the generosity of landlords and the well-to-do peasants that contributed to fostering the tradition of Islam in Ethiopia. So, while the Islamic faith did diffuse in Ethiopia, its military, political, economic and cultural institutions, including the Arabic language, were never dominant. Instead, the Islamic faith adjusted to the existing local institutions. This was an important and historically specific feature of Islam in Ethiopia.

In general the spread of Islam in Ethiopia was peaceful, except the jihad of Imam Ahmad Ibn Ibrahim El Ghazi, remembered by Ethiopians as Ahmed Gragn (Ahmad the left-handed) in the sixteenth century (Hussein 1988). Gran used both his "military genius" (Bahru 1991: 9) and application of brutal forms of coercion to accelerate mass conversion to Islam. The destruction caused by the jihad of Ahmed Gran created a long lasting trauma among large section of Ethiopians. As a result, in the popular mind, the spread of Islam in Ethiopia by Ahmed Gran is associated with fear and terror. However, the subsequent expansion of Islam in the country has mostly been peaceful.

The activities of Muslim scholars played a significant role in the peaceful spread of Islam in Ethiopia. The two scholars who have been particularly associated with the peaceful expansion of Islam in Wello were Shaykh Sabir and Shaykh Garad (Hussein 1988). They lived around the market areas of Kombolcha and Dessie in Wello. Some of the residents of Berekha who followed the Great Shaykh, came from these areas. These two scholars played a leading role in converting the surrounding Amhara Christian communities to Islam. As a tribute to their peaceful role the villages of Shashabir and Gerado are believed to have been named after them (Hussein 1988). Though just a village, Gerado has captured the popular imagination. It has been incorporated into famous Amharic songs eulogizing the beautiful landscapes and people, especially the women of this region. To quote one of the popular love songs of the region:

139
Ere Dessie Dessie, Gerado, Gerado
Alekelish libe, Tanido, Tanido.

Oh Dessie, Dessie, Gerado, Gerado
My heart is getting finished/dissolving [for you women].

Another Amharic song conveys the same sense,

Ere Bati, Bati, Gerado, Gerado
Ere Bati Bati, Bati Gendariyu
Yimashal yinagal Qonjo lij iyayu, Shega lij iyau

Oh Bati, Bati, Gerado, Gerado
Night falls and day breaks looking at the pretty child,
looking at the beautiful child.

These poems popularized the Shaykhs and the places named after them far beyond the region of Wello. Poetry is an important medium of communication in Amharic as well as the Islamic Sufi tradition and the two complemented each other. In Ethiopia, Amharic poetry is a popular idiom of communication for the non-literate masses.

The peaceful spread of Islam through teaching and preaching had been an established tradition in Wello. Some of the Islamic teachers and saints associated with such activities were highly respected by the wider population. They played an important role in the political and cultural life of the community. It is against this background that the reputation of the Great Shaykh with the landlord of Efratana-Jille and the peaceful role he played in the unstable region must be contextualized. The preeminence of Wello as the centre of Islamic learning is due to its proximity to Ifat, the earlier Islamized area. Furthermore Islam in Wello was consolidated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries due to the establishment of local political dynasties, and the expansion of the mystical schools. The Wello ‘ulama’ developed high reputations for their mastery of learning in the areas of nahw (Arabic grammar and syntax), fiqh (Islamic law), and their commitment to teaching (Hussein, 1988:96). Their patronage by well-to-do cultivators and traders helped the development and expansion of learning. Through their teaching the peaceful spread of Islam was encouraged in the entire

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4 In addition two of the four universally recognized madhahib (school of law) are presented in Wello. See Hussein (1986).
region. The most widespread order in Wello is the Qadriyah which was introduced in Wello from Harar in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century (ibid). The Shadhiliyah, Samaniyah, Tijaniyha, and Khatmiyah were introduced by Welloye scholars who had received training in the Hijaz and Sudan (Hussein 1988: 96, 1984: 49-50). Since it was the indigenous teachers who were the propagators of Islam, "they showed a high degree of flexibility and, adaptability to local conditions and guarded tolerance of pre-and non-Islamic cultural accretions..." (Hussein 1984: 50). It is within this historical context that the migration of the Great Shaykh along with his followers from Wello to Shewa can be understood. The Great Shaykh of Berekha received the patronage of the Oromo landlord who granted the land on tenancy to his peasant followers from Wello (see chapter six).

b) North-Eastern Shewa: One of the Oldest Centres of Islam in Ethiopia

Northern Shewa was the seat of Ethiopia’s old Muslim community. The spread of Islam in the region was associated with the long-distance trade route and Muslim traders who had started to penetrate the hinterland as early as the second half of the eighth century A.D. (Tadesse 1977, Chernet 1990). According to Tadesse (1977), the Sultanate of Shoa is the earliest Muslim political unit. Its exact location is not clearly established, but "it seems it included the eastern foothills of the present-day Shoan plateau, and it probably extended east of the Awash river into the south-western reaches of the Chercher massif" (ibid.106). He also points out that the chronicle of the sultanate of Shoa does not report any major conversions to Islam in the interior until the beginning of the twelfth century. Citing Cerulli (1947) and Trimingham (1955) he argues that it was in 1108, in the reign of Sultan Harbar’ir’ that the conversion of Gbbah, who were probably ancestral to the Argobba, took place (107). Relying on oral traditions collected recently, Hussein (1988: 95) argues that the earliest period of Islamization of eastern Wello falls between the establishment of the Sultanate of Shewa (end of the ninth century) and the Sultanate of Ifat (twelfth to thirteenth century). Northern Shewa is thus the earlier Islamized area, from where Islamic influences radiated via southeastern Wello to the rest of the highlands of Wello (Hussein 1988). In Wello Islam coexisted with some of the oldest Christian monasteries. It became the religion of both peasants and landholding aristocracy. The complex history of Christianity and Islam in Ifat, coexisting and
competing with each other, has been documented by, among others, Tadesse (1972), Chernet (1990) Hussein (1984, 1988), Huntingford (1965) and Stitz (1973). Tadesse (1972: 50-51) and Huntingford (1965: 3-4) have noted that by the tenth century, Islam had already become an integral part of the social and political organization in this area.

c) The Argobba, the Early Muslim Community of Ifat

It has been documented that by the early seventeenth century, about one-third of Ethiopia’s population consisted of Jabarti - "Muslims who had emigrated from the territories of the Emirate of Ifat" (Erlich 1994: 41). The Jabarti were Ethiopian Muslims "...scattered amongst or mixed up with all Christian population of the highlands, from whom from the ethничal point of view they cannot be distinguished" (Trimingham 1976: 151). The Jabarti can be distinguished from the highland Christians only by the "...ways in which their different outlook on life expresses itself and constitutes a distinct cleavage between people..." (ibid 147). Their following of Islam according to Erlich was not based on an institutionalized Quranic educational system, nor did it have the political mission of Islam. While maintaining their Islamic identity the Jabarti formed an integral part of an increasingly diversified Ethiopian society (Erlich 1994: 41-42). The name Jabarti is a derivative from the names Jabara/Jabarta, which according to Arabic writers, is a region identified to be close to Zeila (cf Tadesse 1972: 124, Trimingham 1976: 150; Erlich 1994: 41). Ifat is also known as Jabarta, "the burning country" (Erlich 1994: 41). The majority of the Jabarti settled in the highlands of Wello. Most of the time they integrated into the local communities, only occasionally maintaining a separate community. Mixing with the indigenous population and spreading their beliefs, the Jabarti spoke Ethiopian languages of the highland area such as Agaw, Amharic and Tigrigna Trimingham (1976: 150). Eventually Amharic became their main language. Whether the Jabartis were Islamic diaspora (Trimingham 1952) is

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5 Some of these Arabic writers are Ibn Taghribird, Ibn Said and Aboul Feda (Tadesse 1972: 124, Trimingham 1976: 150).

6 a) The Jabarti settled in urban centres and engaged in commerce, a profession which was not looked at favourably by the Christians. As the time passed, all Muslims of Ethiopian origin speaking Ethiopian semitic languages were called Jabarti (Erlich 1994:41).

b) It is difficult to establish if the Jabarti spoke other languages than already mentioned. Given the fact that
questioned (Hussein 1992).

The Argobba constituted an advanced farming and trading community and contributed to the peaceful spread of Islam from Northern Shewa to Wello. The Argobba are the Muslim community associated with the Sultanate of Ifat. They are considered to be the descendants of the influx of dissident Arab refugees who maintained the early tradition of Islamization in Northern Shewa. This view of the origin of the Argobba is supported by the archaeological findings from Northern Shewa. Relics such as Muslim graves, archaic Arabic inscriptions, ruins of mosques and other stone edifices found stretching from northeastern Shewa to the southern Wello mountains and across the Afar desert (Stitz, 1973:185-87) support this thesis. The largest Argobba historic settlement has been discovered in Northern Shewa located around the town of Shoa-Robit, district of Quet, in the heartland of Ifat, south of Efratana-Jille district (Chernet 1990:307).

Those Argobba people of Efratana-Jille district I interviewed frequently referred to their connection with the Islamic sultanate of Ifat and claim that they are descendants of the Wallasma family. The Wallasma dynasty (1285-1415) is one of the dominant Islamic dynasties of Ifat (Tadesse 1972, Tringham 1976, Ehrlich 1994, Bahru 1991). According to the local oral history I gathered, the Wallasmas are directly associated with the learning and teaching of the Quran. One of my Argobba informants, woizero (madam/mrs) Zeinab defines Wallasma as a Woliv/Qalicha (an educated person).

Zeinab Ummar is a resident of the village of Alala-Aman Gebaya located approximately 7 - 10 kilometres south-west of Berekha. I first met her at one of the mourning rituals in the village of Berekha. Later, I met her when she frequently came to visit the earlier Jabarti trace their genealogy to the first hijira to Ethiopia, it is possible to guess that their first language was Southern Arabic.

c) There is an old small community of Muslims living in Tigre and speaking Tigrigna. They trace their origin as far back as "the eighth century when Dahlak island was an important Islamic cultural centre" (Erlich 1994: 41).

7 In 896-7, eastern Shoa [Shewa] was the seat of a Muslim sultanate under a dynasty called Mkhzumi from a famous Mecca tribe that emigrated to Ethiopia. In 1285 the Mkhzumites of Shoa were deposed by sultan Wali Asma (locally addressed as Walasam, which in Arabic is known as Walashma) of Ifat, written by Arabic writers as Wafat, or Awfat (see Tadesse 1972, Tringham 1976, Erlich 1994).
the residents of Berekha village and subsequently at the markets of Alem and Sanbate. I
selected Zeinab as one of my Argobba informants because of the close association she has
maintained with the people of Berekha from the time she first met them during the 1984-85
famine. As she put it: "We first met in seba-sebat (seventy-seven)," that is, during the 1984-
85 famine, "waiting for food at one of the feeding shelters near Sanbate". Her friendship
with the women of Berekha was established at the queue to receive food at one of the food
distribution centres, organized by the state, Save the Children Federation U. S. A. (SCFUSA),
and other international aid organizations operating in the district.

The impoverishment of the area has resulted in the decline of the culture and language
of the Argobba. Zeinab reflects:

My parents and grandparents spoke Argobba well. But I could only speak a
few words. We are not even addressing each other as we did earlier. In
Argobba custom, we don’t mention the child’s name first, but the father’s. So,
I am not Zeinab Ummar, but Ummar’s Zeinab.

Reiterating Argobba’s old claim to Ifat, and their attachment to the land of Ifat, she
recited a common saying in pidgin Argobba which according to her goes back to the times of
Lukas (Luke):

Yale Yimula wuha Gay yelegn
Yale Suwalihu mise yelegn.

Zeinab repeated the saying in Amharic as follows:

Yale Yimula-Wuha [Yimlo] hagar yelegn
Yale Suwalihu bal yelegn.

Translated into English, the saying is:

Other than Yimula-Wuha [Yimlo] I have no country
Other than Suwalihu I have no husband

Zeinab’s tracing the history of the Argobba to the times of Luke is a typical style of
historical narration also common among the Christians of Efratana-Jille district. Both Biblical
and Quranic verses and symbols are evoked to establish old links to the region, a reminder of
the competition between the local Christian and Muslim rulers of the area. At the same time
Zeinab, who is a Muslim, refers to Luke in tracing her Argobba roots. What this shows is
that while there is a competition among Christians and Muslims, there is also a lot they share in common including their symbols and the way they evoke them.

Most of the Argobba of Efratana-Jille live in the valleys located in the western border of the district. The villages of Yimlo and Alala-Aman Gebaya have old Argobba settlements. The village of Muz-Amba, south west of Berekha is dominantly an Argobba settlement. The Argobba people of Muz-Amba subsist by farming and petty trading. There is a close resemblance (for instance in terms of dressing and ornamentation patterns by women) between the Argobba and Welloye settlers in Efratana-Jille. The Welloye settlers of Berekha maintain close ties with the Argobba residing in the town of Alem.

d) Islam and the Oromo Migration Northward

Ifat was the connecting point for Islamic expansion in Shewa and Wello. However the Muslim community in Wello was isolated and affected by the migration of the Oromo northward in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, which undermined and cut off the local Muslim communities from other Islamic centres like Ifat and Harar. It is generally accepted by historians of Ethiopia that the Muslim - Christian conflict of the sixteenth century (during the time of Ahmed Gran) caused serious destruction and left the populations on both sides exhausted, which facilitated the Oromo migration to the north like "a tidal wave" (Bahru 1991: 9). The migration and settlement of the Oromo which involved displacement of peoples creating a violent upheaval, brought about a temporary disruption in the process of Islamization in Wello (Hussein 1988: 96). By the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, the Oromo settlers had converted to Islam and began to play an active role in expanding it. The Oromo incorporated some of their traditional beliefs such as zar cult and wadaja* (Oromo word for communal prayer) with Islamic practice, which were subsequently adopted by other Muslims as well (ibid). This is an important point. As we will see later,

* On Wadaja, see also Trimingham (1965: 198 - 207, 262).

9 Hussein (1986:96) states that the zar was also brought by the Oromo migration. However, the survival of the zar cult is found not only among Muslims, but also among Animist, Jewish, and Christian populations of Ethiopia. Therefore, it predates both Islam and Oromo migration. It is possible to argue that the Oromo absorbed the zar from the highland population.
wadaja is syncretized with *dua* by the Welloye settlers to pray communally for good harvest, rains, and good health; to celebrate religious days, births, and marriages; to mourn during death and loss; and to ward off sickness and evil spirits. Its importance is significantly enhanced during moments of stress like death, sickness, drought, and famine.

What one can infer from the above is that throughout Ethiopian history, spontaneous migration of people from one region to the other has been a common phenomenon. Ecological degradation and recurring droughts and famines have contributed to this process of internal migration. Furthermore, it shows that the people of different regions maintained regular contact with one another, cutting across religious and ethnic boundaries. The peaceful spread of Islam and its teachings, which had permeated rural Ethiopia, were contributing to the social integration at the grassroots level, by making it possible for Muslims and Christians to live together harmoniously.

Earlier in this chapter, we have discussed that Islam did not spread in Ethiopia through the military, but through the different Sufi *tariqa*. Sufi orders were instrumental to the expansion of Islam due to Sufi teachers’ less legalistic approach and their ability to adapt their teachings to specific local customs and practices (Voll 1995: 110). Islam was able to diffuse rapidly and easily into the hinterland regions of Ethiopia through the *ulama*, traders and the pastoral population (accustomed to transhumance). Sufi teachings in Ethiopia kept in touch with the rural masses, where the isolated and neglected Christian community of the highlands was susceptible to absorption into Islam (Trimingham 1976: 150). Then, unlike Christianity, which is tied to parish, fixed church, and priesthood, Islam due to its territorial freedom of worship allowed its followers to move from one place to another with relative ease. Adrian Wood’s (1976) study of farmers’ migration, a response to the drought and famine of the early seventies, is very instructive in this regard. In his sample, out of all the migrants leaving their villages that he interviewed, only nine percent were Christians, and the rest Muslims. This was so despite the fact that these migrants came from western Wello and Eastern Begemidir regions, the Christian heartland. Wood suggests that the difference in the number of Christian and Muslim migrants was partly due to their respective religions. Muslims did not need a fixed place or building (*masjid*) for worship, and were able to take their Shaykh with them. Therefore, they were able to move out permanently to far away
places. The Christian priest, on the other hand, was appointed to a specific church and was supported by the land allocated to that church. Hence, the priest could influence his congregation from leaving. Being less legalistic, mobile and adaptable, Sufism acted as a force of social integration by encouraging peaceful coexistence of people of different faiths and modes of existence. As we will discuss in chapter six, tactically, the Great Shaykh advised the settlers of Berekha to live in peace and harmony with the local highland farming and lowland pastoral populations. The Great Shaykh and the villagers, in addition to keeping peace with their neighbours, emerged as mediators between the conflicting highland Christians and the lowland pastoral Oromo population. Thus, the Great Shaykh played an important role in integrating the three communities: the Welloye settlers, Oromos and Christian Amhara populations of Efratana-Jille.

e) State and Islam in Ethiopia

The integration of Christians and Muslims took place both at the level of ordinary people as well as at the higher echelons of political and religious leadership. Thus, the state in Ethiopia deliberately followed the policy of integrating Christians and Muslims. This is not to deny the key role of the Amharic language and culture and the special status of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the affairs of the state until the 1974 Revolution. It cannot however be reduced to a state created and maintained by the simple imposition of Christian 'Amhara domination' over subordinate (or internally colonised) peoples, a view particularly popularized by the resistance movements against the central government after the Revolution. Clapham rightly notes that this view "is true only in a limited sense." He writes,

Ethiopia has (like the United States) a dominant culture, to which anyone ambitious for a place in the state apparatus, and especially for national political power, must to some degree assimilate....This ethnic non-exclusiveness has been essential to the survival of the Ethiopian state, particularly as it has expanded to incorporate new peoples since the later nineteenth century, and as the centres of political and economic power have shifted steadily southwards (Clapham 1991: 243).

The issue of religious and ethnic co-existence is directly relevant to my study. Hence, a brief discussion of the role of the state in this context is necessary. The state in Ethiopia pursued a policy of accommodation between Christianity and Islam. A concrete example of
this policy was the case of Lij Iyasu II. Iyasu was the son of Ras Mikael, son-in-law of Menelik II. Ras Mikael was formerly Imam Muhammad Ali, a Muslim hereditary ruler of Wello, who was converted to Christianity in 1878 during the reign of Emperor Yohannes IV. Iyasu continued to maintain good relations with the Muslims in Ethiopia and the neighbouring countries. In order to create a strong and unified state, he pursued a policy of integrating Christians and Muslims. One of the most effective methods he chose was marrying, according to Islamic tradition, the daughters of various Muslim chiefs (Bahru 1993, Erlich 1994, Marcus 1994). As a mark of his non-partisan policy towards religion, Iyasu after Menelik's death (1913) did not insist on a coronation ceremony as Emperor in the capital, Addis Ababa, a highly religious Christian event. However, he elevated his father to be the king of Tigre and Wello, the two key provinces which are the centres of Ethiopian Christianity, where the oldest monasteries are found. Moreover, he maintained cordial relations with Muslim landlords of Ifat, one of the historical centre of early Muslim settlement in Northern Shewa. Iyasu's policy of accommodation between Christians and Muslims created a conducive environment for the Islamic teachers in Wello to maintain contact with Muslim landlords in Ifat. This tradition created the possibility for the Great Shaykh to negotiate a land deal for his followers from Wello with the Oromo landlord in Efratana-Jille. It brought in contact the Great Shaykh of Wello and the Oromo landlord in Efratana-Jille (Northern Shewa). These long established contacts between the two bore fruit. The Great Shaykh and the landlord, Ahmed Immar Dima (here after A. I. Dima), were able to negotiate the migration of peasants from Wello to Northern Shewa.

II. STATE AND GULT LAND TENURE SYSTEM

In order to understand the relationship between state and gult, it is important to begin with a brief discussion of the state in Ethiopia. The state in Ethiopia is an old institution. As Clapham (1991) notes, over centuries Ethiopia has developed a state with a hierarchical political structure founded on the control of territory. During this long period of evolution, Ethiopia came to be headed by an emperor whose membership of a specific dynasty was considered important. The dynamic nature of the state in Ethiopia has been described as follows:
...the survival of the state....from the reign of [Emperor] Tewodros [II] (1855-68) onwards demonstrate that this state was no mere dynastic creation, but was, rather, deeply rooted in the social and economic structures of the people who comprised it...moreover, it was a literate society with its own written language through which the historical tradition of statehood could be transmitted (Clapham 1991: 243).

The dynamic nature of the Ethiopian state needs to be historically contextualized. Axum, the ancient centre of Ethiopian civilization and state, was heavily dependent upon maritime trade with the outside world. When the maritime trade was no longer lucrative, the Axumite state eventually declined around the middle of the seventh century. The state began to focus more and more on the land of its interior regions, Lasta and Wag (located in Wello province) being the first (Tadesse 1972 and Bahru 1991). This new orientation to rely on entirely on an agrarian economy slowly began to develop. Varied and complex systems of land tenure began to evolve. The state began to revive with renewed strength based on the development of its interior regions in Wello. This gave rise to different dynasties, the first one after the decline of Axum being the Zagwe Dynasty which held power roughly from between 837 and 1270 (Tadesse 1972, Bahru 1991) and originated directly in Wello. With the decline and defeat of the Zagwe, there emerged the Solomonic Dynasty (1270 - 1974). From this period onwards, we have a more detailed account of the relationship between land tenure and the state in Ethiopia (see Tadesse 1972, Marcus 1994). The evolution of the complex land tenure systems in Ethiopia was intertwined with the consolidation and expansion of the state under the Solomonic Dynasty. There were three stages in the consolidation and expansion of the Ethiopian state under this dynasty: i) prior to the nineteenth century (1270 - 1800). ii) The nineteenth century, when the state was under transformation in a new direction and began to expand effectively southward (1855 - 1916). iii) Centralization (the evolution of absolutism) which became entrenched between 1917 and 1974. Each stage contributed to the diversity of land tenure with significant implications for relations between rist holders, and rista-gult and gult holding landlords and peasants. However, here our main concern is with the third stage (1917-74), because the

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10 There are conflicting views on the duration of this dynasty. The first one 837 - 1270, while the second one is 1037 - 1270.
transformation of the state and the change in land tenure system during this period is directly relevant to my study.

The land tenure system that evolved in Ethiopia in response to the various internal and external pressures over a long period of time was extremely complex (Ege 1996: 59) and hierarchical. Various forms of land tenure and the corresponding rights and obligations have been discussed by Mantel-Niecko (1980: 53-132). The gradation of land rights in Wello and Northern Shewa was particularly varied and complex. Gilkes (1975: 101) writes: "Ethiopia is generally reckoned to have one of the most complex systems of land tenure in the world - in one province alone (Wollo) an estimate of one hundred and eleven types of tenure has been made". It has also been reported that during the Wello famine of 1973-74, there were one hundred different systems of land tenure in the province (Penrose 1987: 89). It would be relevant to investigate if there is a connection between the enormous diversity of land tenure and the extreme agrarian poverty and vulnerability to famine in Wello. This is an important issue that needs further investigation.

It is not possible to analyze here all the complex and various land tenure systems in Wello. I shall, however, follow the two broad categories, namely gult and rist tenure systems, under which all the systems have been broadly classified for analytical purposes. Rist referred to individual or household hereditary right to a piece of land, commonly found in the provinces of Wello, parts of Northern Shewa, Begemidr, Tigre, and Gojjam. Theoretically, rist holding guaranteed a source of livelihood for almost everyone in these regions. The institution of gult, on the other hand, referred to a land grant from the emperor to a landlord in return for military and civil services. The gult system was found in all parts of Ethiopia. Because, gult land has direct relevance to the subject of this research, some of the main characteristics of the social and political organization of land under gult will be briefly described.

Gult Land Tenure

In pre-1974 Ethiopia, the emperor had the right to allocate revenue from the land by waiving his own rights of taxation. This was known as gult. The gult rights enabled the holders to obtain dues otherwise allocated to the state. The emperor could create gult in any
part of the country merely by transferring his taxation rights to a third party. Though such grants of revenue, when given to churches and monasteries, were often permanent, secular grants were normally revocable at the emperor’s pleasure or were valid only during an official’s period of appointment. Such grants were given on the condition that the recipient would serve the sovereign by administering the country, raising and commanding troops, or supplying provisions (Darkwah 1978). Gult provided local landlords a source of power to control both peasants’ labour and the produce of labour on their estates. Moreover gult also provided landlords the authority to rule over people within their respective jurisdictions.

The emperor had sovereign rights over all land in the state, and these were never questioned. In comparison to other regions of Ethiopia, it was in Shewa that the Emperor’s rights in land were most entrenched. Even in Shewa, the notion of imperial rights in land showed variations between highlands and lowlands. Thus, while the above description of the imperial land rights was approximately true of the Shewan Christian highland region, it was rather different for the pastoral lowlands and deserts. It was thus not representative of all the regions in Ethiopia, or even of all of Shewa. In the lowlands of the pastoral regions, the local landlords had more autonomy.

The emperor also had the right to allocate lands (rather than merely the right to collect revenue from land) on a temporary or permanent basis. Like the right to collect taxes, the allocation of lands on a temporary basis was made in return for specific services. Thus administrative officials, usually members of the nobility, received large estates, and were in return expected to govern the country, collect the taxes, and raise armies. Land was also granted on the basis of service to functionaries of the church, priests, deacons and others. The members of the royal family were also allotted land. Though land allocated in return for service was generally given on a temporary basis, it could become hereditary. Once it became hereditary it could be inherited equally by both men and women, provided the heir was able to continue the service. In such a situation gult land became irista-gult (hereditary).
The institution of gult, then, provided local landlords the right to control peasants’ labour and the produce of labour. It also gave them the right to exercise political control over people within their jurisdiction. This arrangement was a source of continuous tension between the state and the gult holders. In the first place, the state granted political rights to local landlords mainly because it was not able to control effectively the entire territory on its own. At the same time, it did not allow the local landlords to have too much autonomous power. The landlords, on the other hand, while accepting the sovereignty of the state, tried to manipulate every possible situation to enhance their power. As a result, there was a permanent tension between the state and gult holders.

There were various levels of gult rights. Even peasants could receive a land grants from, and perform services for, the sovereign directly. However, this depended on the merits of the claimant, the fertility of the soil, the location of the land, and its degree of cultivation. Some peasants also received small plots of land in return for a variety of clearly defined lesser duties, such as making and carrying tents, wood cutting, and so on, as well as serving as soldiers during war. Peasants holding such grants stood in an identical relationship to other land holders, e.g., nobles and churchmen (Pankhurst, 1986: 151). This provision created a space for ambitious peasants to initiate litigation for greater land rights on the landlord’s gult holdings. Furthermore, peasants could also exploit the situation created by the rivalry between gult holding landlords to either entrench their tenural rights or to get concessions in rent and corvee.

The size of a gult and the number of tenants under a gult holder could vary, which added a third dimension to gult holding. A gult holder had to fend off other gult holders. There was an incessant competition among gult holding landlords to increase the area of land under their control and have more power. The competition among landlords was not only local; it could be regional and even national with wider implications. For instance, in order to reduce the power of the hereditary gult holders in one region, the emperor could grant gult land in the region to a person from outside. This in turn had far reaching implications for peasants. Given the fact that in the feudal political structure of Ethiopia there was always a tension over balance of power between the central authority (the state) and the hereditary gult holders, the emperor used this mechanism to create a division among the regional gult holders.
holders, and between gult holders and peasants. One such instance that is of direct and immediate relevance to this study was the replacement of the hereditary gult holders of Wello by those from Shewa, following the Battle of Sagale. A brief discussion of this historic event is necessary and relevant here.

a) The Battle of Sagale and Its Aftermath

The Battle of Sagale (64 kilometres north of Addis Ababa) was fought in 1916 between the supporters of the grandson of Menelik II, Lij Iyasu and the supporters of Ras Teferi Makonnen (later Emperor Haile Selassie I). Lij Iyasu II was the legitimate successor to the Solomonic throne. He was, however, challenged by Ras Teferi Makonnen and his supporters from Shewa. Lij Iyasu’s supporters were mobilized from Wello by his father King Mikael of Wello. The Battle of Sagale was a most decisive and important battle in Ethiopian history (Bahru 1993: 128 Marcus 1994: 117). In this battle, the Wello forces were completely exhausted and the Wello gult holding aristocracy lost its place of prominence to Shewa (Asnake 1986). After the Battle of Sagale, Zewditu (the daughter of Menelik II and the aunt of Iyasu) was crowned as Empress in 1917. She was, however, only the symbolic head of the state, while the actual power rested with Ras Teferi Makonnen. The Empress died in 1930 and her death marked the completion of the ascendency of Ras Teferi, who succeeded to the throne as Haile Selassie I.

The replacement of Wello’s aristocracy by those from Shewa had immediate consequences for the Wello peasants. The Welloye hereditary landlords had much stronger social bonds with peasants within the local moral economy than did those appointed by the central state. The new overlords, being outsiders and absentee landlords, were much more repressive and exploitative toward Wello’s peasantry than had been the traditional local landlords. Furthermore, the newly appointed lords sent from Addis Ababa were also the modernizing agents of the state. This set them apart socially and culturally from both the hereditary rulers and peasants of Wello. In addition, most of them were Christians from other regions who were insensitive to Wello’s tradition of fluid Christian and Muslim relations.

Local lords could be more benevolent than the centrally appointed governors and soldiers. The latter did not share common sentiments with the local people nor did they have
the political sensitivity and will to empathize with the peasantry. This is not, however, to reduce peasants' resentment in Wello to purely regional sentimentality, nor is it to mean that all non-Welloye rulers were invariably oppressive. Not all outside appointed lords and administrators were insensitive to the material conditions and sentiments of the peasantry in Wello. There were some notable exceptions, like Ras Imru, who is still very much remembered for his liberal political views and fair administrative policies in Wello (ibid). In tribute to his fairness, the peasants of Wello composed the following couplets:

Be-Imru
Terefe kimru

At the time of Imru
The piles of the sheaves are in excess.

Notwithstanding some exceptions, the peasants of Wello did feel oppressed under the new rulers. In addition, there were many movements of troops stationed in the province. In order to capture and bring under control the deposed Emperor Iyasu II and his supporters among the Welloye aristocracy and peasantry, soldiers were being quartered and billeted in peasant households. This social and economic burden exhausted the peasants and led them to migrate to neighbouring regions of Gojjam and Begemidr (Asnake 1986).¹²

In addition to catering to the new soldiers, who were their immediate overlords, tax payment by the peasants of Wello to the central state increased. In particularly during Ras Kabada’ rule of Wello as a Governor (1918 - 25). His unpopular policies in Wello contributed to peasants’ growing alienation with the new system and many opted to become Shifta (bandits). The sub-province of Ambassel, which was part of Empress Menen’s (wife of Emperor H. Selassie I) estate was an exception where no soldiers from the centre were imposed nor was there a direct intervention in its internal administration (Asnake 1986, Bahru 1993). Nevertheless, even peasants from these districts moved to other areas. The Great Shaykh and a large section of his followers who accompanied him to Berekha came from this district.

¹² It has also been reported that people from Wello migrated to Gondar and Illubabor (see Wood 1976).
Asnake has attempted to explain the local resentment of Welloye peasants against Shewa primarily on the basis of ethnic and religious differences. I disagree with this interpretation. His account of Wello's history is based entirely on oral history and hence cannot easily be verified. However, the evidence I collected both from oral history and written records leads to a different interpretation. In the first place, social and political boundaries between Northern Shewa and Southern Wello were fluid. Secondly, and more importantly, Wello was/is not religiously, nor ethnically homogeneous. The gap between the new administrators and the wider population of Wello, and resentment of Welloye peasantry (and gentry) noted by Asnake were in fact a result of the measures taken by the state in the process of centralization rather than the ethnic and religious differences between the old and new landlords and soldiers. The impact of centralization was confined not only to Wello, nor to a particular ethnic group. It affected all regions, ethnic groups, and classes.

b) Centralization of State Power in Wello and Its Implications for Landlords and Peasants

In addition to the replacement of the hereditary rulers of Wello with the centrally appointed administrators from Shewa, it was the process of centralization that contributed to the hardship of the peasantry in Wello. With the coronation of Ras Teferi Makonnen as Haile Selassie I in 1930, the process of centralization got a new impetus. The process of centralization was further consolidated through the July 16, 1931, Proclamation of the first modern constitution. One result of centralization was that the hereditary rulers of all regions experienced the diminution of their political power, while the state became more powerful.

While this process affected the hereditary rulers of all regions, its impact on Welloye aristocracy was particularly serious. Among the northern regions, members of the Welloye aristocracy were the first to lose their autonomy. Between 1917 and 1935, seven Shewan notables were appointed as the governors of Wello. The lands of the Wello rulers with gebbar (tribute paying peasants) working on them were confiscated and granted to landlords, retainers and troops from Shewa, Harar and the Southern and South-Western regions of the

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13 The centralization (the period of absolutism) process began with the Reign of Tewodros II (1855 - 1860).
country stationed in the various districts of Wello (ibid). In some districts of Wello, the defeated Wello notables were reduced to *gebbar* in their own estates, subject along with the peasants to the centrally appointed notables who became the new masters of the land. It has been argued that their conditions were further aggravated by the fact that the rank and file soldiers were Christianized Oromo and Christian Amhara from Shewa (Asnake 1986).

During this period the state, in addition to introducing economic measures, such as measurement of land and fixed payment of tax from each landlord, also tried to define and restrict the scope of landlord’s political power. These measures had implications for the relations between landlords and the state as well as for the relations between landlords and peasants.

The process of centralization went hand in hand with the process of modernization. In order to modernize education and the army and to build an industrial infrastructure, the state needed more revenue. This need for more revenue was the underlying source of the burden on the peasantry. Since Ethiopian society and economy were dominantly agrarian, the entire revenue had to be generated from the countryside. Hence, one consequence of modernization was the increased squeeze on the peasantry, particularly in Wello. This increased burden contributed to peasants’ impoverishment. At the same time, in regions where pastoralism predominated, the same process created a space for peasants (from Wello) to make a fresh start (see chapter six).

c) The Role of Chiqa-Shum

It is important in this context to mention the role of the *chiqa shum* (village chief). The institution of village chief was an important component of the land tenure system. The *chiqa shum* (literally meaning the mud chief) was a local village head-man appointed to mediate between peasants and the landlord. He was "similar to the reeve in thirteenth-century England" (Hoben 1973:254). His main task was to collect taxes from the peasants of each village and his own existence depended entirely on taxes and tributes he collected from the peasants on behalf of the landlord.

The village chief also had the responsibility to arbitrate boundary disputes between peasants. The role of the village chief became particularly important in times of political
instability, especially if the old administrators were replaced. Even during the frequent feudal wars and change of governors of the era of the nobility (1769-1855), the continuity of the customary systems of tenure and taxation were much preserved by the village chief. Given the absence of written records, the extraordinary amount of traditional knowledge of the village chief which was preserved through memory could be relied on in all matters relating to taxes and boundary disputes. This gave the village chief special power. During the period following the Battle of Sagale, the chiq (mud) - as the villagers of Berekha commonly referred to the person of this position holder - contributed to the hardships of peasants. The role of the chiq under the new administrative system precipitated peasants’ migration from Wello. Even in Efratana-Jille, the same institution continued to affect the lives of the villagers of Berekha until 1974.

The role of the chiq-shum was thus crucial to the peasant-landlord relationship. The peasants were in greater direct contact with him than with the landlord, and his conduct could heighten peasants’ discontent, especially during times of scarcity. Penrose and others reported that, even during the peak of the 1973-74 famine, many of the chiq-shum were collecting higher taxes, which added to peasants’ alienation from the landlords (see Penrose 1987: 96-98). In Wello, the chiq-shum by arbitrarily imposing new demands or increasing the customary demands of corvee and rents had contributed to many peasants’ decision to migrate. Many of the settlers of Berekha I interviewed confirmed this. Some of them said they left their rist (hereditary) land in Wello and moved to Efratana-Jille to escape the constant harassment of the chiq-shum of their village.

d) Land Shortage in Wello

The scarcity of farmland was one of the most compelling factors for people leaving Wello. Moreover, agricultural land in Wello was becoming progressively less productive as a result of soil erosion, and ecological change making the land unable to sustain the people

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14 Plowden, the first British consul who came to Ethiopia in 1848 (just before the end of the era of the nobility) observed that in each village there is one hereditary officer that cannot be displaced on any pretence; and it is this institution that alone preserves some appearance of order, in the absence of clearly written documents, amidst the whirl of "revolutions" and the frequent change of dynasties and governors.
living on it. Yimmar Muhe, one of the important followers of the Great Shaykh provides his own assessment of the social, economic, and environmental conditions in Wello before migration.

In our home land [Wello], land was expensive and holdings were narrow [too narrow to accommodate everyone]. We inherited the size of a sinzir (a unit of measurement equivalent to an arm’s length). In addition, the land was maretu tamatual (sucked of its fertility). So we came to Efratana-Jille.

In Wello the land was small, but the getochu (Great Shaykh) had many followers. Day and night food was prepared at the shrine to feed people. Then the Getochu said: "the population of the poor is growing; there are too many of them, let me find another place and live there." That is why he came to Efratana-Jille, even though he had land in Wello.

The above testimony refers to the land shortage in Wello due to partition of rist land with every successive generation. In addition, the land was also losing fertility due to increased pressure on land and ecological degradation (see McCann 1986, 1987, 1990).

All land-related problems in Wello were exacerbated by the interference of the central state in the internal administration of Wello. The most common way settlers expressed why they left Wello was summarized: "the land in Wello was gebbar maret" (tribute/tax land). Mohammed Girma, who had lived in Berekha for thirty eight years at the time of the interview, added another important factor that prompted some peasants to leave Wello: the high demands placed on peasants by the local notables and magistrates for forced labour and corvee. He left Wello because he got tired of being harassed by the magistrate of his village:

I have been here since the earthquake, which took place thirty eight years ago. In Wello I used to have a gebbar maret (tribute/tax paying status), which I inherited from my father [as rist land]. We were three brothers and three sisters in my family. All the sisters were older and I was the first son. When both of our parents died, I took over the land. Fitawrari Kassa Zelelew was the mislene (local notable), and Qan-azmatch. Wolde Sanbat was the Atbiya Dagna (local magistrate).

The mislene always asked me to come and work for him. But, I would refuse,

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15 Commander of the vanguard.

16 Commander of the right, a political-military title above Gra-azmatch (commander of the left).
because my own land required a lot of work. The magistrate will then send his servants to catch me. On several occasions I escaped, but sometimes I was caught and jailed. Finally, my land was confiscated and made a pasture land by the mislene. At that point, I decided to leave. That was the main reason why I left my rist land in Wello.

Migrating with the Great Shaykh provided them a temporary relief from the injustices of the administrators in Wello. Though initially it required hard work (as peasants had to use their own labour and tools) to clear the land and make it agriculturally productive, coming to Efratana-Jille provided a space for peasants to start a new life free of the daily harassments of landlords, magistrates, and their functionaries in Wello.

The harassment by the local administrators was a reason in the decision of even some of those who were not destitute to follow the Great Shaykh to Efratana-Jille. The case of Mehammed Girma illustrates this point. He had rist land in Wello. He is fiercely independent and hard working. However, his effort to lead an independent life was continually interrupted by the administrators, which forced him to leave Wello. He provides the background how he became connected with Great Shaykh and eventually followed him to Efratana-Jille:

I followed the Great Shaykh and came to Alem. He was loved and respected in our village in Wello. My mother knew the Great Shaykh. After she had three daughters she became worried for not having sons. She was stressed because once my father will get old there will not be any one who will plough the land and feed them in their old age. So, she made a vow to the Shaykh to pray for her to have a son.

Many of the villagers discussed land-related feuds and insecurity as contributory factors for migration from Wello. The scarcity of productive land perpetuated endemic land disputes. As elsewhere, land for Ethiopian peasants was more than a means of subsistence - it was the basis of all social and economic life. It guaranteed the individual access to equal community membership and it was a source of honour. Hence, most land-related conflicts ended up creating the deepest forms of enmity and feuds, which went on for many generations. Quite often, these disputes resulted in a spiral of violence as unavenged murder was considered a stain on the honour of the dead man’s family. Such conflicts could easily accelerate during times of political instability. Yimmar Muhe reflects:
There was no peace of mind regarding our land in the region we left behind. Even brothers were killing each other for land.

From the narrative of the villagers it is possible to infer that it was the relatively poorer and vulnerable section of the population that migrated with the Great Shaykh to Efratana-Jille. The other category of people who followed him were those who were devoted to him.

III. THE PROCESS OF CENTRALIZATION

a) The Process of Centralization in Efratana-Jille

The process of centralization in the predominantly pastoral areas was in several respects different from what it was in predominantly peasant areas. In the past, the landlords in pastoral regions enjoyed relatively greater autonomy, and were able to resist the central state’s encroachment, unlike the landlords in areas under predominantly settled agriculture such as Wello. It is important to note that the process of centralization started long before the period of Haile Selassie I. It started during the reign of Tewodros (1855-1868) and Yohannes (1872-1889). It gained prominence during the reign of Menelik II (1889-1913). Harold Marcus writes: "in short Menelik's reign represented the triumph of the centralizing idea which had been renewed by Tewodros and confirmed by Yohannes IV" (1975: 3). It acquired further momentum during the period of Haile Selassie I. Particularly, after 1941 the state was able to exercise greater control over pastoral regions as well. In the first place, it subjected the landlords in these regions to new obligations. Most importantly, for the first time, the lands under their jurisdiction were measured and clearly demarcated. Simultaneously, they were obliged to pay a fixed, regular tax to the state in return for the lands under their jurisdiction. However, it is important to note that the landlords in pastoral regions were not passive victims of the state; rather, they actively sought to maximize their interests through resistance, negotiation, and accommodation both with the central authority above them and peasants and pastoralists below them. In the case under study, the Oromo landlord, Ahmed Immar Dima realized that he could not meet the new obligation of paying fixed tax to the state without getting the lands under his jurisdiction cultivated by peasants in return for a regular payment of rents. He was thus induced to actively recruit peasants, who
could clear and farm his lands. Because the pastoralists under his jurisdiction had no experience of agricultural production, he had to look for peasant labour outside his district. The pastoralists lacked both the technical knowledge and skills of agricultural operation as well as the culture of hard work, monotony, and drudgery typically associated with peasant production. This demand created space for peasants from Wello who were facing land shortage and administrative injustice to migrate to the district of Efratana-Jille, Northern Shewa.

The process of centralization involving uniform land measurement, settlement of property and inheritance rights, and standardization of tax payment took place at different times in different regions depending on the history and political relationship a particular region had with the centre.

Ato Tsegaye, who has been working at Alem’s ministry of finance office since the time of Haile Selassie I, tells how the centralized and uniform system of land administration by the state was implemented in different regions at different times.

In 1934 [Ethiopian calendar],17 for the first time land tax was officially set in Wello province as "ye Wello kifle hagar yasirat gibir gabi" (Province of Wello’s Land Tithe and Tax Revenue). At this time land holdings began to be measured and standardized for the first time.

It was later on in 1937 [Ethiopian calendar]18 that monetary form of tax payment was introduced in the highland Amhara region of Northern Shewa. Until then, they paid land gibir (tribute/tax) in chawna mar (salt and honey).

But it was not until 195519 that land tax was introduced in the lowland pastoral regions of Northern Shewa. In 1955, there was a declaration stating that all the Oromo landlords and hereditary chiefs had to take siso (one third) gult of the land they were administering. It was ordered that the malkana (the gentry)20 gets a measure of one gasha (40 hectares) of land while tera sew

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17 1942 in Gregorian calendar.

18 1945 in Gregorian calendar.

19 1963 in Gregorian calendar.

20 As it has been pointed out by Weissleder (1965: 107) the malkana, closely parallels the English "lord", or the Austrian equivalent of landadel, as opposed to the courtly hofadel (cf Crummey 1980: 135).
(commoner) gets half gasha. This process was still going on until 1966-67, [that is, until the Revolution].

It is important to underline here that the process of centralization, by imposing a fixed tax on landlords of Efratana-Jille forced the landlords to look for peasants labour to cultivate their lands and pay rents. That is what created a space for peasants to migrate from Wello to Efratana-Jille. This issue is discussed in Chapter Six.

After the liberation in 1941, the government began to introduce new political and economic plans. For the expansion of the modern economy, industry, education, health, etc., the state needed more revenue. This had to be collected from land taxes. In order to ensure the collection of increased revenue, the modern state needed a more effective means of recording land revenue and control over the entire territory of the country. To achieve this, it had to rely on local landlords especially in pastoral areas. Thus, the process of centralization involved subordinating the local and autonomous landlords to the modern and evolving state, society, and economy, without alienating them.

It was around the same time (1940s), that the state began to establish the Imperial Territorial Army as a new regular army. One important objective of this was to absorb the scattered bands of patriots of the Resistance (against Italian occupation) in the countryside and to ensure further security in collaboration with the regular police force. Twelve territorial army training centres were created out of which one was located in the town of Jawuha, Efratana-Jille district. The soldiers that were stationed in the Jawuha territorial army training centre had to be taken care of by the state. The country was just emerging from the devastation of war and the state could not provide salaries to the soldiers. Consequently the old institution of maderia maret (land grant in lieu of salary) was used, that is the soldiers stationed in Jawuha were to be given land as a form of salary by the state. This process prompted resistance from the local chiefs of the lowland, pastoral regions who appealed to the Emperor to be given the first priority over the soldiers for land grants.

In emphasizing the process of centralization (the absolutist period), I do not mean to suggest that there was a complete rupture from the old way. Rather, the state implemented centralization through accommodation and coercion. Both the old and the new systems were
combined to suit the purpose of modernizing the state. Land measurement and the introduction of uniform payment of tax, siso-gult was a new feature introduced in this process, which is central to the entire process of migration and settlement of the Welloye peasants. At the same time, the Emperor also used the old feudal political tradition of shumat (giving titles) periodically. During his visit to Gidim/Menz & Gishe in Ginbot 1953 [May 1961] he appointed and gave titles to many local landlords. It was at this time that A. I. Dima’s title was elevated to qan-azmatch. The Emperor went to Gidim to honour some of the selected Amhara and Oromo landlords from Northern Shewa. One of the landlords thus selected was A. I. Dima, whose title was raised higher than the title held by his father. At the same time, it made the landlord pay fixed taxes to the state and discharge his responsibility to look after the law and order situation in the district. Thus, whereas the new appointments and titles increased the landlords’ holdings extending rights over many villages and tenants, they also bound them to pay to the central government higher taxes and ensure proper administration of the territory.

It may be noted that Emperor Haile Selassie I continued the old tradition of the Ethiopian state of entering into alliance with the hereditary Muslim rulers. Using the traditional institution of fictive kinship, the Emperor became the god-father of I. Dima (A. I. Dima’s father) when he was baptized at a ceremony officiated by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. This act of baptism was symbolic. Dima continued to remain Muslim. However, the symbolic baptism consolidated the bond between the two. It served two objectives. By winning the loyalty of I. Dima’s clan, it allowed the state to have more effective control of the pastoral region which has been difficult to govern. It also increased the prestige and political authority of the landlord. This act by the Emperor had a great symbolic value. It raised the prestige of the landlord and set him apart from other Oromo landlords of the area.

There are two important issues that are relevant here: firstly, how the process of centralization affected the position of the landlords in Efratana-Jille by creating a need for peasants’ labour. Secondly, there was fertile land in the eastern part of Efratana-jille that covered with trees and bush, and was uncultivated. This land was however occasionally used by the pastoralists. Since the process of centralization took place first in Wello and later on in Northern Shewa, it created space for peasants from Wello to migrate to Shewa. In order to
understand these issues we have to discuss the process of land settlement in Efratana-Jille during centralization.

b) Land Settlement under Centralization in Efratana-Jille

The landlord, A. I. Dima remembers with precision the system of land tenure prevalent in his area over one hundred years. He recalls the forms of land use and other land-related events from the times of Menelik II, Queen Zewditu I, Lij Iyasu II, Haile Selassie I, the Derg and the present regime. He states how before the arrival of the Welloye settlers, the land in his estate was not under cultivation; it was difficult for cultivation.

What I know about the time before I was born is based on what the shimaglewotch (the elders) told us. The rest is part of my own experience, which begins with the time of Haile-Selassie I. Until then, this whole area was tchaka (forest), and there were not any farms. The lands covered with forests and bushes were not cultivable. When they [migrants] began to arrive, we [the Oromo population] had just started farming a little bit.

He describes the process started by the new measures taken by the state after 1941, which eventually led to the grant of siso-gult by the Emperor. That forced him to search for peasants labour in Wello.

In the 1940s, the number of Government soldiers who were settling in our region began to increase. They reported to the state about the lands that were not farmed and appealed for these lands to be granted to them. When the Emperor heard this, he first ordered that the lands be measured in gasha (unit of land measurement: one gasha is equivalent to 40 hectares) and be granted to the soldiers.

During this time, both A. I. Dima's grandfather, Fitawrari Dima Immar, and his father Qen-Azmatch Immar Dima were still alive. They were important landlords of the area, who had other landlords under them. There were also other landlords mentioned frequently by A. I. Dima during the interview who had lands in that territory. One of them was Mehammed Aliye of Digurguru (who was also remembered vividly by the settlers for being the first among all the landlords in Efratana-Jille to increase the demand on his tenants, a problem

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21 Late 1940s.
discussed in chapter six).

Some of the maderia maret (land grants in lieu of salary) granted by the state to the soldiers were being assigned in the vicinity of his father’s and grandfather’s land. This decision of the state to grant lands to soldiers from outside their district was objected by his father and grandfather on the following ground, as narrated by A. I. Dima:

When my father heard that the Emperor was going to grant our lands to the soldiers, he appealed to the state authorities to stop the mirit (new settlement). He pleaded: izih maret lay vatafatarnew (we are created on this land). How could the land grant ignore us and bring soldiers from outside? We should be given priority over soldiers from outside. In response, the Emperor ordered the authorities to stop the mirit and get the lands measured in gasha to be given to the Oromo landlords who were living on it. If only there were any lands left after that, it should be given to the soldiers. The authorities followed the order and stopped granting the land to outsiders.

The fact that the emperor’s decision went in favour of the landlords’ demand shows the negotiating power of the local lords of that particular region.

The landlord explains the subsequent process of land settlement by the state accommodating the local hereditary rulers’ interests. He described its implementation as follows:

They began measuring the land in gasha and asked us to pick in sisó (one third), that is, every time they measured three gasha, we the balabat (landlords) got, one gasha. For every three gasha we received our melkeba (landlords under us) received one gasha, while the common people got half a gasha. After we distributed the land among ourselves and to the public, gebir tagamata (the tax was estimated).

I picked sisó for 85 gasha of land. Half of the land I picked was developed and the other half was not. For lem (cultivated land) the tax was 80 Birr per gasha, for lem-taf (partly cultivated land) 65 Birr, and for taf (uncultivated land) 25 Birr.

Land measurement and settlement had two implications. First, it gave landlords a definite right over the land under their control. Secondly it required them to pay fixed tribute on land under their control. In order to be able to pay the tax they had to find peasants to farm their lands. There were in all four landlords who brought Welloye peasants to their holdings in different parts of Efratana-Jille. However, my research focuses only on A. I.
Dima and the Welloye settlers of Berekha who were his tenants. The site of the village of Berekha and the land the settlers farmed was given to them by A. I. Dima on sharecropping arrangement. According to him, the tax he was required to pay was too high. The only way he could be able to pay the tax by getting his land cleared and cultivated. Once he ensured the land under was his control, the next step was to find the cultivators. That is what prompted him to go to Wello searching for peasants labour.

Because the estimated tax payment inda ras tsegur yebezana yemayichal silehone (was as much as the hair count and impossible to pay). It was at this time and because of this that we went looking for the sedecha\textsuperscript{22} in Wello. It is the gebir (tax) which killed us. From the time of the estimation, the tax piled up over the year and I was not able to pay. How could I? As I told you, the highland Amhara didn’t come down to farm here for fear of illness and the killings. The Oromo did not cultivate; they were pastoralists. As a result, I had to go and bring the sedecha here.

It shows that the landlord was not simply a passive victim of the centralizing state. Rather, he actively intervened to guard his own interest which enabled him to share the economic and political power with the state. The fact that independently of the state the landlord was able to arrange the labour for his lands gives strong evidence of this:

We said to them [the Welloye peasants]: come to Northern Shewa, and let us give you land to farm. Let us farm the land and eat. You are good at farming, our people don’t know how to farm. It is you idari mawtat maretun yemitchilut (who are capable of clearing the land), which our people can’t. Leminenachew (we begged them) to come, clear and plough the lands.

I went and brought them here: "merahuwachew" (directed them) to come here to work with me. I brought them here to develop my land because I was not able to pay gebir (the land tax).

At the initial stage, the peasants’ need for productive land to earn their subsistence and escape from the harsh conditions in Wello, and the landlord’s need for productive labour to cultivate his sis-o-gult holdings, complemented each other. This point was made clear by the landlord:

Because the land was taf (virgin land) with no income, the tax became too

\textsuperscript{22} A derogatory term used for Welloye migrants, see also Chapter One.
heavy for me to pay. Instead of getting uprooted from the land due to the accumulated land tax I owed the state, I told them [the Welloye] to come and develop the land so that the surplus I get from them will enable me to pay the tax. So, I brought them and settled them here. Although my father was the one who knew the Great Shaykh, it was not my father who brought them here, it was me. I started taking the surplus grain from them and selling it at the market and paid the tax to the government.

While the landlord asserts, "I am the one who brought the people of Berekha here," the settlers, without denying this claim, give precedence to getochu, the term of address they use for their Shaykh, who arranged and mediated their migration and settlement in Berekha.

In search of peasants, why did the landlord have to go north to the neighbouring regions of Wello? The Welloye peasants’ reputation for disciplined and hard labour was already known to the landlord. When I asked him why he chose Wello to get his tenants and not somewhere else, his reply was:

There are no other people who could work as hard as them. Even the Amhara of Shewa could not work as hard as the sedecha of Wello. They never tired of tilling the land.

The landlord needed the disciplined labour necessary for the area, which apparently the skilled and impoverished peasants of Wello could supply. The landlord’s narration again and again emphasized:

*Kale inasu man vichilewal* (Except them [Welloye peasants] who could have handled the work)?

The landlord had two distinct advantages with the Welloye peasants which he did not have with the local Oromo population. First, the pastoral Oromo were not used to the drudgery of sustained hard labour required for peasant farming. Secondly, their pastoral mode of subsistence made them autonomous. The Welloye peasants were more amenable to control than the autonomous pastoral Oromo. That is why the landlord decided to bring the experienced toilers and land hungry peasants of Wello to Efratana-Jille.

It is here the mediatory role of the Great Shaykh becomes important (see chapter six). He had influence over his people in Wello, who needed land. He also maintained contact with and had influence over the landlord in Efratana-Jille. He was thus able to bring the two
together. However, in bringing together the peasants and landlord, the Great Shaykh was also able to expand his religious teachings in Northern Shewa. It was therefore not a purely economic process.

c) Land Tenure in Efratana-Jille before the Arrival of the Settlers

Before the arrival of the settlers in the lowlands of Efratana-Jille, there were two patterns of land use by the Argobba and Oromo communities. There is no detailed account of the land tenure system practised by the Argobba before the arrival of the Oromo. On the basis of other studies (Chernet 1990) and the oral history I collected it can be inferred that their farming practice (terracing and the type of cereals grown) was similar to what is found in the highland regions. The landlord’s description of the farming tradition of the Argobba in the district of Efratana-Jille aptly illustrates this point:

Before the arrival of the Oromo, the people living in the lowlands of Northern Shewa were the Beni Omeya (Argobba). The Beni-Omeya/Argobba lived in the qola (lowlands) on the borderlines between the Afar and the area occupied by the Oromo, and on the border lines between the highland of Menzna-Gishe and the lowlands. The Argobba for centuries had built compounds with high walls and masjids (mosques). Some of these old masjids which are now in ruins still have their windows intact.

The Argobba were settled agriculturalists. They used the land differently than we do. Their farms were separated by irken (terraces). The ruins we find in the different areas of the land provide evidence of this. We were told that the Argobba fled this area after the arrival of the Oromo. They got frightened by the loud Oromo communal prayers and blessings, which were in a language they could not understand. Fearing that the Oromo yifajunal bilaw (will massacre them), they abandoned their farms and began fleeing at night eastward [towards the Afar] crossing the Awash river. The Oromo followed them all the way east to the Awash river to find out who these people were, but couldn’t catch up with them.

The migration of the pastoral Oromo northward disrupted the settled agricultural tradition of the Argobba population in Northern Shewa. The landlord’s statement supports this:

Once the Argobba were driven out of the region as a result of the Oromo migration to the area, their agricultural practices became extinct and
pastoralism dominated the area. It was not until the arrival of the settlers from Wello that agricultural production based on the plough in the lowlands was revived.

Contrary to the above, Hassen (1994) claims that the Oromo population in the area were already engaged in sedentary agriculture.

The land relations between the Oromo chiefs and Oromo pastoralists before the arrival of the settlers as narrated by the landlord was fundamentally different. Most significantly, there was no hierarchy of landlords and peasants. The landlord, A. I. Dima, describes:

In earlier days, the Oromo landlord and ordinary Oromo worked the land together. They scratched the land using animal horns and grew a bit of maize and sorghum. But no one sat down and ate the produce of another man's labour. We did not believe in hierarchy and did not put one on top of the other. We did not collect anything from the people who used the land. The land belonged to everybody. We were fraternal. We all had our livestock.

The system of land tenure and the tradition of land use by the Oromo of Efratana-Jille was different from the one that developed after the arrival of the Welloye peasants (discussed in chapter six). Land was a communal resource mainly for pastoralism (grazing), with minimal use for farming. Until after 1941, the landlords also paid minimally to the state in the form of vesar gebir (tribute of grass). The Amhara Christian highlanders used the fertile lands mainly for farming, while the less fertile and steep hills were used as pasture land.

The pattern of land use and the social and economic organization of the pastoral Oromo population of Efratana-Jille was less differentiated. Land in the earlier system was communally held by the pastoral society (Adhana 1987). A. I. Dima reminisced about this earlier system of arrangements rather nostalgically:

The land that was not farmed, the land that used to lie idle used to be respected by the Oromo people. The grazing land was respected by everyone. The grass was so beautiful. To show respect to the land and the grass, the Oromo elders and chiefs would take off their shoes when they had to pass through the area. They will repeat it again when they returned from the lowlands in September. I remember this custom, it used to be followed in this area and around Sanbate as well. The fields in Sanbate were in fact much bigger than here. One of the reasons why the pastoralists did not want to farm the land was because ja-maretu visasuletal (they were protective of the land) for their cattle. They did not want to over-exploit it. They were more concerned about their cattle.
During this period, the Oromo shared the produce among themselves. They did not have to pay ye-maret gibir (land tax) to the state, if they did pay the state anything at all, it was more like a gift.

IV. NEW SYSTEM OF LAND TENURE AND SHARECROPPINGS

The earlier settlers of the lowlands of Efratana-Jille were the Argobba, who lived by farming and trading. The area was subsequently occupied by the Oromo, who were pastoralists. There is not much information about the form of land tenure at the time when the Argobba were the main inhabitants. But, the land tenure system of the Oromo pastoralists was communal. With the arrival of the peasants from Wello a new land tenure system emerged, characterized by a landlord-tenant relationship. The Welloye settlers became the tenants of A. I. Dima, the Oromo landlord with whom they entered into a sharecropping arrangement.

The development of agricultural lands gave rise to yet another form of land tenure in Efratana-Jille, called yetej afliwootch merit (te~ (mead) brewers’ land settlement). The mead traders were purchasing land at a low price from the government mainly around the district town, Alem. In the process, land ownership was increasingly becoming privatized. These lands, acquired by the mead merchants, were also given out on a sharecropping arrangement to the Welloye migrants. This form of arrangement was however quite different from the sharecropping arrangement the Welloye settlers had with A. I. Dima, discussed below.

a) The Evolution of Landlord - Peasant Relationship

The arrival of the Welloye peasants gave rise to a new form of stratification (discussed below), which shows how the process of centralization/modernization resulted in social and political changes at the local level. This does not however mean that the pastoral society was egalitarian. There was a clear status distinction between the chief and the ordinary pastoralists. Thus, in the new system, the new hierarchy was grafted on to the old. The landlord gave his account of this process:

It was only after the state took the land and imposed gibir (the tax/tribute) that we began collecting money/grain from those who used the land. It was only after the government "appointed the landlords" and decided who should order
whom, who should pay what etc., that we changed. Before that we shared and lived in fraternity. I did not only hear about that from my father and grandfather. That system was still in existence when I was growing up.

The coming of the settlers gave rise broadly to two types of tenancy arrangements in the region. One was between the Oromo landlord and the Welloye settlers, another was between the settlers and other landholders in the area. The other landholders can be divided into two categories each of which had a different tenancy relation with the Welloye newcomers. The first were the traditional \textit{rist} holders in the district. The second category comprised the mead merchants who, with the establishment of Alem as the new district town, invested the profits they made from trade in land. Let us first discuss the relationship between A. I. Dima and the settlers, which is the most important for this study.

The arrival of peasants from Wello to plough the \textit{gult} land of A.I. Dima introduced a new land tenure system and peasant-lord relationship in the district. The specific characteristic of this new system of tenure was the development of landlord and peasant relationship between the Oromo landlord of Shewa and Amhara peasants from Wello. This marked the transition from a predominantly pastoral to a mixed peasant-pastoral economy. Furthermore, it had significant social-cultural implications by weaving people of different ethnic (Oromo landlord and Amhara peasants) and regional (the landlord from Shewa and peasants from Wello) backgrounds into a new relationship.

b) The Landlord as an Administrator

The landlord was also the political administrator of the area under his jurisdiction. This was an essential part of the \textit{(gult)} land tenure system. Unlike Wello, the hereditary rulers of Efratana-Jille did not lose their political right to administer the territories under their jurisdiction even after 1941. This was explained by A. I. Dima:

My father died in 1949 [Ethiopian Calendar].\textsuperscript{23} In 1950 [Ethiopian Calendar], I got his post as the district administrator. It was a hereditary office. Because we [the Oromo] are strategically located between the Amhara and Adal (Afar), and we know the people and their customs on both sides, I was given office in the administration and got posted in the desert of the Adal for four years. I

\textsuperscript{23} 1956 - 1957 in Gregorian calendar.
know the area very well. I have served here for over twenty years without any complaint.

When I took the office I did not even know the fidel (the Amharic alphabet). But they knew we had the experience of administration. When I was administering Efrata and Gidim, they called me imiye (a term of endearment to a person who has been very kind, equivalent to a mother).

The fact that the state allowed the hereditary rulers in Efratana-Jille to retain their hereditary rule shows the uneven policy of the state. The old system of allowing gult holders to administer the territories under their respective jurisdictions was not completely abandoned. This was more so in the pastoral areas.

c) Sub-Contract Sharecropping with Rist Holders

The influx of Welloye peasants to Shewa also led to the development of new sharecropping sub-contracts between the immigrants and the residents of the district who owned large or small plots of land. The latter included diverse categories of land holders, rist land, private land, widows, and the old with no family labour. Locally, this institution of sharecropping sub-contract was known as begamis (by half). Although addressed as begamis, tenants did not necessarily get half in each case. The tenant’s portion varied from contract to contract. Each contract depended on the bargaining position of the landholder. Prior to the arrival of the Welloye settlers, these sub-contracts were taken up by highland Christian Amhara peasants of the region. But due to the increase of Welloye settlers, and their readiness, and flexibility to pick up sharecropping contracts anywhere and under any conditions resulted in a shortage of sharecropping contracts for the highlanders. This condition created tension and competition between the highland Amhara and the new settlers.

d) Sub-Contract Sharecropping with Mead Merchants

The villagers remember two types of land settlement and acquisition by the people who settled in the new district town, Alem during their early settlement period. One was va balabbat maret (hereditary land under the landlords). The other was tej afli maret (mead brewers land), that is, land bought by those who sold mead. The sellers could be both men and women. The settlers cleared the land around Alem river and converted it into productive
farm-land. Land tenure in the uncultivated area became fluid and new interests in land were developing. After the earthquake in Kara-Qore, the district headquarters shifted to the town of Alem. It is important to note here that the establishment and the expansion of the town took place on the farm-land originally cleared by the settlers of Berekha. The development of the town gave rise to a new type of land holding. According to the settlers of Berekha, the tej- afliwotch (mead brewers) who moved from Kara-Qore purchased land around the town of Alem. Mead brewers were catering to the increasing population of the new district town. The development of the town as a market centre integrated the adjacent rural hinterlands. Increasingly, more and more people from far-off villages were coming to the district town for government services, trade, etc., which boosted the sale of mead. The mead merchants invested part of their profit in the purchase of farm-land, which they leased on sharecropping basis. During the earlier period of the district town, the mead merchants bought land, which was not rist or gult from the state.  

e) Progressive Increase in Landlord’s Demand

The villagers of Berekha understood that the welcome they received from the landlord and the local population at the beginning was in recognition of their hard work and agricultural skill. M. Girma’s reflection summarizes their sentiment:

It was all taf maret (virgin land) here: from Woday to Alala, it was all taf. There was no irisha (farm-land), except Addis Amba, Merma, where some of our people had already arrived in Northern Shewa were farming in the midst of the Oromo. So, when we came here, they received us happily. Lemin? Arsan inabalalena! (Why? Because we will plough the land and feed others).

As tenants of A. I. Dima, the villagers were given uncultivated land by him on the basis of sharecropping tehisagnet (tenancy) arrangements. Yimmar Muhe, one of the early settlers, relates:

According to the initial agreement of share cropping, irbo (a quarter) of the

24 As capitalism was developing in Ethiopia, after 1941 land was beginning to be commoditified. This was taking place mainly on state land. As Allan Hoben (1973: 230) wrote, "The possibility of land sale...is almost universally opposed...It would be a social as a moral evil if parents could sell this birthright for the love of money and personal advantage...".
produce was to be given to the landlord as a form of rent in return for the farm-land we ploughed. On top of that we had to give ke-asir-anid (one-tenth) to the landlord, which he had to pay as a form of tax to the state.

As the time passed and agricultural production became more established, and trade activities around the town began to grow, the landlord began to progressively raise his demand, from one-fourth, to one-third, to half, and so on. Mohammed Girma recalls:

When we first came, the sharecropping arrangement was irbo (one quarter). The landlord said: "you give me one silicha [about fifty quintals] out of four silicha of harvest." Then it went to siso (one third). Then came yahulat kifiya (dividing [the produce] into two). Finally, it reached the fourth stage, which was a fixed payment, forced payment. If we didn’t reach the quota, we could be told to leave and the land would be given to another tenant.

This was a new challenge to the settlers and they needed to find a solution.

Undoubtedly, the perseverance of the settlers to withstand the political and economic pressures in the new environment needs to be appreciated. Once again, they had to rely on their ingenuity and resilience. One survival strategy they resorted to was to acquire more sharecropping arrangements with different landholders in different villages. The early settlers who came with the Great Shaykh expressed:

When the landlord continually raised his demand, and we felt that he might even ask us to leave, we couldn’t accept it. How could we give up and return to Wello after we developed the land here breaking our backs? We decided to stay. It was at this time, we felt we were worth something and had to find some way out.

When we realized that the landlord might tell us to leave since he doesn’t need us any more now that we have developed the land and made it cultivable and productive, that we started searching for more contracts, and began farming as sharecroppers on new lands as far as Alala and Jawuha, wherever we could.

This account of the settlers was confirmed by A. I. Dima.

However, he justified the successive increase in his demand as the time passed and agricultural production became more established:

Initially, we said to them maretu idari wato le-abel iskidars diras (until the land is cleared and ready to produce surplus), whatever you produce will be yours. Only after the whole land area was cleared that we started demanding one quarter of the produce. As the time passed, we raised the demand to half of what they produced.

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The landlord did not see any injustice or unfairness in the increase. According to the narrative of the villagers, the Great Shaykh had advised them to put up with any difficulty they might be facing. Since his prediction was that there will come a time when the land will be theirs.

f) Victims of the Fruits of Their Own Labour

The traditional rights of gult land allowed the landlord to own the lands as well as politically administer the territory under his jurisdiction. This combination of economic and political rights in landownership increased his authority over peasants, making the latter more vulnerable. The vulnerability of the settlers was further increased due to the subsequent developments of the district which were ironically a result of their own labour. These included the entrenchment of settled agriculture, a later influx of migrants from Wello, and the development of capitalism in agriculture. The landlord tried to exploit this situation to maximize his interests. The settlers, on the other hand, sought alternative sources of land in their attempt to resist the increasing pressure from the landlord and to ensure a modicum of security for themselves. These were the social and economic conditions on the eve of the Revolution of 1974. How these conditions shaped peasants’ response to the Revolution and the reforms introduced by the Derg will be discussed in chapter seven.

The lands were developed by the migrants, with their own labour and rudimentary tools, without any technical or draft animal support from the landlord. While the development of the area, gave peasants a sense of their own worth, it did not make them the beneficiaries of the growth they brought. The increase in the number of new migrant peasants from Wello seeking sharecropping arrangements put the earlier settlers of Berekha under great pressure.

As the news travelled to Wello about the good harvest the settlers were making, impoverished peasants from Wello seeking sharecropping tenancy came to the district in larger numbers. The landlord expressed his opinion about this phenomenon as follows:

All the chigiregna (impoverished) people from Wello began to come here. These people are found in Gojjam too. From Wello they have reached all regions of Ethiopia. That is why they are called sedecha, meaning sidetegna.
(exiled people) moving to different places.

The solidarity and togetherness the villagers had which sustained them in the difficult environment of Efratana-Jille during the earlier period of settlement began to give way to competition and mutual suspicion. This was so despite the fact that most of the new migrants were related to the old (by birth or marriage). How this began to impact on the villagers’ lives was expressed by M. Girma as follows:

When we were visiting our homeland and we began telling people in Wello about the good harvests we were getting here. When our people heard this, those who were having difficulty at home, started coming here. This made the landlords hold their land tighter. They noticed, if we leave they will get others. So, instead of taking irbo, they started demanding siso (one third), then raised it to yakul/vagamis (half). Though, by this time, they were used to eating injera and they needed people to plough their land. But, there were many Welloye coming to do it for them.

It was rather ironic that the earlier settlers and their Shaykh having propitiated the jini, cleared the bush, controlled the malaria, made the lands productive and the place habitable, subsequently became victims of their own success. With the spread of their success story, more migrants from Wello began to arrive. The new migrants were willing to work for less. This process resulted in a decline of the value of labour of earlier settlers. As more migrants arrived, the landlord was in a better position to bargain for higher rent.

The landlord protected the settlers whenever there were conflicts between them and the Oromo population. These conflicts arose, firstly, over peasants’ use of land previously under pastoral tenure, and, secondly, when pastoralists let loose their cattle over peasants’ farms. It was in the interest of the landlord to protect the settlers from the pastoralists. The landlord protected the settlers in these conflicts but did not give them security of tenure. The settlers perceived this as injustice within their moral economy. Mohammed Girma’s narration articulates this sense of injustice:

We just kept on saying: inaw manitiran, inaw arsan, inaw zartan, inaw arimen, inaw achidan, inaw wakitan, inaw chinan (we clear the field, we plough, we sow, we weed, we harvest, we thresh and we load), and we have to give away more than half of what we produce, and that does not even give us any guarantee of tenure.
The labour of Wello peasants produced great wealth for the landlord, which helped him maintain his status. After the land was cleared and converted into productive farm-land, the landlord, instead of paying yesar gibr (grass/grazing tax) to the state, had to pay vemaret gibr (land tax), which was much higher. Thus, the labour of the Welloye settlers increased the revenue of the state collected from the province of Shewa. The villagers usually comment with a sense of irony and nostalgic regionalism about their own lives and their home province, Wello: "What to do? Welon laqan Shewan lin-abeletsig metan" (We left Wello to enrich Shewa).

Faced with the continual increase in landlord demands and competition from the new migrants, the settlers began to compare the conditions in Efrata-Jille to the conditions they left behind in Wello. There was no escape from the problems which made them leave their homes in Wello and migrate to Northern Shewa. Their plight remained the same.

The Welloye settlers’ contribution to farming in Efratana-Jille is further confirmed by Ato Tsegaye who worked at the district’s ministry of finance office before 1974. His understanding of the district’s political and economic history is informed and analytical. He states:

The Oromo did not live by farming, but bekebt irbata (by cattle breeding/pastoralism). This area the settlers are cultivating was under the administration of two Oromo landlords, Qan-azmatch A.I. Dima and Girazmatch Hassen Ummar Hibso. They used to pay tax to the state in the form of yesar gibr (grass tax) for grazing land. Until the settlers came and cleared the area, it was all covered with girar (acacia) and zigba (podocarpus gracilior). Clearing the land and converting it for productive agricultural use required tremendous amount of hard labour.

The settlers were very conscious and rather proud of the fact that they converted the virgin, uncultivated and initially un-cultivable land into productive agricultural land. They saw themselves as the pioneers who introduced settled agricultural development in the lowlands of Northern Shewa. Even the landlord’s testimony confirmed the settlers’ account of their pioneering role in developing agricultural production on the one hand and Oromo’s lack of agricultural knowledge and skills:

According to what our elders told me, the Oromo originated from Abay (the
Blue Nile. They came Abayin wuha teshagiro (crossing the waters of the [blue] Nile), and spread in different parts of Shewa [which means they came from a direction which is north west of Efratana-Jille].

When they came, they did not know how to farm. They subsisted by kabit iribatta (cattle breeding). It was after staying here for a long period of time that they began planting crops such as beqolo na mashilla (maize and sorghum). It is only after they properly settled in Ifat that they began farming. They did not start farming until we were born. Earlier, they were planting crops in a very limited way. They used wild animal horns like Sala to scratch the earth, they did not know the plough. They dug the earth and planted grains one by one by hand. Since they mainly relied on dairy products, the small harvest they procured by using such primitive methods was enough for them for the whole year. They did not need much grain. There were times when they did not eat any cereal for up to a year.

It is important to note that the migration of Welloye peasants discussed here was not an isolated event. The spontaneous migration of peasants from one region to another seeking fertile land has been taking place for centuries. This process has been especially common in the areas adjacent to the lowlands, pastoral and semi-pastoral regions of the country. Even in the memory of the settlers of Berekha, the migration of peasants from Wello to Northern Shewa has been going on since earlier times. M. Girma recollects:

When our people started coming I was not even born. Our forefathers and fathers used to tell us that when they came to visit this area, the whole land was covered with bush and was used as pasture by the nomads. The people in this region started to plough after seeing the Welloye migrants. After seeing how we work the land, what we eat, that is, after imitating us, the population of this region really started farming. Before that, they used to come to markets of Kara Qore, Sanbate and Shewa Robit to sell their cattle and buy grains from the highland Christians and the Argobba.

The labour of the hard-working Amhara peasants of Wello converted the marsh and uncultivated land under the jurisdiction of the gult holding Oromo landlord into one of the most fertile and agriculturally productive lands in the country. This process shows that ethnic and linguistic divisions were not necessarily antagonistic, nor were they unsurmountable. People of one region were moving to another and actively interacting with the local people of diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. This was a result of the agrarian
conditions of endemic poverty precipitated by droughts and famines, and administrative
injustice which forced people to migrate from one region to another in search of livelihood.
What is specific in this context is that the migration process was not from rural to urban but
from rural to rural. In this process, the traditional agricultural knowledge and practices along
with the social and cultural traditions of one locality diffused over diverse regions.

Spontaneous migration has thus been a major factor for much of the history of
population distribution in Ethiopia. The historical significance of the spontaneous migration
of people has been discussed by McCann (1995). My findings agree closely with McCann’s
central thesis stated by Gebissa:

[It was not] the northern land tenure system, the Amharic language and the
Ethiopian Orthodox church [that] were the primary instruments by which
northern hegemony was extended over the southern territories...these factors
were secondary to the social transformation brought on by the spread of ox-
plow agriculture and the consequent ‘ecological revolution’ which gradually
transformed the physical landscape and the social organization of the
subjugated peoples....northern ox-plow technology and the accompanying
annual crop regime played a crucial role in effectively integrating the southern
peoples into the northern mode of production and way of life (Ezekiel 1996).
CHAPTER SIX

THE PIVOTAL ROLE OF THE SHAYKH AND THE SHRINE FOR SETTLEMENT IN BEREKHA

In this chapter, I will focus on the political and economic roles of religious leaders and institutions. The intertwining of the religious, with the economic and political will be highlighted. Essential to this depiction is the argument that for the group of Welloye settlers under consideration, it was precisely the intermingling of the religious with the political-economic that produced a highly stable and tight-knit community which proved capable of withstanding the destructive forces exerted by poverty, as well as famine that was induced by war and political instability. Indeed, the Welloye settlers of Berekha (meaning blessed) were able to resist these destructive pressures precisely because of the cohesive power exerted by religion, following the guidance and teachings of their charismatic leader, the Great Shaykh.

The chapter opens with a discussion of the historiography of religion, emphasizing the tradition of accommodation between Christianity and Islam. This discussion seeks to reflect the settlers’ perception of the Great Shaykh, and examines his critical role in the migration and settlement of Welloye peasants in Efratana-Jille. It is emphasized that the Great Shaykh’s decision to lead his followers to a new region was based on a careful political and economic calculation, accompanied by a series of negotiations with the leaders controlling the region into which they migrated. The recollections of the settlers are characterized by a series of mixing of mythical and religious sentiments with the realities they faced in their new political and economic environment. These reflect the complex role of the Great Shaykh as political and religious leader. It is emphasized that the Great Shaykh continually created an appropriate economic, political, and cultural strategy for his followers. His function as a creative leader, developing a set of religious and moral rules that allowed for a smooth functioning of community life, even during a period of worst political and social strife, is shown through the narratives of the settlers. At the same time, the settlers’ active participation in creating and implementing these political, economic, and cultural strategies, through their faith in religion, self-sacrifice, discipline, hard labour and strict obedience to the Great Shaykh’s precepts, is discussed.
The place to which they migrated was associated with one *jini* (evil spirit), which reflected past difficulties for human settlement and making a livelihood from the land. The purpose of the initial rituals and ceremonies at the time of settlement was to pacify the *jini* and make it leave the specific area the village was built and the surrounding land the settlers first cleared and farmed. The Shrine created by the Great Shaykh and associated ceremonies and rituals contributed to the cohesion of the social structure supporting the settlers in times of need. Central to the most important rituals was the sharing of food at the shrine, which proved essential to the survival of the community. Rituals associated with the communal sharing of coffee served several functions in the rich social life of the settlers of Berekha. The communal sharing of coffee bolstered collective empathy and solidarity even in conditions of utmost poverty.

In this chapter, the character of these rituals is examined and their function as reflected in the settlers’ recollections are discussed. It is argued that food itself became a ritualized object and eating a religious experience. The investment of these acts and objects with special meaning was in part a viable strategic response to prevailing economic and political conditions. The crucial role of the Shrine and the food rituals is clearly recognized and valued by the settlers. They associate the Great Shaykh’s actions with supernatural meaning, giving great value to those aspects that are pivotal for their communal life. These elements of their collective lives are examined by focusing on one community member, the *khadami* (host), a single woman who served the Shrine. The great respect that she receives within the community reflects the settlers’ recognition of the Great Shaykh’s importance in maintaining the communal system of reciprocal support. The Great Shaykh and the settlers worked to create a set of rules and codes of behaviour that were crucial for the functioning of the community. These codes and rules continued to help the community even after those times the Shaykh had left the village permanently for Mecca, and the community had to function without him.

Death and burial are among the most important social concerns for the highland Amhara society. More than any other social events, burial, mourning, and grieving together are culturally significant because they establish the link between the individual and the society. It is for this reason that the institution of *gire* is so central to both Christians and
Muslims of Welloye society. Literally, qire means burial association. It also has a wider meaning, referring to an occasion for gathering, or belonging to the community at large (see Pankhurst 1992: 188). In this chapter, I discuss the role of qire as a key institution in the social life of the settlers.

I. THE GREAT SHAYKH AND THE SHRINE

a) The Role of Religious Leaders

In chapter five we have seen that it was peasants’ need for land and the landlord’s need for labour which eventually brought them together. However, the landlord and peasants did not come in contact on their own. Rather, it happened through the crucial mediatory role of the Great Shaykh. In the accounts of the peasants, this point is given greater importance. The mediation by the Shaykh is pivotal to the entire process of peasants’ immigration and settlement in Berekha.

From the fourth century onwards, Christianity in Ethiopia has been interwoven with the political organization of the state. Because of their importance in understanding the state and society, much has been written on the subject of Christian saints. Ignazio Gudi’s (1896) statement aptly describes the intricate relationship between religion, state, and society:

A class of sources very important for the history of Abyssinia are the lives of those saints who had some influence on the events and the development of that country: neither should this cause any surprise if one considers the more or less theocratic nature of the government and the power of the clergy (cf. Tadesse 1972).

Consequently, the value of understanding the lives of the local Christian saints for the study of Ethiopian history has been increasingly recognized. The life histories of many of the saints available in Ethiopic manuscript collections of European libraries have been published, translated, and annotated. Tadesse Tamrat (1972) rightly notes that a critical study of the life histories of saints available in the Ethiopian Church Library can be very useful for an understanding of Ethiopian society and history. His reconstruction of the relationship between church and state (1270-1527) in Ethiopian history provides an excellent source on the subject. His work mainly draws on Ge’ez, written sources available in the monasteries and the library of the Ethiopian Church consisting of Gadla (hagiographical) tradition and the royal
chronicles. However, research on Ethiopia’s rich and diverse indigenous Islamic tradition has lagged behind and, as result, there has been very little study of the lives of Muslim saints. Hussein (1984) is rightly critical of the dominant tradition in Ethiopia’s historiography which has not paid attention to its old Islamic tradition and history. In the process, the significance of Islam for understanding Ethiopian history and society has been neglected. Even within the limited available material on Islam, and Muslim - Christian relations - in Ethiopia, there have been distortions and omissions. As a result, "only the conflicts between Christianity and Islam constitute the most significant theme in any study on Ethiopian history in general and Ethiopian Islam in particular" (Hussein 1984: 40). On the contrary, however, Muslim scholars and religious figures in the course of their teachings, rather than confrontation and conflict, showed a high degree of flexibility and adaptability to the local conditions. In this chapter, I illustrate these points by discussing the role of a Sufi saint in the process of helping his poor peasant followers to find secure livelihood and maintain harmonious relations within the community and with the outside world.

Overall, in contrast to Christianity, Islam in Ethiopia lacked direct state support. However, in Wello, the lack of direct state support was compensated by both Christian and Muslim leaders’ deliberate attempt to accommodate each other. One mechanism evolved in this process was the baptism of Muslim hereditary rulers into Christianity. This was a symbolic gesture to affirm that the Muslim hereditary rulers, like their Christian counterparts, were subordinate to the Christian ruler of the state. This did not make the Muslim rulers abandon their religion. In fact, it allowed them access to the Emperor to win favour for their subject. These baptized rulers continued to be patrons of the ulama (religious teachers) of Wello whose teachings reached out to the rural populations. In addition, traders and well-to-do peasants supported the ulama. As a result Islam in Wello became integrated both at the court and grassroots level.

Another important point to note is that despite Islam’s lack of state support, there are striking similarities between Christianity and Islam in Wello. One important area of similarity was in the style of teaching and in forms of organization of schools. Another area of similarity is the lack of resources and localization of teachings, which characterized and
shaped both Christian and Muslim education in Ethiopia (Hussein 1986: 102). Particularly in the rural areas, both Christians and Muslims face lack of resources and infrastructural facilities for education. The life of the ulama in Wello has been characterized by that of general poverty, while the lives of students depended on patronage by traders and well-to-do peasants. Like their Christian counterparts, students are expected to support themselves during the period of their study by begging for alms from the wider village community. Both religions prescribe alms giving as part of religious duty (see Hussein 1986:103). Through this system of teaching and patronage, the isolated rural masses became connected to the great traditions of Christianity and Islam in Ethiopia.

Another area of similarity is how both religions are held by the popular masses. For Christians, in spite of Church and state alliance, all sites of monasteries and churches as well as the lives of religious figures are remembered by the popular masses more for their religious role rather than their secular (political and economic) role. In the popular consciousness, religious importance takes precedence over secular, even though as Donald Crummey (1972b: 3) points out, the missionary expansion of the medieval Ethiopian church embedded with secular aspects (see also Crummey 1972a: 55) Similarly, early settlements of the Islamic community in Ethiopia are remembered mainly for their importance in religion (for instance, see the section on the Argobba). My own research findings exemplify this trend. The Great Shaykh of Berekha is remembered and revered by the settlers more for his religious than for his political and economic knowledge and contribution to the community. However, as discussed below, the Great Shaykh was not only a religious figure. In addition to his religious knowledge, he also possessed political and economic wisdom. He combined his religious and secular knowledge to help his impoverished rural followers from Wello secure livelihood and retain their cultural identity in Efratana-Jille.

b) Who Was the Great Shaykh?

The oral history from the settlers indicates that the Great Shaykh was not only a religious figure, but also a nobleman, a landowner, and an important political figure. In Wello, he held high status and prestige among the local landlords.
He had a house in Tekhuledere, Ambasal district, Wello. His house had ilfign-kadarash (banquet and reception halls). When the balabbats (landlords) of Wello visited him, or invited him, they wore their shema adagdigaw (a style of wearing the White toga by Ethiopian men to show respect) around him.

They [the landlords] gave banquets in his honour. Both Christian and Muslim landlords used to serve him and protect him. Even the Christian priests used to come to serve him. So, when we moved here, he did not have any problem with the Efrata Christians of the district.

His connection with Lij Iyasu II (1911-16) and his opposition to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (1935 - 41) are indications of his political importance. But, the villagers of Berekha emphasize mainly his spiritual qualities and religious, charismatic deeds, attributing to him a saintly character. While his political role was remembered and clearly articulated only by a limited number of villagers, his religious deeds and charismatic qualities are clearly remembered and emphasized by all the settlers. To highlight his political acts and secular importance, settlers in their narratives, emphasize his divine qualities. For instance, his opposition to the Italian invasion is associated with the popular belief that his miracles diverted the bombs the Italians were dropping on his compound. Thus, his followers’ narratives elevate the Great Shaykh to sainthood. The settlers assert that his compound was protected by God from such destructions. Yimmar Muhe narrates:

Even the Italian bombs could not touch his palace. Thinking that it was the home of one of the nobility, the Italians tried to bombard it. Every time they tried, the bomb always ended in Hardibo lake. Because, it was a great house protected by God. Finally, when the Italians arrived at the compound of his house, he dressed just like an ordinary peasant and escaped. The Italian’s ashkaroch (servants) trying to catch him went around asking: 'shumu yetalu' (where is the title holder)? But, they found no trace of him. God was protecting him.

c) The Great Shaykh’s Departure from Wello to Shewa
Why did the Great Shaykh leave Wello? Two factors were mainly responsible. One was pressure on the Great Shaykh from the official in Wello, which seems to have resulted from his increasing popularity among the large section of the poor and his connection with Lij Iyasu. The second factor, already discussed in chapter five, was the unjust economic and political pressure by the new administrators appointed by the central government in Addis Ababa. These factors, combined with the shortage and degradation of agricultural land, induced the Great Shaykh along with his followers to look for land elsewhere.

Haji, who was a servant and student of the Great Shaykh and thus knew him closely, explains the nature of the accusation by the newly appointed officials in Wello:

The inderase\(^3\) (the governor) of Wello during the time of Lij Iyasu, ras Nadew sibatabitu (was spreading the rumour causing disturbance) that Iyasu was being converted to Islam by the Shaykh. The spread of this rumour upset the Shaykh and he renounced the world (mananu) and exiled himself into a cave.\(^4\) He returned to teach the Quran. But got interrupted again, when the fereni (foreigners/Italians) came to our country, who were undressing the set-woizero (the notable ladies), who were degrading people and bringing those we revered to shame. At this point the getochu said: "I cannot witness all this degradation," and moved to an Arab country, Mecca. He wanted to avoid seeing the fereni doing this. Later on, when he heard that the Italian soldiers were leaving, he returned to Ethiopia but stayed in a cave again for one year. Only after they left, he came out of the cave. At this time, the public received him with honour because he was a menan (a renouncer), and negesu\(^5\) (he was resurrected).

During the time of power struggle between the supporters and opponents of Lij Iyassu there was a widespread rumour that the Great Shaykh was enhancing the influence of Islam at Lij Iyassu's court. The objective behind this rumour was to demoralize the supporters of Lij

\(^3\) The title of a provincial governor until 1974 which literally means like me, that is, like the emperor who had the authority to appoint governors under him.

\(^4\) Memenen (to renounce the world) is very common in Ethiopian Christian tradition. The renouncer, usually a priest or someone with some knowledge of the religious texts, will wander in search of religious and spiritual wisdom to become a bahtawi (hermit). While in the cave, he usually eats leaves and wild fruits, never cuts his hair nor shaves. He will then return back to society as a Bahtawi. Up on his return, he wanders all over the country, visiting parishes at different towns, cities and villages to preach and teach about his new revelations. He gives sermons only around the church and its compound, but not inside/within the church. The sermons include messages revealed through dreams, about being a good devotee to God, praying and not forgetting the poor.

\(^5\) Literally it means he was crowned.
Iyassu and his father, King Mikael.

By continually giving food and other valuables the Great Shaykh was creating a large section of followers:

In Wello, the Shaykh lived only by holding prayer. Visitors to his shrine brought gifts and he in turn gave away all the gifts to his followers and to people who served him loyally. He had plenty of tagara birr (silver dollars) which he spent on people's welfare.

This form of gift-giving by the Shaykh is called jabata/hadiva (sacrifice). The dominant values of both Christianity and Islam in Ethiopia encourage alms giving and feeding the poor. This norm combined with the impoverishment of Wello peasantry during the period, attracted a large section of the people beyond the capacity of what the Great Shaykh and his shrine to support. The village elders who vividly remember the conditions in Wello stated:

In Wello the land was small, but there were a great many followers. Day and night food was prepared at the shrine to feed people (feast). The Shaykh said: "the population of the poor is growing; there are too many people here, let me go to another place and live there." That is how he came to Alem, even though, he had land in Hardibo.

The Shaykh’s popularity among the masses in Wello created discomfort for the local administrators. His charitable acts and increasing popularity created suspicion and fear among the local administrators, who tried to tarnish his image. Yimmar Muhe and Haji provide the social and political background for the Shaykh’s departure from Wello. They narrate:

He left Wello because there was a widespread accusation that the liqawint (intellectuals) of Wello were eating [making their living] by calling the jini, rather than by tilling the land.

Haji interprets the accusation in terms of his own understanding and analysis of the social conditions in Wello at the time:

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Silver thaler minted and in use during the time of Menelik II.

For instance Aba Issa's description of Wello's rural scene in the 1930s.
Every one prayed at our Masjid. Our religion became "tingola" (witchcraft) and heresy, because our people were illiterate.

The important factors that necessitated the departure of the Great Shaykh with his followers from Wello were a combination of the basic need of farming and eating, and the religious objective to continue teaching. Ato Yimmar’s explanation illustrates this point:

Our Shaykh said, the qalichawochu (the learned religious men) of Wello are not suitable to help me. So, let me go to Ifat and ‘arishe libla’ (let me farm and eat).

When I enquired how and why he selected this particular place for settlement, the settlers’ narration inextricably combined the Great Shaykh’s dream with politics, state, history, land shortage, and environmental degradation in Wello. The narratives of the settlers and the landlord converged in their understanding of the tradition of accommodation by Wello rulers towards Muslims. Both the landlord and elder members of Berekha village remember Lij Iyasu II fondly. Even though none of them were born yet during his reign, they have nevertheless retained the memory of those times through a rich oral history. The settlers remember his short-lived reign as a period when Wello was administered justly. For the landlord, talking about this period is both political and personal. Reminiscing what his father had told him, he said: "my father and Lij Iyasu II were good friends, they participated in sports like gugs (a horse game similar to polo) and horse riding together". This confirms the political link between Northern Shewa and Wello at the time of Lij Iyasu. The landlord’s father, Fitawurari Immar Dima, had close contacts both with Lij Iyasu and the Great Shaykh. The village elders recall:

The Great Shaykh following Lij Iyasu, had visited Sanbate. He knew this area before we were even born. In fact, he even planted and watered the trees, which we now see in Sanbate. That was when he spotted this area. At that time, this area was covered with bush and forest. There was no settlement. He [the Shaykh] requested Fitawurari Immar Dima: ‘give me this uninhabited and uncultivated land and let me develop it’.

The settlers attribute the Great Shaykh’s choice of site for the settlement in Efratana-Jille to his supernatural vision. Those who accompanied him on the first trip to Alem present

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8 Lij Iyasu is famous for his love of outdoor activities and sports (see Bahru 1991).
his choice of the site as follows:

While the getochu was praying, Alem appeared in his dream. It was revealed to him by God through a dream that the new land of settlement is surrounded by two rivers, Alem and Getu. Situated between Efrata and Gidim of the Amhara Christians on one hand, and the Dugurguru Oromo clan on the other, there is taf maret (uncultivated land).

Though the villagers in their narration focus and enhance the mediatory role of the Great Shaykh between God and themselves, it is possible to clearly draw from these narratives the worldly role played by the Shaykh in the entire process of migration and settlement. It was the Shaykh who selected the strategic site of Berekka. He was able to see the economic potential of the fertile virgin land between the Alem River and Getu Creek.

d) The Great Shaykh and the bad Jini of Alem

There are many myths surrounding the Great Shaykh. These myths enhanced his charisma, and religious and moral authority over the settlers. In addition, they enhanced his power to deal with the landlord and outside groups. Thus the myths can be interpreted as a creative and very useful activity of constructing a stable social space.

One of the important myths included the Great Shaykh’s ability to propitiate the jini (evil spirit) of Alem. The jini is found in peasants’ supernatural world as well as Orthodox Islamic belief. The Great Shaykh’s ability to contain the malevolent influence of the jini and protect his followers provides an explanatory system in terms of the villagers social world and moral values. The villagers’ narrative and explanatory models provided them the avenue to enhance the Great Shaykh’s charisma. For example, the particular spot revealed to the Great Shaykh in the dream as a suitable site to build the shrine had been feared for the sickness it had been associated with. It was believed to be occupied by the most malevolent form of jini. Because of this fear, the landlord (M. I. Dima’s father) discouraged the Great Shaykh from building the shrine and settlement on that particular spot. As one villager describes it:

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9 Dugurguru is the area bordering the Jille Oromo clan on the eastern part within Efratana-Jille district.

10 In Amharic jini is singular. The plural form of jini in Amharic is jiniwotch. According to narrative of the people of Berekha and the landlord, the site had only one jini.
The whole area was **taf** (uncultivated land covered with forests and bush) and the **jini** did not allow even a single person to stay here overnight. Berekha, the place where we are settled now used to be called Tchir (deserted). It used to make people sick within minutes of their arrival to the spot.

The villagers’ understanding is that the Great Shaykh first tried to persuade the landlord I.Dima (the father of A. I. Dima) about his ability to pacify the **jini**, and his premonition about the suitability of the particular spot to build the settlement for his followers. From their narration it appears that initially he was not able to convince the landlord. Those who accompanied the Great Shaykh during his first trip recalled:

At the beginning the **Getochu** spoke to Fitawurari I. Dima about the particular site he wanted to build Berekha Mandir and the land he selected for his followers to cultivate.

He requested the Qan-azmatch’s father to give him the permission to develop the area. They [the landlord and his family] told him that the area was haunted by **jini** and was impossible to farm. But, the Shaykh said he would manage it and explained why he was not afraid of the **jini** when he decided to come here. Because he knew how to talk to the **jini** and calm it. He had a gift from God to work with **jini**. The **jini** obeyed him and was under his control.

But the Fitawurari did not keep his promise. Finding this out the Great Shaykh returned to Wello very disappointed. Soon after following his departure from Efratana-Jille, the Fitawurari died.

The popular belief among the settlers is that the death of the Fitawurari was a direct result of the offense he caused to the Great Shaykh. They interpret it as a punishment sent from God. Similarly, the incident made the family of the deceased landlord realize the supernatural power of the Great Shaykh. They promptly decided that the son, A. I. Dima would go to Wello and plead for the Great Shaykh’s return to Efratana-Jille.

He pleaded with the Shaykh: "**ibakhwon yihen maret inalmaw**" (please, let us develop this land). Qen-azmatch promised to fulfil the initial wish of the Great Shaykh, that is, to grant him the specific spot for the shrine and the land he wanted for his followers.

This incident is perceived by the settlers as the Great Shaykh’s triumph over the landlord. They describe their first arrival to Efratana-Jille following the Great Shaykh most enthusiastically:
There were eighty aba-wera (head of households) that came with the Great Shaykh initially. We came from Hayiq, Tekhuledere, and Hardibo. When we first arrived here, the Shaykh slaughtered a white lamb and smoked a lot of adrous (a mixture of aromatic barks and incense used for prayers) to make peace with the jini. He gave the jini a name with a feudal title and called it Fitawurari Filate.

It was then he brought us, eighty aba-wera (household heads) initially with him to Efratana-Jille and said: eyaresachihu injera tibalalachihu (you shall till the land and eat injera).

He said: I have called this place Berekha. This site is hagere selam nat (she is a land of peace). From now on, no one will die here any more.

This chain of events contributed to an enhancement of the supernatural power of the Great Shaykh among his peasant followers.

The landlord A. I. Dima’s testimony confirms the settlers’ account that Great Shaykh had proposed to his father to give him the land which his followers would develop into productive farmlands. Moreover, he also confirms the belief in the history of the jini of Tchir (the name of the site, which the Great Shaykh renamed Berekha), that had rendered the region prone to sickness and made it uninhabitable:

The land around where Berekha is located was prone to a particular kind of sickness and people who came near it used to die. Particularly, if the Amhara came down from the highlands of Gidim and spent a night here, it was to be sure that the next day they will be infected and die as soon as they arrived at their village. People will pass through here by car, but never want to come too close to this area. It had a bad kind of jini. This particular area, used to be called Tchir. It got the name Tchir because forty people from Gidim highlands once died here of the jini. However, with the arrival of the Sedecha and the development of the area, combined with the smoke from the cars, it began to get better. Now with the arrival of medication that the situation has further improved. Otherwise, no one could dare come here.

Thus, both the villagers and the landlord agree in their account of the belief in jini and the area being prone to sickness and uninhabitable. But, the landlord’s narrative emphasizes the importance of the demographic (the arrival of the settlers) and infrastructural factors (development of roads) in pacifying the jini. The settlers, on the other hand, attribute the pacification of the jini entirely to the supernatural power of the Great Shaykh.
e) Farming and Eating as the Key Issue in Migration

The most important issue that brought all the three principal actors - the Great Shaykh, peasants and landlord - together was farming for subsistence. The narration of both the landlord and peasants converge on one point, that is, tilling the land and eating. They all used the same idiom to express their sentiments about the main objective of peasants leaving their homeland and coming to Efratana-Jille, "let us farm and eat." For a society faced with land shortage, drought, famine, and perpetual poverty, tilling the land and eating became an important idiom of expression. Especially for peasants of Wello, tilling the land and eating automatically carries the meaning - farming and harvesting cereal to eat injera.

f) The Centrality of the Shrine

The Great Shaykh and the shrine were central to the collective existence of the settlers. They were the source of social cohesion and integration in the new unstable environment. Right from the beginning, the Great Shaykh emphasized the value of community spirit and sharing. This value which was a continuation of the past tradition was further strengthened in Berekha through the institutions of qire (funeral-burial association) dua (communal prayer), wonfal (voluntary labour contribution), coffee and tchat ceremony and food sharing.

g) Collective Obligation to the Shrine, Qire, and the Village

One of the important collective obligations of the settlers was to maintain the farmland of the Great Shaykh and the shrine through wonfal. Settlers enthusiastically describe:

The Getochu had his own farmers, who did the farming for him and the shrine (village masjid). In addition, there were other (three to four persons) who took care of his oxen. Then there was Meremma who was in charge of cooking for the Shaykh and the shrine.

The rest of us, [the settlers] farmed for the shrine for a limited number of days, as part of our contribution to the shrine. This could be for Miazia\(^{11}\) (April), Gimsha (feast of sacrifice), Mirai, and Ashura. For Gimsha, there will be up to one-hundred-pairs of oxen ploughing. The other contribution was le-zer (good

\(^{11}\) Miazia (April) is the harvesting season for the Belg (short rain) crops.
quality grains stored for seed and times of scarcity).

Farming was ordered by the qire dagna (judge of the qire), where everyone was called to farm for the shrine on a yearly basis. All farming activities - ploughing, weeding, harvesting, threshing and carrying - were organized by the qire. We had a high level of cooperation and everyone of us used to get in the mood of inisra! inisra! (let us work! let us work!). There were no azai (bosses) to order us around. It was only God who was ordering every one of us to work diligently: our own conscience ordered us. If anyone refused to work, no one was there to force. However, no one refused. Everyone was interested in working together.

What we harvested collectively went to the shrine. On the threshing ground, we separated what was going to be stored, to be buried underground in the pit, and what was going to the mill. Later on, the whole community used to get involved in preparing the dough, and baking the injera. Then we just said: "Mawlid". On this occasion, nine steers will be slaughtered, or five, depending on the season. Within a year, we had three days of mawlid. These days were occasions for digis (feasts).\(^{12}\) It was only for these feasts that the Getochu had to have his land farmed. It was only for Sedeqa (feasts following prayers after death).

The voluntary labour for the shrine organized by the qire epitomized the spirit of collectivity, farming, eating and praying together. It was the essence of the Great Shaykh’s teachings to his followers.

The majority of Ethiopians have had to live through recurring droughts, famines, and wars. As a result, death is omnipresent in their consciousness. Proper burial and death rituals are therefore of utmost concern in the life cycle of most Ethiopians. This is guaranteed by funeral, burial, and mourning associations. Irrespective of the social standing of the person concerned, this tradition ensures honour and dignity both to the dead and the grieving. To mourn and grieve alone is a sign of moral, spiritual, and social poverty, and destitution.

By ensuring collective burial, mourning and grieving, the institution of qire elevates the death of ordinary peasants to a higher social and spiritual level. The collective responsibility of death and mourning, rituals gave the individual a sense of dignity, and

\(^{12}\) The important religious days were identified as Miazia, Gimsha, Miraj, Mawlid, Ashura (the event a few weeks after the end of Ramadan, Eid al fitr.)
enhanced social cohesion. The fact that the people of Berekha migrated in groups following
the Great Shaykh enabled them to recreate their qire, which protected them from the anxiety
of not having proper burial and funeral rituals in the new environment. The institution of qire
is always important, however in the new environment, it acquired a much more significant
function than before.

h) Communal Eating, Coffee Drinking, and Tchat at the Shrine

Settlers describe the basic rules governing social life the Great Shaykh prescribed for
them.

Our Shaykh prescribed three rituals and assured us that if we follow these
rituals strictly, the jini will not touch us. The three rituals he prescribed were;
i) Tarbi, a ritual of coffee ceremony at the shrine for all the people of Berekha.
ii) Khadra (communal religious chanting), a ritual performed three days a
week. It involves having dua/wodaia on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and
Thursdays. iii) Mawlid, a ritual to be performed and celebrated three times a
year.\textsuperscript{13}

In Berekha, in continuation of the old practice set by the Great Shaykh, each day starts
with people meeting at the shrine for solat (Islamic communal Prayer) between five a.m. and
six a.m. After the prayer, qurs (snacks/breakfast) and coffee, which are provided daily by
members of the community by rotation, are shared collectively in the shrine. When the
harvest is good, the snacks consist of wat (stew) and injera, serebat, anebabero, kitta, and
dabo (variety of Ethiopian breads prepared differently from different cereals). Coffee and
food sharing are initiated by intense blessings given by the village Shaykh, or village ritual
elder and dubarti (female ritual elder), followed by all those who participate in the ritual. All
the villagers are encouraged to contribute to the food shared in the morning according to their
capacity. The villagers absorbed and followed the tradition without any question. Their
typical discription of the tradition of the Shrine is:

The rule requires all the Aba-Wera (male heads of households) to drink their
coffee together at the adarash (reception hall) of the shrine.

\textsuperscript{13} Ramadan (the 30-days fasting), Mawlid (The Birth of the Prophet), and The Meeting of Adam and Eve.
The household which provides the coffee and meal for the day receives the blessings. The blessings reinvigorate the bond between the individual household and the wider village community. Since it is the responsibility of different households to provide meals, the quality and quantity of these ingredients depend on the general state of the village economy and the budget of each household. Thus, in times of scarcity, it is not possible to provide stew with *injera* and bread, nor *qashir* (fine quality beans) coffee. Instead, *berbere* (a combination of chillies, herbs and spices) is sprinkled on the bread and served. In times of greater scarcity, when it may not be possible to provide even bread; just *qollo* (roasted cereal and legumes), or *nifro* (boiled cereals and legumes) may be served with coffee. There are even more scarce moments such as *seba-sebat* (seventy-seven, that is, 1984-85), when they were only able to have coffee made from *janfal* (coffee shells mixed with a tiny proportion of *qashir* (good quality beans).

i) Coffee Is Social

The coffee ritual is meant to generate and maintain the communal spirit. To encourage communal sensibility and sharing, no household is expected to make its morning coffee and drink it individually. Rather, every morning, residents of the village are obliged to come to the shrine for communal morning prayer and the coffee ceremony. Early morning, there will be a call from the Shrine:

‘*Arihb yabuna saw tabilo vitawojal!*’ (It will be declared, Arihb coffee human [people]!). Pounding morning coffee in each household was prohibited by the Getochu, so that everyone gets to drink the coffee together.

Pounding coffee means making coffee. Furthermore, the settlers explained pounding carries another meaning. More than from the smell of the roasting coffee, it is easier for the neighbours to identify a household that is making coffee from the sound of the pounding.

The actual process of coffee making and the ceremony are important areas of daily social activity that is common to both poor and rich, rural and urban people, in Ethiopia. Each time coffee is brewed, it follows the same procedure. First the raw coffee beans are washed and roasted, then pounded with mortar and pestle made from wood, and brewed in a special coffee pot made from clay. The special types of utensils used are believed to give the
coffee the particular flavour desired. Even with this, the subtle and fine coffee taste varies with each preparation. Well-to-do households make coffee at least three times a day, following the same procedure.

Coffee is the most communal and ritualized beverage in Ethiopia. The coffee ceremony is always associated with prayers, blessings, entertaining guests, and occasions to make vows. Particularly in the Welloye tradition, it is both a social and a religious ceremony punctuated by intense blessings. The only exceptions are funerals and mourning when coffee ceremonies do not have blessings. It is the most shared item involving family, relatives, and neighbours. The daily coffee sharing at the shrine maintained the continuity of this tradition and provided relief for the poor.

The coffee ceremony goes hand in hand with the burning of incense. It initiates and concludes the coffee ceremony, which has three boiling stages. It begins with abol jaba (first brew sacrifice). The khadami (usually a woman) who serves the coffee spreads the palms of both hands to receive the blessings and calls for jaba. The religious figure, or ritual male/female elder gives the blessings usually in the following way: "May God give you good harvest, health, character, and may you and your zer (seed) multiply." The second brew from the same coffee is not accompanied by blessings. The ceremony ends with the third brew, which is called berekha (blessing). The same blessings as used for the first ceremony are repeated, the khadami repeats amen, amen. Throughout the ceremony, the incense is set to smoulder on the ember contained within a small decorated clay dish. More incense is added to the ember during the last brew, berekha.

Despite endemic rural poverty, the shrine, like all places of worship in both Christian and Muslim traditions, is adorned with incense, myrrh, aromatic plants, bark, and branches. Frankincense and myrrh are both tree-resins, which are used for incense, perfume, cosmetics and medicine. In addition they are considered effective at warding off evil spirits. Both for Muslims and Christians of Ethiopia, worship is associated with cleanliness and incense, as

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14 Hence, even households who can afford and have access to coffee grinding machines resist using them, for fear that the taste of the coffee they are used to will be affected.

15 Incense burning is also part of a ritual offer to the adbar (deity). Both Christians and Muslims perform rituals dedicated to adbar.
good scents are believed to bring people closer to God and ward off the evil spirits. Even lime is commonly distributed among worshippers for its fragrance. When Dua and Wodaja are held, lime is one of the donation items worshippers bring to the shrine of Berekha.

Coffee and incense are the two items considered essential for each household. If a household lacks these two items, it is believed to attract all the evil spirits. People generally advise each other, atchisubet (make smoke) meaning that the house needs the smell of coffee roast and incense. Absolute poverty, when a household lacks the ability to have the coffee ceremony at least once a day, creates a sense of acute desperation and depression for its members. Sometimes poor households burn a piece of wood or cow dung as a substitute. It is in this light one has to see the significance of the ritual of communal coffee drinking at the shrine. The daily ritual of prayer and coffee drinking at the shrine protects the vulnerable from falling into this sense of destitution and loneliness.

Tchat, a mildly narcotic leaf, is chewed with relish by both sexes. Men and women hold segregated ritual gatherings to sit around and chew tchat. The men do it until their cheeks bulge out, while women do it in a more delicate and subtle way with little bulging of the cheeks or green spittle around their mouths as possible. Sometimes hiding behind the natala (white cotton shawl). The tchat chewing ceremony, like the coffee, is very communal and spiritual. For the ceremony people clean themselves and sit around on clean hides or rugs and burn incense. During the ceremony all the plucked tchat leaves from the stem are collected, cleaned, and given to the ritual elder to pass around. Each time the tchat is passed around, the ritual elder recites a new prayer and gives blessings to the person who provides the tchat. The blessings, usually in the form of ‘may you be green, moist and fresh like the tchat leaves’ represent peasants’ preoccupation with fertility.

The Tchat chewing ceremony could also be used as an occasion for discussing public issues. During the Derg time because of the political dissent generated at these gatherings, the tchat ceremony was banned in the urban areas.

The tchat chewing which originated among the Muslims, has now become a form of entertainment for other communities as well. Even in northern highland regions, where this ceremony was not practised before, it is now taking root. Farmers, becoming aware of tchat’s potential as a lucrative cash crop, have started growing it. There is a potential risk that
might take over fertile farmlands replacing food crops in the highland regions, as it is a plant that thrives in high altitudes.

Food for the people of Berekha is an indispensable ritual object and all prayers are punctuated by food sharing followed by a coffee ceremony intensified by incense burning. The prayers, accompanied by sharing of food and coffee, maintain the solidarity and continuity of the village on a daily basis. The daily meetings for prayers at the shrine guaranteed people, especially those from households with meagre resources (barren women and men, anyone with misfortune) that they were able to get some coffee and food and the smell of incense. This was, and is still, a communal way to take care of the poor and the destitute. These prayer meetings intensify during times of crises, such as drought, famine, sickness, death, feud, and other social calamities.

The 1984-85 famine is remembered vividly by the villagers as issat/qawti gize (the fire/cruel time), signifying the famine as a flame sent from heaven in the form of divine punishment. During this period, the villagers of Berekha were able to share at their shrine just coffee. As the drought and famine intensified they shared coffee made from plain janfal and without a snack. Though the famine brought destitution to everyone and they were acutely aware of their impoverishment, they were nonetheless able to survive without any loss of life until food relief provided by the state and international aid arrived. It is important to emphasize that, in the tradition of the villagers, sharing is not meant to make the poor feel inferior, but to make them feel that they belong to the community. Instead of going to beg from outsiders, the relationship between giver and receiver within the community takes the form of a partnership - partnership in worship, sharing, and celebration of food together.

Through participation in these rituals at the shrine, the villagers are encouraged to show human kindness to one another. This value permeates the day-to-day interaction among the villagers as well as with the outside community at large. People are generally encouraged to be gracious. Old people are respected and they in turn behave generously towards the young. Guided by the teachings of the Great Shaykh, the elders set the rules defining the requirements of good conduct for those who otherwise might not be aware, or get the essence of it. For instance, it is very common to see those who arrive early at the shrine for prayer give up their space for the old, the sick, and pregnant women. The young and healthy
members assist the weak to and from the shrine. Though a poor farming community barely subsisting in the midst of scarcity, the village tries to make its members more sensitive to others through these rules of etiquette rooted in the old Ethiopian tradition. These norms gave the villagers who were otherwise poor and discriminated against by the neighbouring community a sense of collective identity, self-respect, and human dignity.

To illustrate this important function of the shrine in the life of the villagers, particularly, in supporting the old and poor members of the community, I shall use the life history of Meremma Ahmed Biru (age approximately 75 or 80), who was the only woman to accompany the Great Shaykh and the first group of settlers to Berekha. Based on her personal experience, she describes the importance of the shrine to the life of the settlers at the initial stage of settlement:

I came together with my husband and his two sons to Berekha. I did not have any children. Because I was barren, his relatives and family persuaded him to divorce me and get married to another woman. He refused to grant me a divorce, but went ahead and married another woman and had four children. After some time, my husband and I along with his two children followed the Getochu and came to Berekha. While the four of us came together, his two daughters stayed back with their mother (with my husbands’ second wife). One year after our arrival here, my husband passed away. As soon as their father died, even his sons I raised left me and went back to Wello. But, I am still here.

Both my husband and I were khadami (in charge of serving in the shrine and the Getochu’s household) to entertain his guests who came from outside. When my husband died, I became the sole khadami. My job was to grind grains, make dough, bake injera, cook wat (stew) and serve. Whatever I cooked and served, was always appreciated. Every one liked the food I made and that was my reward.

Since Meremma was the only woman who came to Berekha with the first group of settlers, she had to cook and serve all of them. That gave her an elevated social status:

I acted like a mother to many of them. I treated all of them like my own children, I did not neglect any of them, nor did I leave them alone without any attention.

Her long service to the shrine elevated her social standing. The shrine and the whole experience of working for the community provided her a source of strength. For her, those
days were aman-gize (peace/blessed time), or turu zamen (good era), that brought people together. The present-day neglect by some members of the village, especially the young, in keeping the old tradition the Great Shaykh set for Berekha is her great concern. For instance, she attributes the eruption of the feud to a bad time, which divides people.\textsuperscript{16} The bad time is the time of scarcity, which prevents people from having ritual and communal feasting. She believes that reviving this tradition will heal the village. In her current vulnerable condition of being old without children, or other kin, reminiscing about her days of active and close association with the Great Shaykh and her role as a khadami at the shrine excites her. She finds the memory of the old days when the Great Shaykh was still around and she led an active life as a khadami, serving the Great Shaykh and his followers, rewarding. When she recalls the earlier days of their life in Berekha, the settlers' ethics of hard work and dedication to the shrine resurface again and again. Her narrated memories of those days were often punctuated by a loud chanting that carries both a religious and secular message: "Wello majan (chanting of God), make the younger ones kasib" (work [plough] hard).

Despite her childlessness and poverty, Meremma enjoyed high status in the village. She was the head of the village dubartiwoch (female ritual elders). Her high status in the village was earned by the fact that she was the first and only female who accompanied the Great Shaykh along the sixty to eighty aba-wera (male household heads) to Berekha. As the khadami of the Shrine, in charge of feeding and serving all of those who came initially, leaving their families behind, she had special status. With a lot of pride and self assurance, she declares: "I am the khadami at the getochu bet (house)." Her long service to the shrine is recognized by everybody, and older men of the village address her affectionately as ye-bet lii nat\textsuperscript{17} (house child).

The settlers recollect how the Great Shaykh while he was in Wello always took care of women, the weak and vulnerable. As a result, many barren and older women without relatives congregated around his Shrine:

\textsuperscript{16} While I was doing fieldwork, there was a feud in the village in which three people were killed in one evening.

\textsuperscript{17} The meaning of ye-bet lii is domestic slave, which could mean that she came from a slave background. However, Muzayen was respected and treated well by the villagers.
In his adarash (banquet hall), the women were always served in the mazakir (inside the most central part of the house where the commemoration for the Prophet takes place), while the men were served in dunkuan/das (tent/canopy).

The law the Great Shaykh established on ritual and morality was followed rigorously. In the absence of property and material resources, his holiness and piety penetrated deep into the consciousness of the villagers. It created an independent source of moral and ethical authority which they followed. The high ethical and moral standard he set continued for most in the social life of the settlers even after he left for Mecca. Meremma’s vivid recollection of his teachings and his advice before his departure illustrates this point:

The Getochu warned us to continue with the prayers every morning, instead of having them once a week on Friday, we continued praying every morning. We follow his advice because once, during the time of our earlier settlement, we stopped the daily morning prayers and many people died. Then the Getochu warned us never to stop the daily morning prayers and gatherings at the shrine and the deaths stopped.

When he was about to leave for Mecca, he said, "sayidochin takabay" (receive the Saints), dua adrigiln (make dua for me) and never leave the Berekha Mandir.

Even during the 1984-1985 famine, we continued to have the prayer and coffee without qurs (snacks) everyday. The Getochu had made a waadi (a vow). Because of his waadi, he has told us: 'we will be safe and we will not die.'

Without a husband, a child, or an immediate family member to take care of her, Meremma survived the 1984-85 famine just like any other member of the village. She describes how she relied on the resources of the Berekha community:

I have all the people of Berekha. They feed me. During the famine, people shared with me what they had. First of all, I got my coffee in the shrine every morning. Later on, when things got worse, the Berekha community registered me at the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission office, and I received food aid.

In addition, visitors (outsiders, both Christians and Muslims from different areas), who used to know the Great Shaykh come to visit the shrine, give me money.
The sound of machine guns and scud missiles during the period of intensified civil war between the Government (Derg) forces and the Ethiopian Peoples’ Democratic Revolutionary Front (EPDRF) in the mid 1980s has left Meremma deaf in one ear and reduced the hearing capacity of her other ear. Even though the civil war and political instability have impinged on the endurance and the survival capacity of the villagers, they have not abandoned their responsibility towards this more vulnerable member of the Berekha community.

My findings about the role of the shrine in providing collective solidarity to the settlers confirm an important idea in the anthropology of religion, underlined by Durkheim. The idea of a church, as defined by Durkheim, is a sense of belongingness to a wider collectivity. By sharing common beliefs and rites people create a moral community that binds them together. This point is particularly relevant here because during drought and famine, the potential threat of the collapse of the community became real. The critical significance of religion in such moments is that it brings people together and saves the community from disintegration. Because Durkheim lived and worked in France through a difficult period of history, he was genuinely concerned with the questions of social integration and morality. Durkheim’s writings emphasize the critical role religion plays in social integration. His observations are relevant to current day Ethiopia. This can be appreciated in the context of the role played by the Shrine of Berekha. The solidarity and sense of common purpose in the settlers’ community was able to stretch far enough to protect its members from the impact of radical social change, civil war, drought, famines, and political instability.

j) Asceticism as a Norm for the Settlers of Berekha

Through his teachings and practice of living a life like the majority of people around him, the Great Shaykh was able to demonstrate to his followers asceticism as a tariq (path).

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18 From the mid 1980s EPDRF had strong guerilla forces as well as popular support in the highlands of Menzina-Gishe. Menz and Gishe are rugged mountains 4,000 metres above sea level, bordering the Efratana-Jille district on the north-western side. The mountains of Menz and Gishe became a good hideout as well as a strategic base to attack in the direction of southeast the government forces and offices in the town, and the main road linking Addis Ababa with the northern provinces. Since Berekha is strategically located on the way to Gidirn (see map), it was used by the government forces to launch rockets and scud missiles directed at Menz and Gishe.
In Berekha, he prescribed a strict ascetic code of conduct for the settlers. Thus, singing even for weddings was prohibited, which as the villagers put it: "happens only once in life time." He strictly prohibited the singing of naf jale (a traditional wedding song from Wello) in Berekha. It is a pre-wedding song sung at the precise moment of dif-dif simolla (when the barrels containing the fermented telilo\(^\text{19}\) beer paste are filled with water) to make it ready for the wedding. This event precedes the wedding day by five to seven days. A group of young girls from the village will gather to transport the water needed for the drink. The task usually involves many round trips to the village spring, or to a water pipe often covering long distances. It demands heavy labour from the girls since in order to fill the barrels for the wedding, they have to carry the insira (clay jar) filled with water on their back. Though the girls have to work hard, the singing not only mitigates the drudgery of hard work, but it enhances the festive atmosphere as all the unmarried boys and girls of the village join in singing. However, even until now (the time of fieldwork) village elders prefer to avoid naf jale, so as to keep a low profile and sobriety. The main objective is to maintain the social rules initially set by the Great Shaykh, which emphasized humbleness as a strategy of survival in Efratana-Jille:

This song was prohibited in Berekha by our Great Shaykh. When a wedding gets too lively it doesn’t fit us, and such things are not for us.

k) Peace, the Fundamental Rule in Berekha

The Great Shaykh’s teachings and their development and enactment by the settlers need to be understood as a careful and successful cultural strategy for survival and enhancement within a very restrictive set of political and economic constraints. While in this section and the previous the teachings of the Shaykh have been emphasized, since those are the elements most readily found in the settler’s memories, it must be recalled that the Shaykh created these strategies through continuous discussion with members of the community. Hence the rules are as much the community’s as the Great Shaykh’s, creatively and

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\(^\text{19}\) Telilo is the beer prepared by the Muslim community. The only difference it has from tella, the beer of the Christian community, is that it is prepared without hops.
effectively adapting to local circumstances. The Great Shaykh’s role was that of synthesizer and leader. He was able to prevent dissension amongst the settlers, while at the same time providing a coherent and well-orchestrated response to the changing relationships the settlers had to have with the neighbouring and more powerful peoples.

For the villagers’ survival in Efratana-Jille, peace was the fundamental prerequisite. The Great Shaykh was aware that the spot he chose for the shrine and the village was prone to conflict, where pastoralists of the lowlands and farmers of the highlands fought each other for access to fertile lands and water. He therefore emphasized the value of peace for the entire area. The emphasis on peace was consistent with his belief as a Sufi saint. He lived according to what he preached and he wanted all those around him to follow the same.

The getochu never tolerated quarrels, arguments or shouting. He said, I have stopped the blood spill between the Amhara and Oromo of Efratana-Jille. The jini makes them fight.

To illustrate how the Shaykh wanted to inculcate this fundamental rule in the consciousness of the settlers, they recalled an incident when two servants of the shrine fought in his compound:

He cursed anyone who initiated a fight within Berekha. When his two servants fought, he said: ‘since fighting meant to be like the local Christian Amhara and the Oromo, I wanted you to avoid that. I named this settlement Berekha. If the people of Berekha I brought and settled here are themselves going to create fights and spill blood, I shall not live here to see it. My idea is to make people plough to eat. You are bringing fights because you are full, you are no more hungry’. He told us this and left for the town of Kombolcha [Southern Wello].

After the Great Shaykh’s departure, there were several deaths in Berekha. The settlers interpreted this as a divine punishment for violating his rule. Haji recalls,

Between the months of September to November, we buried fifty-four people. At this point, we all agreed to obey his teachings. We walked all the way to Kombolcha as a form of atonement to beg the Great Shaykh to return back to Berekha.

The Great Shaykh advised the people of Berekha to have peace among themselves within the village, as well as with the local Amhara and Oromo population. The settlers were not only sensitive to avoiding conflict between themselves and the local population, but they
also tried to build bridges between Oromo and Amhara, who were fighting each other. The Great Shaykh said, the jini makes the Oromo and Amhara of this region fight. We will push the jini aside and neutralize it, and "iyakasabin\textsuperscript{20} iyabalan ininoralen" (we will till the land, we will eat, and we shall live). Hence, in addition to their own survival, the settlers began to see themselves as mediators between the two rival groups who were fighting each other. Mohammed Girma claims:

\begin{quote}
We mediated between the Amhara and the Oromo. No highland Amhara dared to come this way. None of them dared to come here without an armed escort, because the Oromo will kill them. We came here, cut the forest and cleared the way for them.
\end{quote}

The important role of the Great Shaykh and the shrine in addressing the main concerns of the villagers is embodied in the following poem the women of Berekha sing during dua ceremony.

\begin{quote}
Aman awulenn, aman awulenn  
Ye-Berekha geta getocu majan

Yihun, yihun, yihun!  
Ahun! (chorus)

Gibu, gibu Aminatt  
Yegetachin inat

Gibu, gibu imete Ansha  
Yemutan mashesha

Imete, Imeteyitu  
Ye-Berekhayitu

Zeyine, Zeyine nabiye  
Wolelawa nabiye (chorus)

Imama hodu yibaba  
Mukhtun yizo, sindewun yizolin jeba

Yihun bey, yihun bey imama (chorus)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{20} Iyakasabin means to work hard on the land in Wello peasants' Amharic dialect.
Indet naw Berekha ye-getochu bet
Ye-Hidar abol, ma-eed bet ye-miserabet

Indet naw Berekha yetsonenaw bet
Yetarezew hulu yemilebisibet
Yeterabew hulu yemitagibat
Yetememew hulu yemidinibat

Shararitun afirsew
Wudimawun Akintaw
Nabar abiltawun
Berekha yeduro yihun

The above Amharic poem translates into English as follows:

Let our day be Aman, let our day be Aman
The lord of Berekha, getochu majan

Let it be, let it be, let it be
Now! (chorus)

Come in, come in Aminat
Mother of our great lord

Come in, come in madame Ansha
Refuge for the dead

Madame, the great madame
Of Berekhan

Zeine, Zeyine prophetess
The purified prophetess

Imama (mother), may his heart be soft
Bringing the mukhit, bringing us the wheat, jeba [sacrifice for prayer]

Say let it be, let it be mama

How is Berekha, the house of getochu
Where the abol [coffee], the kitchen is being made/built

How is Berekha the house of good deeds
Where all the poor are dressed
Where all the hungry get full
Where all the sick get healed

Dismantling the spider web
Clearing the field
You had fed us
Let it be the old Berekha.

Chewing tchat and sipping coffee, the women of Berekha chant, being absorbed into the mood of ingurguro (a mood of mourning and singing).

II. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT

In the first sections, the role of the Shaykh as a crucial leader and mediator is emphasized. Again here, the emphasis is on the Great Shaykh’s teaching, and especially his emphasis on peace, that was perfectly suited to the complex political-cultural situation in which the settlers found themselves - precariously located at the border between the highlanders and the pastoralists. In this section the insecurity brought about by their lack of secure tenure rights in the new environment is examined. The multi-sided perceptions among the different groups will also be explored. Here it is emphasized that the settlers had clearly understood their subordinate position within the local moral economy. On the basis of this understanding, they were able to devise a survival mechanism to effectively exploit their position in two ways: first by making sure that they presented no threat to either of the two traditional groups in the region, and second by acting as mediators between the two, following the norm laid down by the Great Shaykh.

a) Political and Social Ingenuity: Emphasis on Peace and Harmony with the Neighbouring Communities

The marginal position of the settlers in Efratana-Jille, in particular their lack of securing tenancy or rist rights, was the crucial factor that made them devise creative social and political strategies. Thus, their marginal status meant that they had to take a conciliatory role, and accept lower status. In Wello, they had a higher status due to rist rights in land.

In the new and unstable environment, the settlers had to rely on a strategic combination of the teachings of the Great Shaykh and their own social ingenuity. To begin with, the Great Shaykh’s teachings to his followers were not limited to religion and morality.
He also provided them shrewd and useful political advice to protect their interests. They recollect one of the parables he used in his teachings:

He advised us to remain quiet and complacent. Be quiet and be like the dead. Even a goq (wild fowl) held in a trap, if she pretends she is dead, the trapper will leave her in the forest thinking that she is dead, and later on she can escape. But if she struggles too much to escape as soon as she got into the trap, she will make noise, and the noise will call the trapper to catch her. So, if you are not quiet you will call for trouble. But, if you wait quietly, the land will eventually become yours. He assured us of success if we followed his advice. So, we followed his teachings carefully.

In addition, he prescribed social and political rules they could use in their dealings with each community. Regarding their relation with the highland Amhara community, Haji summarized the Great Shaykh's advice as follows:

The Getochu told us that our centre of refuge is the highland Gidim and, not the lowland area. Because, it is only our religion that is different from the highlanders. If the Oromo attack us, it is in Gidim where we shall have a place to hide. He instructed us to teach our young people not to fight with the highlanders since they will be our place of retreat.

The migration and settlement of the people of Berekha did not only rest on a matter of finding fertile land and a landlord. Their settlement also needed adjustment to a new political and cultural milieu. Making a livelihood involved creating positive social networks in this challenging environment. Hence, the migrants simultaneously had to use their labour, traditional agricultural skills and knowledge, along with their social-political ingenuity. Although the villagers are too modest to admit this, their ability to adjust in the midst of turbulence that has historically characterized the social and political landscape of Ifat is a testimony to their social talent and political skills. It required a delicate balance. For in the new unstable surroundings, seeking a source of livelihood and rebuilding their community, they could not rely on the state. Neither the state nor the local landlords were really in a position to control the region effectively and ensure stability and order. On the other hand,

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21 Because people do not eat meat that is not Halal, or Birkh for the Christians.

22 The highlands' civility and law abiding behaviour is contrasted with the lowlands' anarchy, that is, between law-fearing peasants and autonomous pastoralists.
the settlers needed peace and stability, which was a fundamental prerequisite for the pursuit of peasant agricultural production in the frontier region of Efratana-Jille.

It is in this context that the Great Shaykh played an important role. His religious authority and charisma served a useful purpose particularly in pacifying the pastoral Oromo, whom the settlers feared most. His teachings on religion and morality radiated outside the village, reaching out to the neighbouring Christian and Muslim communities of the area. This gave the village an aura of respect and fear not based on coercion and secular authority, but on the sacred authority of the Great Shaykh and his teachings. The religious and moral influence of the Great Shaykh won the affection and respect of the outside community. Their perception of the Shaykh’s role in warding off the jini of Tchir, where no one dared come and settle down before, enhanced his religious power and charisma. The aura of his moral authority elevated the status of the village, and restrained outsiders from intruding into the settler’s community. As a result the settlers felt secure to dedicate their energy to pursue their livelihood.

b) Economic and Social Insecurity

The landlord wanted the settlers to remain his tenants, but he ensured they did not acquire any claim to the lands they cultivated. Consequently, he did not allow any direct contact between the settlers and the state. Hence, the additional ten percent of their produce which they had to pay as tax to the state for the lands they farmed was directly paid to the landlord. He feared that if he allowed them to pay the tax directly to the state, it would have given them a space for litigation to claim more rights, in land and autonomy from him. The villagers recollect what the landlords discussed among themselves, which reflected these fears and suspicions:

'If I allowed them to pay directly to the state for the land they farmed, they will claim it as their rist and take it away from us (landlords): so they must leave our area.'

The landlords' fears and suspicions were well-founded. In 1966 the government issued a third decree of land tax which was supposed to terminate the intermediary role of the gult holders in the appropriation of surplus. However, it has been argued that the decree was
not effectively implemented by the state due to the landlords’ efforts to block it by using their political power in the parliament (Bahru 1993: 193). It was a period of transition in which the state, landlords, and tenants were all engaged in trying to increase their rights while protecting what they already had. Consequently, the ties between them were tenuous. These were the conditions on the eve of the Revolution and how they played out after the Revolution will be discussed in chapter seven.

The landlord’s attempts to restrict the rights of settlers went farther than preventing them from having direct contact with the state. One very sensitive issue, where the landlord’s intervention had adverse consequences for the settlers was the prevention of the Mosque that the Great Shaykh and his followers wanted to build in Berekha. Once the settlement of Berekha was established, the Great Shaykh wanted to improve on the shrine. In comparison to the tukul (thatched roof dwellings) of the villagers the shrine was much larger and well built. The building material, in addition to stones and wattle-daub had pines to support the walls and the roof. Yet, in order to expand further and elevate the status of the shrine, the Great Shaykh ordered his followers to improve the building. One of the plans was to replace the thatched roof with corrugated iron sheets. However, this plans was prevented by the landlord. The settlers who were involved with the renovation plan describe:

He wanted to build a nice masjid in Berekha with qorgoro (corrugated iron sheets for roof). We went as far as to the parish of Bar Gibi in Gidim to get building materials and carried them over the mountains. We brought tid (pine seems) for the wall, etc, and just began building. Then the chiqa-shum (village chief) went and reported to the qen-azmatch [the landlord] that "the Getochu was building a masjid on your land." At this point the qen-azmatch said: "I have taken back my initial promise for the construction of the masjid and from now on I prohibit you building: Ya Wello hizib hagaren liaslaqiqagn naw (the people of Wello are going to uproot us from our homeland)," and ordered the building to stop. He and his family began to say: "after we brought them as bemegazat (on share-cropping contract), are they going to uproot us from our land?"

He stopped the Getochu from building a Masjid for us, because he believed that if he allowed us to build the masjid in Berekha, we would take over the area.

When the disappointing news reached the Great Shaykh, he asked all the people of
Berekha to stop the construction. Despite the serious setback he faced, the Great Shaykh’s reaction was nevertheless stoic. Yimmar Muhe, who was present when the news arrived at the shrine, describes the Great Shaykh’s response:

When the Getochu heard the bad news, he instructed us to stop the construction. The chiqa shum was the one who reported to the landlord and got the construction stopped. The Getochu went straight to him and asked: ‘are you the one?’ The chiqa shum replied, ‘yes’, and the Getochu went silent. Shortly after that, the chiqa shum became blind.

The settlers did not perceive this incident as a setback to the Great Shaykh. On the contrary, by making a direct association between the chiqa shum’s offensive act against the Great Shaykh and his subsequent blindness, they restored the Great Shaykh’s supernatural power and saintly charisma.

The landlord’s decision however shattered the Great Shaykh’s hope of building a Masjid to expand his teachings and increase the influence and prestige of Berekha over the neighbouring communities. It played a decisive role in his eventual decision to abandon Berekha and depart for Mecca. Nevertheless, the settlers kept his wish (to build a better masjid). The current religious proselytization taking place in the area encouraged from outside, such as the Wahhabiyah order (which I witnessed during fieldwork)\(^23\) has given further impetus to the villagers’ old wish to build their own mosque in the village. I shall discuss this issue later.

c) The Great Shaykh’s Departure from Berekha

The Great Shaykh’s departure for Mecca, like other events in his life, is wrapped in mythical and religious significance for the settlers, which helped to enhance the efficacy of the Great Shaykh’s teachings even after his permanent departure for Mecca. As seen in the

\(^{23}\) a) The Wahhabiyah order, advocating strict observance of the precepts of the Quran and insisting on the emulation of the life style of the Prophet and his successors, which could not "secure the allegiance of Ethiopian Muslims" (Hussein 51), is now actively engaged in proselytization in Efratana-Jille.

b) It is not only the Muslims in Ethiopia who are under pressure from outside proselytizing forces. The Ethiopian Church and its followers are also experiencing similar pressure from the Born Again proselytizers (see appendix B).
following examples, the settlers interpret the subsequent political and economic developments as conditions prophesied by the Great Shaykh. The events were reinterpreted in order to emphasize the culturally and politically important aspects of his teaching.

How is his final departure for Mecca interpreted by the landlord and the settlers? Both are sure that the Great Shaykh went to Mecca. For the landlord, who is still respectful towards him, the Great Shaykh simply left; he went to Mecca and died there. On the other hand, the settlers’ narrative of the Great Shaykh’s departure is far more complex. They mix important events that happened in the country before the time of his departure to Mecca with events that took place afterwards. The fact that nobody witnessed exactly what happened to him once he was in Mecca is used by them to continue their belief in his supernatural and saintly qualities, and his prophecy. Haji, who was the Great Shaykh’s closest associate and who accompanied him to Mecca, fondly recollects:

I was 27 years old when I came with the Getochu to Berekha. I was the one who carried his kaka (cape), books. During prayers I was the one who led the khadra (religious chanting). I was never separated from him for a minute. So, even when he decided to finally leave Ethiopia for Mecca in 1955 (Ethiopian Calendar), I escorted him. There were forty of us on this voyage. Only two of us were from Berekha, while the rest were all from Kombolcha. We first went to Addis, then to Mitswa (Massawa), stayed there for eight days and then took a ferry and went to Gidah (Jiddah). When he left his age was 95 years.

The settlers continued to use the Great Shaykh’s prophecies as a guide to understand and explain the major political and economic events that took place after his departure. They recall that just before his final departure for Mecca, the Great Shaykh told them:

‘I am not going to stay in Ethiopia because there is going to be trouble. I had enough with Ethiopia.’

According to the settlers, the Great Shaykh had prophesied about the coming trouble in Ethiopia, that is, the Revolution of 1974. The radical change and violence after the Revolution is interpreted by the settlers as follows:

The Shaykh had prophesied: All those "ya-gubo ya-bag mukit ya-belaw hulu na hodu hulu yatanafaw" (who have eaten the fattened lamb taken in bribe and become fat) are going to be ruled by a slave and suffer.

What the above testimony shows is that, Ethiopia was going to be governed by a
commoner, instead of the descendent of the ruling dynasty and the corrupt bureaucrats of the feudal regime were going to be prosecuted.

The settlers believe that the Great Shaykh was dismayed over Ethiopia’s future:

It is a country where even Emperor Haile Selassie I was not going to be allowed to have a burial in Ethiopia.

Proper burial is sacred to all Ethiopians irrespective of their social position. The denial of a proper burial to the Emperor symbolized the climax of cultural crisis, anticipated by the Great Shaykh.

The Settlers’ narratives about the Great Shaykh’s vision of the future course of events also carries an apparently contradictory message. On the one hand, he was pessimistic about the future of Ethiopian society but, on the other, he was optimistic about the future of his own followers in Efratana-Jille. They recollect:

He told us: ‘Do not worry, just work hard. There will come a government that will help you in the future’.

The settlers’ belief in the Great Shaykh’s supernatural power protecting the Shrine and the village long after his departure, even in the aftermath of the Revolution, continues. This is expressed in their explanation of the events of the civil war and instability of the late 1980s in the district. For instance, settlers recall one important incident when,

During the Ethiopian Easter of 1988, the EPDRF fighters, dressed like peasants, disguising themselves as the people of Berekha, moved into the shrine and ordered all the residents of Berekha who were hiding in the shrine for safety to move out. The fighters then checked if there were government troops in the village. Once they were assured there were no government soldiers, they moved their ammunition to the shrine. From the shrine, they aimed to shoot their Ballistic Missiles at the government garrison in the town. The missiles went dead; they couldn’t be fired! The fighters had to move out and find another spot to use their missiles. This was the miracle of the Great Shaykh and his shrine! If they had succeeded in firing their missiles from the shrine, the government soldiers would have retaliated and many people in Berekha would have been killed. The Great Shaykh had blessed Berekha and his blessings remained with us, and saved us.

The settlers revere and remember the Great Shaykh with affection. The fact that he did not have his own family nor blood kin around him who could have diverted the attention
he gave entirely to the villagers had enhanced their trust in him. This dedication on his part to serve the villagers further enhanced his influence. This is an important factor why they remember him with tenderness and reverence even long after his departure. The Great Shaykh’s dedication to his followers is described by Y. Muhe as follows:

He had no parents, children, or other family members, kin, or relatives. He was *ya geta futour* (a lone creature of God). In addition, he was also a *baytewar* (celibate). He never touched women. He gave everything he owned for prayer and feast in the shrine. All was for "Mawlid" (the birth of the Prophet). He lived for feeding people and for Quran *masqueret* (reciting Quran). He lived for reciting the prayer: "Nabi! Nabi! (Prophet! Prophet!)."  

**d) Social and Cultural Interaction with the Local Community**

The Great Shaykh’s teaching drew on Sufi religious tradition and emphasized those aspects that were useful for his community. Given the unstable geographic and economic conditions of their new settlement, he emphasized a conciliatory attitude toward neighbours and insisted on peaceful relations within the community. At the same time, the Shaykh helped to create a series of nested strategies that would allow the community an escape in all eventualities. Again the religious and political roles of the Shaykh are intertwined in crucial ways. The settlers recognized the prudence of his approach and followed it in practice.

However, notwithstanding the efforts by the Great Shaykh to establish peace and harmony, as discussed above, the relations among the settlers and Oromo landlords and pastoralists and local Amhara Christians were characterized by rivalry, suspicion, and distrust, while at the same time one can detect in their relations a sense of sentimental attachment to one another, based partly on a sharing of common interests. Yimmar Muhe reflects on the complex bond between the settlers, Oromo landlords and the pastoralists:

The Oromo called us "Sedecha." The majority of them did not like us when we came. Because we developed the land which they were using for their cattle. The whole area we developed was a home for the *kerkaro* (wild boar). But the *qan-azmatch* (the landlord) who brought us here used to like us. He never liked it when the Oromo population used to harass us.

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*24* Unfortunately, the narration when translated into English loses the meaning and sentiment it evokes to Amharic speakers.
This can be interpreted to mean that the welcome settlers received from A. I. Dima, the landlord was determined not by the ethnic identity of the former, but by the political and economic interests of the latter.

Until 1974, all the village residents used to protect our cattle overnight by turn. Otherwise, the Oromo would come and drive them out of our barns and take them to the golla (lowlands), which we cannot reach. The village had to take care of itself. The landlords were also protective of us and they were decisive when it came to such things. But now, we don’t know who is in charge. We have been missing our cattle, but we don’t even know who to report it to.

Before the Revolution, the landlord provided them with protection. During the Derg period, there was heavy state security. Following the fall of the Derg in 1991, there was a breakdown of law and order, which rendered the settlers particularly vulnerable.

In the idiom of the villagers, the world is still divided between those who are hungry and have no status, and others who have status and sufficient food to feed themselves as well as entertain their visitors by offering food. They see themselves as hungry people, who came to Efratana-Jille searching for injera, that is, to make their livelihood. In Amharic, injera is metaphorically used to refer to any form of making a livelihood. Consequently, their migration to Efratana-Jille searching for injera in their narrative is linked with why and how they were looked down upon by the local population in Efratana-Jille. They have accepted their condition stoically. Their description aptly illustrates this point.

Injera felagi hunan silemetan naw Sedecha yamilun (Because we came here searching for injera, that they call us Sedecha). Both the Amhara and the Oromo here called us Sedecha.

Sedecha malet tasaduo yemeta malet naw. Hagarun tilo wode izih yemeta malet naw (Sedecha means some one who is exiled, someone who has abandoned his/her locality.

In addition to Sedecha, another derogatory term used more often by the urbanized Oromo to characterize the settlers was/is asabaqi (tale mongers). They are characterized as people who carry gossip between the Amhara and Oromo population. Because they had to

\[25\] In particular, the elders use it in blessing the young to have good marriages, children, prosperous lives, and anything that sustains an independent life and a good future.
appease both sides, in the eyes of the fierce and independent Oromo pastoralists, they have no honour and character.

In order to get a wider perspective, I also tried to find out the local Christian Amharas’ perception of the settlers. I interviewed a cross section of them from different social categories. My focus was mainly on those who belonged to the same Peasants Association as the settlers. At the time of the fieldwork, the Peasant Association was facing land shortage exacerbated by the re-institution of private ownership of land in 1990. Ato Dule, who is in his sixties, expressed a deep sense of anxiety about the growing land shortage as a result of competition from settlers both for land as well as sub-sharecropping in the area:

Wand lii indet bare iyalaw aqim iyalew yichanakal bemaret itot mikniyat?
Setis sitamit tichanakalach.

How can a healthy, productive and experienced man with oxen quietly suffer for lack of land? When a woman suffers the pangs of labour at least she is delivering a baby.

Another person who joined the discussion used the following comments about the Welloye migrants:

Sedecha gobazoch nachaw, bahedubat yamertalu.

The Sedecha are strong, they can go anywhere to farm [and they succeed].

The highlanders recognized the settlers’ agricultural skills and capacity for hard work. For the same reason they also put them down.

The following parable is used to show the contrast between the Amhara Christians from the highlands and the Welloye settlers regarding attitudes towards farming for livelihood:

Amharana gade

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26 Sharecropping arrangements often took place when the person who possesses a plot of land cannot work on it due to a number of reasons (old age, sickness, the absence of adult males), or wants to do something else. In this case the owner gives out the land to a man to work on it and share the produce with the owner. This arrangement can be made for each harvest, or can be renewed.
Sedechana jofe.

Amhara [Christian highlanders] are like Eagle
Sedecha [are like] Vulture.

The parable is used to convey the meaning that the highlanders are hard-working farmers, but like the eagle they are choosy and remain on the mountain. The settlers on the other hand, who are also hard-working farmers, are like the vulture; they will farm anywhere.

The settlers also have their own reservations about the two communities. They look down upon Oromo pastoralists, who did not have farming skills, and were not used to eating bread, especially injera. For Amhara peasants teff injera is indispensable, and it is given higher prestige over other staple foods. For the settlers, the Oromo women also did not have the culinary skills of settler women. Nor did they have the sense of feminine aesthetic and social etiquette typically associated with Welloye women. Thus, Yimmar Muhe remarks:

The Oromo learnt to wear "white shema," their wives learned cooking and home management, such as injera and wat making from our women. They used to make qita (a simple bread made instantly from sorghum) not injera. After we settled here, they began coming to our homes to share drinks and food. Then, they wanted our women to train their wives to make injera. We taught their men how to plough, harvest and store, and bury grains.

The settlers also show a strong disapproval of what they characterize as the pastoral Oromo proneness to violence and conflict.

We also taught them how to saddle a mule properly. Before that they only knew how to sharpen their swords and load their rifles for fighting.

Towards the highland community, settlers’ sentiments are summarized as follows:

The highlanders are like cats, but after they drink, they behave like lions. When they are passing by our fields on their way to the market, they greet us. But, on their way back, because they get drunk they change and lose their sense of etiquette. But we tell our young people not to fight with them, since they will be our place of retreat, our hiding place in case the pastoralists attack us. It is in Gidim [the highlands] we shall seek shelter. It is only our religion that is different from the people there. Otherwise, we are alike. For our Great Shaykh has told us that, our centre of refuge is Gidim and the highlanders, not the lowland area, which is unpredictable.

They look down on the highlanders because of what they perceive as the decline of their moral standards. Aminat Ali commented with a sense of surprise and disappointment on
the changing attitudes and values of the highlanders. Theft, the worst crime in the highland value system, is now being committed, according to Aminat, by the demobilized military and militia men. She expressed her disappointment as follows:

The people of Gidim [highland Christians] were highly regarded for their sense of pride and dignity. But, now they have even started stealing from us!

Aminat had planted tomatoes as a cash crop in the backyard of one of her daughters' tukul which was located in between Berekha and the district town. All her tomatoes were stolen when her daughter and her husband were gone to Wello. There were also other attempts of theft in Berekha which the villagers were able to stop. During my fieldwork, two similar cases were reported from the district town. According to police report, all these cases were committed by demobilized soldiers and militia men.

e) The Feeling of Being Permanent Outsiders: The Metaphor of Huttu-Gela

Because of the mutual mistrust between the settlers and their neighbours, the settlers felt as permanent outsiders and powerless. Nevertheless, they were able to convert their feeling of powerlessness to their advantage. Paradoxically, as discussed below, by accepting their lower status, giving up the right to carry arms, and by carefully pretending that they are not seeking to gain a permanent status in the region, they were able to avoid being the targets of the pastoralists or the highlanders. This strategy was quite successful. In spite of their lower status, they have been able to secure a relatively stable social and economic position for themselves.

Their status as outsiders led to several specific cultural and social characteristics. Firstly, they were more closely tied to one another through bonds of kinship than they would have been back in Wello. In Wello the fragmentation of rist land created tension within the kin group. The fact that they were away from their birth place in Wello created a longing for family members, relatives, and even people from the villages they left behind. Furthermore, their impermanence in Efrafatana-Jille enhanced this sentiment. The perpetual uncertainty over their status in Efrafatana-Jille led some of them even to attempt a return to Wello when there was an opportunity.

The settlers' understanding is that they were always perceived as outsiders who came...
from another province, and were systematically discouraged from establishing roots in Efratana-Jille. They strongly believe that despite their hard work and all the effort they have invested to develop the area, they were discouraged from making Efratana-Jille their permanent home. As a result they have internalized the strong sense of being permanent outsiders. Haji describes how they were treated before the Land Reform of 1975:

We were not even allowed to plant a tree, because the landlord thought if we planted our own trees we might claim his land eventually. It was only after the 1974 change that all the trees in our village were planted.

Aminat (Mohammed Girma’s wife) put emphasis on *huttu-gela* (temporary shelter with a removable wall) which in fact can be used as an appropriate metaphor to describe their impermanent existence in Berekha. She narrates:

We brought with us our two children, who were born in Wello, and I gave birth to another child in our *huttu-gela*. My husband will clean the area to make sure there are no snakes and rodents, and I will lie down with the children on the floor. We were never concerned about building a home. We came here for the crops leaving our homes behind in Wello.

At one time, we invited the merchant who bought our grain to come inside our *huttu-gela* and have *injera* and coffee. When the man tried to enter the *huttu-gela*, he couldn’t [big laughter]! Because there was no proper door! He had to bend down to enter. The merchant could not believe that a farmer who sold him all those donkey loads of grains could be living in such a place!

M. Girma recalled with laughter: “The grain merchants wondered where we were keeping all the sorghum we had harvested.” Where were they keeping their grains? Prior to the Land Reform of 1975, settlers resorted to various strategies to enhance their well being by relying on the different traditional techniques developed over many centuries of peasant’s farming in Wello. One of these techniques they brought to Efratana-Jille was burying the surplus grain in pits dug close to their dwellings. This form of storing differed from the other traditional *gottera* (granary) usually found in Northern Shewa and other parts of Ethiopia. It guaranteed the security of their produce as it was hidden away. However, the people in Efratana-Jille found it rather amusing.

Despite the good harvests the land in Efratana-Jille provided them the villagers never felt secure about their tenure. To emphasize their insecure position, M. Girma describes the
huttu-gela conditions of their life further.

We were here for the mashila (sorghum), we have forgotten what a proper home is all about. We did not want to build a house, because we didn’t know our future. When we first arrived we lived in huttu-gela, even though we were having rich harvests and could afford to build a better house. But, we were insecure. Since the landlord was increasing the rent, we were afraid to build a better and more stable dwelling. We were hesitant to invest in something we might have to leave behind. We built the house we have now during the Derg time, after the Declaration of maret le-arashu (Land To The Tiller).

Until the Derg came, I kept on farming as far as Alala and Jawuha (see map 4) and my harvests got bigger and bigger. But, that did not provide us a sense of security.

f) Infant Mortality, Old Age Security, and Polygyny

The good harvest from the newly-cleared lands compensated for all other problems associated with living in Efratana-Jille. However, it also created other problems, particularly for women. Among other things, once men produced enough, they wanted to expand their families. Hence, good harvests resulted in men having more than one wife. For instance, once the good harvest was guaranteed through getting multiple sharecropping contracts and sub-contracts in different villages, M. Girma married a second wife and had four children by her. He justified his choice on his skill of farming, his love for hard work, and the amount of good harvest he was able to make.

I used to plough for plenty of people on sharecropping and sub-sharecropping contracts. I ploughed in Jawuha, Alala, and here in Alem as well. I will carry my mofar na qenbar (yoke and plough) and walk back and forth driving my oxen. I used to harvest plenty. So, I could support all of them, at that time, I could have even added another one [a third wife]. Because I could afford it.

Most men who had more than one wife claimed that they worked hard to make enough harvest in order to adequately maintain an additional household. Hence, they were entitled to have more than one wife, the most common form of which was bigamy. This practice was justified by them on religious grounds. Both Mohammed and Aminat (husband and wife) agreed that "our Quran says, if a man is capable of supporting them and making them happy, he is allowed to have more wives."
There were other practical reasons that created a need for men to have more than one wife. The high rate of infant and child mortality was an important one. This problem became more acute in the new environment, motivating both men and women to opt for giving birth to more children in order to ensure that at least some of them would survive. The need to have sons to share the farm work and provide support in old age was an especially strong motivation. For women, the alarming rate of infant and child mortality created the most serious problem in their lives. Although they were aware that the high mortality was caused by malaria, inadequate diet, lack of medicine, unhygienic living conditions, and inadequate clothing (when it gets cold), women often blamed themselves for the misfortune. The common feeling was, *lijochua iyemotu inedt inat qoma tihedalech* (how could a mother continue to live, while her children are dying?).

Because their religion and custom endorsed it, women were compliant about their husbands taking more than one wife. Nevertheless, they suffered from the practice. The contrasting female and male perspective on this issue is aptly provided by the life history of Aminat and Mehammed Girma. When Mehammed Girma got married the second time, his first wife, Aminat was deeply hurt. She describes her reaction as follows:

*He married another woman younger than me, and I went crazy. His second wife had not gone through the experience of losing children and burying them, so she was beautiful and fresh. Yelijoche mamot, hazanu anjate gibit bilo tibis adirgo goditognal* (the death of my children and the bereavement had gone so deep into my stomach burning me inside and affected my looks).

In addition, the fire and smoke from cooking in this heat of *qolla* (lowland) climate had affected my looks. When the bereavement and hard life began to affect my health and looks, he [my husband] said to himself: she is getting old and started looking for another woman.

In Efratana-Jille, the settlers resorted to growing *mashila* (sorghum) rather than *teff*. In general, the climate and soil of Efratana-Jille is more suitable for growing sorghum than *teff*. Moreover, *teff* is far more labour intensive and takes longer to ripen than sorghum. The switch from *teff* to sorghum was part of the settlers’ strategy to adapt to the new environment. However, one consequence of this was that sorghum replaced *teff* for making *injera*, which added to the domestic burden of women. Unlike *injera* made from *teff*, *injera*
made from sorghum loses its moisture quickly and gets dry. Men, in particular don't like to eat dry injera. As a result, women have to bake it daily. One of the frequent complaints women made about their life in Efratana-Jille concerned the lowland heat and isat (fire) from the mitad (clay-griddle) used for baking injera: "In Wello we made teff injera which could last three to five days".

As with all marriages, Aminat’s betrothal to Mohammed was initially arranged by their family. However, out of four marriage proposals she received she chose Mohammed Girma and pleaded with her parents to marry her to him. Because of the choice she made, she had to endure on her own the stress from her husband’s second marriage. In addition, her experience as a mother who lost many of her children made life more difficult for her. She reflects on how her husband’s second marriage triggered the emotional and psychological impact on her:

I was pulling my hair and crying. After I have developed all the land in someone else’s region, buried my children: I went back to Wello empty! I was so affected that I kept on crying day and night. Then, my relatives said: "mon honach" (she has become a fool/senseless) [she is depressed].

The dominant social norm prescribes that women maintain a state of emotional strength. Displaying deep emotional attachment to their husbands or men they love is treated as a matter of shame and a sign of weakness. For women not to undermine their own and their consanguineal family’s honour, they must subdue their feelings. Hence, to become a mon (to be depressed) over her husband is a shame. On the other hand, the same norms encourage men to add more wives. This makes women’s position even more precarious.

g) Migration and Loss of Status

The migration of the Welloye peasants to Efratana-Jille automatically put them in a lower status vis-a'-vis the earlier inhabitants of the district. The fact that they were not allowed to carry a rifle, even for self-defence, distinguished them from the rest.

We were nothing. We did not have any status here, nor any weapons. Our only weapons were metrabra na matchid (an axe and sickle). They [Oromo] did not count us as human beings, but as cattle. Ironically, that acted as a shield against us being a target. I used to sing aloud when I ploughed and walked through the fields, but no one cared. Since they did not count us as
humans, they did not even kill us.

Even the emasculation of a *sedecha* was not good enough for an Oromo marriage. So, we had no fear. We could scream, shout and sing while on our way to the market, to farm plots, etc. They would not even bother to look at us: *mindinan-in* kamin *tagotiren*? (What were we? For what could we be counted for?). We were nothing.

Haji uses an Amharic proverb to illustrate settlers’ subordinate social status in Efratana-Jille:

*Inaten ye-agebba hulum abate naw* (Every man who marries my mother is my father [Father symbolizes power and authority]). We are in other people’s land in search of subsistence. The power is theirs. It is they who decide about everything.

The settlers’ sense of vulnerability and powerlessness is elaborated by Leila Ummar, who is married to Muhe Said, the son of one of the important followers of the Great Shaykh who accompanied him along with the first settlers of Berekha. Muhe is respected by the residents for his hard work, sobriety, kindness, and peacefulness. Leila comes from Ancharo, in the district of Qalu in Wello. She has a poignant memory of her parents’ well-established farms and high social status. Her parents held *na-im/wefq* (land allotted to a cleric). When she was ten years of age, her father died. Until then, her mother was always secluded in the household and never stepped out of the compound. The extent of her mother’s seclusion from the outside world was stated by Leila: "my mother did not even know where our farm lands were located". Her brothers were too young to take care of the farm. Consequently the household was faced with extra pressures. At a young age, Leila was forcibly married off to a man she did not like. The marriage was negotiated by her mother and other family members without her consent. Her understanding is that their life and status dramatically changed after the death of her father:

Our family’s social standing, the land and cattle we had, made all the unmarried men of the village think of me for a potential wife. When my father was alive they feared him. So, when he died my mother got worried and rushed my marriage.

Leila did not like her husband. Soon after the marriage, she ran away to Ifat to be
with one of her aunts who has moved with her husband to live near the town of Sanbate, in Efratana-Jille. Again, her aunt quickly arranged another marriage for her with Muhe Said of Berekha village, to which Leila agreed rather reluctantly: "I did not like him at first, but my aunt warned me that I will be kidnapped in Ifat." Kidnapping of women is common in the lowland regions of Efratana-Jille, and it was a major source of fear to the settlers.

Often, Leila talked about her anxiety for being an outsider and having a low status in Efratana-Jille. During one of the coffee ceremonies held at her tukul (in which I was a participant), a woman brought the disturbing news about a household losing all its cattle: the cattle were driven out from the barn overnight. Hearing the bad news, the women gathered at the coffee ceremony interpreted the incident to mean that they were being targeted because they were outsiders:

We are tisegna (tenants) and tigagna (dependants) in Ifat. They can do whatever they wish. We still don't know how they are going to treat us in the future.

As the discussion got heated, Leila used the following parable to express her sentiments about settlers’ uncertain status.

**Yewaf wondun,**  
**Yesaw hodun, man yauqal.**

Just as it is difficult to distinguish the male from the female bird in the flock, it is difficult to know a man’s heart [that is, the settlers will never know what the local people are thinking about them].

The state of perpetual insecurity was expressed by the women gathered at the coffee ceremony as follows:

For instance, if you ask the people of Berekha to move off the land, they will do it without any protest. They will abandon everything, which is the opposite of what they could have done in Wello. If it was in Wello, they will fight. Why? Because, in Wello it was our *rist* land we inherited from our parents, so we were prepared to die for it.

For Welloye settlers, the loss of status and lack of security in Efratana-Jille prompted them to seek a source of solidarity among themselves. Their sentiment about their low status in Efratana-Jille is often punctuated by everyday Amharic rhyme, pun, and poetry. Leila
illustrates the shared sentiments of settlers about being an outsider through another sam-ena work (wax and gold) referring to the surface meaning and the deep meaning in the tradition of Amharic poetry:

Yabat hagar gabi, yenat hagar shema
Natal ayidalam way yasaw hagarima

The land of a father is gabi (the thick cotton toga worn when it is cold), the land of a mother is shema (cotton clothes lighter than gabi). Isn't it natala (the very delicate shawl) someone else's country.

The surface meaning (the wax) in the poem compares and evaluates the degree of warmth of the three types of traditional white cotton clothes worn by Ethiopians. The deep meaning (the gold) metaphorically refers to the gabi symbolizing the father's place (the warmest), which is the most preferred place of residence. This is followed by the shema (mother's place), which is the second (warmest) preferred place of residence. The natala (the thin shawl), which does not protect one from cold symbolizes the lack of warmth, that is, the experience of living in someone else's place.

Although the settlers are aware of their subordinate status in the area, they look down on the conflict-ridden tradition of Ifat. Before their arrival in Berekha, the surrounding area they developed was a scene of feud and rivalry between the Amhara highlanders and Oromo pastoralists. The conflicts took place over the use of valleys, rivers, springs, and meadows. The settlers are acutely aware of the role their hard labour played in developing the area, which helps them offset their marginal position and enables them to maintain their self-worth. They are eager to emphasize their positive contribution to the district.

We developed this land for them. No one from the highland dared to come to this area before we cleared it. Before that they only went to Sanbate market, using their old safe routes and trails. Otherwise, they were killing each other, they feared each other. It is due to us that the Alem market developed.

h) Nostalgia for Rist Land in Wello

The combined result of insecurity and the longing for the land they left behind, made the settlers keep the idea of returning back to Wello alive. Consequently, when the Land
Reform was declared in 1975, some of the villagers tried to get back their rist land in Wello. Especially for those who had not completely given up hope on their rist land, regardless of the size, the hope of returning back to Wello was omnipresent until 1990. This was, however, not so simple. Leila reflects:

When the Derg declared, the land will be returned to the original owners, we could have gone to Wello to claim our land back. It is only there people know who we are, not here. But, we cannot return because the people there will not allow us and will not welcome us. Even my old mother would not be allowed to return to build a hut to retire on our land there. Because our relatives there will fear that once she sets her foot there, she will eventually bring her children to fight for her land. In Wello, people can easily be bought off for land and money.

In 1990 the Derg declared reprivatization of land, mixed economic planning, and the new form of liberalization of politics. As soon as the settlers (who had rist) found out that the new reform converted the land under peasants’ usufructuary right as hereditary, they rushed to Wello. Mehammed Girma, who did not give up on his rist land in Wello until 1990, describes his dilemma:

I went to Wello to check if I could reclaim ye-abaten rist (my father’s rist). Making sure no one saw me, I toured around the whole area of my father’s rist land, stood there and wept, because my rist land was appropriated by the amratch (Producers Cooperative).

i) Creating Relationships beyond the Village

The villagers tried to transcend the combined effect of both the feeling of nostalgia for their land and relatives they left behind in Wello, and their insecure status in Efratana-Jille, by creating and expanding their social bonds with people outside the village. They actively sought to forge ties that transcended ethnicity, religion, and physical distances. The webs of social ties were deliberately searched out and extended to other districts. Leila emphasizes the importance of creating such types of social networks for their survival in Efratana-Jille. During the height of the civil war in 1989, she took the initiative to create a kinship bond with one of the Oromo families. She describes why and how she forged this bond.

At home people care more about land and money, not kin relations. Here, as migrants or exiled people, we begin to value blood relations rather than money.
Because money can be made easily, once you leave your homeland you can do anything to make money and survive. But, blood relatives will always be scarce. No one can replace your family and kin.

In Efrata-Jille we are mana qudri, manim yemayawikaw, yeman lij naw yamibal (someone with no known history: no one knows our family history). That is why we [her family] have to create relatives, and we did. We made luka (to become brothers in Oromifa; tut matabat, that is, breast suckling in Amharic). We slaughtered one cow, prepared two quintals of teff to make twenty-two dibir (many layers made into one) injera. We had the Oromo of the different clans come from the sub-province of Ifatna-Timuga to Efratana-Jille.

Leila took this initiative because she knew that with the kinship tie she established through the institution of luka, her family will be assimilated into that particular Oromo clan. The Oromo had the tradition of elaborate system of adoption of non-Oromo children. It has been pointed out that this tradition helped the process by which the Oromo assimilated non-Oromo into their population. Mohammed Hassen calls this process, "The Oromo genius for assimilation..." (1994: 21). Leila was attempting to create a permanent social niche in Efratana-Jille for her family. Ahmed, one of the eldest sons of the Oromo family became the brother of her eldest son, Ibrahim. Soon, Ahmed left for Saudi Arabia. The bond was so strong that he kept in touch with his fictive family. From his earnings as a migrant worker in Saudi Arabia, he sent her one thousand Ethiopian Birr (equivalent to US $200 after the devaluation of the Birr).

In addition, through this relationship her family was able to overcome the shortage of grazing land for their cattle. It guaranteed them access to the pastures of the Oromo family in the lowlands. This type of arrangement is commonly made between the farming community and the pastoral Oromo of Efratana-Jille, where the pastoralists take all the milk and butter in return for keeping the cattle of the farmers.

j) Increasing Contradictions between the Landlord and Sharecroppers

Just before the Revolution, contradictions between sharecroppers and the landlords of the area were sharpening due to the introduction of mechanized farming and the beginning of the development of capitalism in agriculture. The people of Berekha vividly recall:
Both the Amhara and the Oromo were conniving together to have us removed from here. They were telling each other: let us drive away these people of Wello, who have settled in between us and make us fight, pretending that they are the friends of the highlanders. They are not anybody’s friends.

It is important to note that not all landlords were equally enthusiastic about embracing the mechanization of agriculture. Some of them wanted to keep the sharecroppers. The feudal notion of having a large number of sharecropping tenants under their jurisdiction was still strong. They did not want to exchange this relationship for machines and wage labour. It was a struggle between feudal notions of honour and status, on the one hand, and the rationality of capitalist development, on the other. This created a conflict of interests between the landlords. The settlers remember the dispute between their landlord and others:

The qan-azmatch was disputing with Alemu Mehammed. The dispute was on the status of the sedecha as tisegna (tenant), that is, whether they should be allowed to continue as tenants, or be removed.

This type of conflict was further explained to me by Ato Bezabih Bizuneh, a member of one of the prominent Amhara landowning families in Efratana-Jille. After the 1974 Revolution, he and the rest of his family were chased away from the district by the alliance of new government officials and peasants.

Eviction of tenants in the area began to increase. Since the area was getting mechanized, most landlords (including A. I. Dima) began to lease the fertile lands to tractor owners. They began demanding the earlier tenants, who cleared the area, to farm the peripheral and uncleared lands.

To sum up the settlers of Berekha following their Shaykh migrated to Efratana-Jille from Wello to escape poverty, landlessness, and unjust rule. The Great Shaykh negotiated a sharecropping tenancy arrangement with an Oromo Chief in Ifat. Before the arrival of this migrant community, the area was turbulent, and the land taf (uncultivated) and difficult to cultivate. The settlers cleared the area and made it agriculturally productive. Guided by their Shaykh, settlers’ strategic adaptation to the region involved organizing their lives around their shrine and tilling of the land. The motto was iyekasabin inibila (let us till the land and eat). The norms laid down by the Shaykh governing the daily life of the villagers focused on his teachings of peace and respect for the shrine and towards one another. Self-support by
collective praying, farming, sharing, solidarity, tolerance, and peace among themselves as well as with the neighbouring community were the norms laid down by the Great Shaykh and followed strictly by the villagers. Furthermore, the Great Shaykh emphasized the virtues of modesty and humility for his followers to survive in Efratana-Jille. This helped them to create an environment of peace and security in which they were able to earn their livelihood and reconstruct a resilient community. It is important to note that these were people who came from Wello and even during the most severe famine of 1984-85, they did not waver in their deep attachment to their birthplace. Even though drought-prone and impoverished, they refused the government sponsored Resettlement Plan, reiterating the bond to their birth: imbirt ve-teqeberebat mamotna mageber yishalal (death and burial in the place where one’s umbilical cord is buried is better), a popular form of expressing attachment to one’s birthplace in Amharic (Alemneh 1990:98, see also Pankurst 1992). The settlement process of the village of Berekha thus shows peasants’ ingenuity, resilience, capacity and will to struggle without losing their sense of history and dignity. Most importantly, the Great Shaykh’s spiritual teachings and guidance protected them from the shame, loss, and guilt of exiled life.

The activities of the settlers and their religious leader the Great Shaykh have been interpreted as creative and largely successful actions in response to a set of difficult circumstances and constraints. The reflection of their leader’s decisions in the recollections of the settlers can be understood both as collective history and as a creative refashioning of history. Through this they are able to maintain history and retain those elements of the Shaykh’s teaching that were important for serving the needs of the community. More generally, the Great Shaykh’s fashioning of and emphasis on rituals involving the qire, collective sharing of food, coffee and the settlers’ enthusiastic following of his teachings represent active and creative responses to their tenuous economic-political condition and social status. By the same token, the creation and acceptance of a relationship that emphasized maintaining a cautious and conciliatory role with the surrounding more powerful peoples can be understood as successful strategies for dealing with their difficult position.

Alula Pankhurst describes how even those who went to resettlement did it as their last choice only after exhausting all other means.
The essential longing for a more permanent and rooted life represented an important part of their lives under these circumstances, and helped keep the members of the community together. Perhaps most important is the interconnection of the cultural and religious aspects of the settlers’ lives with the political, economic, and social circumstances in which they lived. Under the leadership of the Great Shaykh they were able to maintain a cohesive communal life protecting their honour and dignity, in an area where the state control was weak. This extended to even the most impoverished amongst them in spite of famine and civil war raging around them. One must indeed admire the collective wisdom, discipline, and ingenuity of the group in creating a viable social life in a new environment.
CHAPTER SEVEN

POST-1974 STATE REFORMS AND THE PEASANTRY

In this chapter the main focus is on the social-economic conditions on the eve of the revolution and the major political and economic reforms introduced by the Derg, the regime that came into power after 1974, namely the Land Reform of 1975 and the Producers Cooperative (PCs) of 1978, and their implications for the peasantry. This discussion seeks to show how the process of centralization, modernization and the beginning of the development of capitalism in agriculture increased the tension between the state and landlords, and landlords and the peasants, becoming an additional source of pressure on the villagers of Berekha. At the same time, it also provided the possibility of an expanded political space for them. Also discussed is how this process began to erode the institution of gult through which the feudal state in Ethiopia was able to administer the country and collect revenue by delegating its authority to local landlords. It is emphasized that the contradictions between the three actors, state, peasants and landlords sharpened as a result of centralization and capitalist development in agriculture (commercialization and mechanization). The conditions of the rural poor were further deteriorating due to the corruption of state bureaucracy. The purpose of this discussion is to bring home the impact of all these processes on peasants and pastoralists.

I will then go on to discuss the stated objectives of the Derg regime in implementing the two reforms and present the narrative of the people of Berekha to illuminate how the objective of the state was perceived at the local level. The discussion draws on the reactions/responses of both peasant settlers and the landlord of Berekha. The purpose of this section is not to show the failure of the Derg’s Socialist policy, that is, to prove that socialism was wrong but, rather to illuminate local peoples’ ability to assess their needs and express their agency.

Even with the best of intentions on the part of the state, things could still and did go wrong. Because there was no partnership between the state and peasants, socialist implementation became authoritarian and oppressive. As a result, as the enthusiasm of the majority of the population waned, the energy and resources of the country were wasted.
Tragically, the enthusiasm and energy among the peasants was redirected and channelled into war and conflict - destroying the same country they were prepared to build and sacrifice for.

I. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS ON THE EVE OF THE REVOLUTION

On the eve of the Revolution, two significant historical processes deserve consideration: state centralization and capitalist development in agriculture. Some of the implications of centralization have already been discussed in chapters five and six. Here I want to focus specifically on how centralization, along with the development of capitalism in agriculture, impacted on the relations between the state and the landlords and between the landlords and peasants.

a) Land Measurement and Rationalization of State Revenue: Tension Between the State and the Landlords

One of the important steps taken by the state after 1916 in the process of centralization was the measurement of lands under the jurisdiction of the hereditary landlords to determine the tax they will have to pay accordingly to the state. Land measurement had a relatively long history in other parts of the country, for example, the province of Bagemidr. It was also prevalent in some parts of Shewa before the introduction of the qalad [the institution of land measurement, named after the rope used to measure the land] (Bahru 1993: 88-89, 216-18). It got further impetus during Menelik’s period when it came to have a wider application throughout Ethiopia, including southern regions. It was, however, during the period of Haile Selassie (1930-74) that it was applied in earnest to all parts of the country even including the regions under pastoralism that were relatively unstable from the political point of view. As discussed below, the state’s objective behind land measurement and fixation of tax was not only to increase revenue so badly needed for modernization, but also to curtail the economic and political powers of the hereditary landlords. And that was the main source of tension between the state and the landlords.

The first land tax decree that fixed the tax rate on both measured and unmeasured land came in force in 1935, that is, prior to the Italian occupation (ibid. 92). For measured areas, the rate of forty hectares (gasha) was $Eth.15 for cultivated land (lam), $Eth.10 for
semi-cultivated land (lam-taf), and $Eth.5 for uncultivated land (taf). A new decree was issued in late 1944, which raised the tax on measured land to a total of $Eth. 50, $Eth.40 and $Eth.15 per gasha of lam, lam-taf and taf respectively. In all the three categories, the increase was represented by the tax in lieu of asrat (tithe), now commuted from kind to cash (Bahru 1991: 191-96).

Bahru has argued that in theory, the decree of 1944 was a first step towards rationalization of land revenue by abolishing the numerous feudal fees and labour services imposed on the tiller (1991:216-218). A proclamation in 1947 specified that the church was exempted from the abolition order. In practice, however, exaction of such labour services on non-church lands continued. The oral history of the villagers of Berekha testifies that such services and payments ceased only after 1974. It has been argued that the introduction of education and health taxes on land in 1947 and 1959, respectively, provided much needed additional sources of revenue to the state (Bahru 1991: 193). However, the land tax as well as a great deal of land revenue due to the state continued to be absorbed by the holders of hereditary tribute right (rista-gult), the landlord or balabbat (siso gult), and by church lands (samon). In addition, no land tax was exacted from maderia holders (those who held land in lieu of salary), unless they had become gebbar (tribute paying tenant) by converting their holdings into freehold. Given these feudal hold overs, the third decree on land tax was issued in 1966 in order to streamline the state’s share of the revenue. This decree was designed to terminate the intermediary role of the gult-holders in the surplus-appropriation process. Under this decree, the state was attempting to abolish both rista-gult and siso-gult by making a provision that all land tax had to be paid directly to the state. But the holders of gult rights, particularly of the rista-gult, were too well-entrenched and too close to the centre of power to allow the full implementation of the decree (see Bahru 1991: 192-93). Hence, in practice the feudal mode of surplus appropriation continued. Measures to terminate the church’s gult were not even considered.

The state’s effort to have direct access to and control of surplus appropriation was thus thwarted by the powerful body of landlords. The state was unable to maximize its revenues made evident by the fact that by the mid-1960s, revenue from the agricultural sector, undoubtedly the most important sector of the economy, amounted to only 7% of the total
state income (see Bahru 1991: 191-96). This was the background of the initiation of the government’s last measure to increase its agrarian revenue, the agricultural income tax of 1967, which was part of a general revision of the country’s income-tax regulations.

Introduction of the new tax schedule was intended to represent a more rational basis for the collection of agricultural tax, to remove the disparity between measured and unmeasured land, and to levy tax on agricultural produce irrespective of the status or nature of the land. In addition, "the progressive nature of the tax also promised greater social equity and more revenue yield to the government" (ibid.). In practice, however, its implementation depended on the setting up of regional assessment committees which, subject as they were to various influences, could not be expected to be completely honest in their determination of income. Moreover, the new tax met stiff opposition in the rist-holding regions of northern Ethiopia, as it was viewed as a veiled attempt to introduce the qalad (land measurement) in the north. The Gojjam peasant uprising of 1968 was triggered by the government attempt to implement the new tax law. There was a widespread fear among the people of Gojjam that they would lose their land. There were also peasant rebellions in Bale and Gedeo. Much earlier, there had been the 1948 peasant rebellion in the Awraja region of Yeju that was suppressed with the help of nach lebash [literally, those who wear white, that is, state security and intelligence who disguise themselves in civilian clothes] (Bahru 1991: 194, 218). So by the 1970s the taxes on agriculture were still far from rationalized.

b) Commercialization of Agriculture and The Articulation of Feudal and Capitalist Relations

A second source of pressure on the peasantry was the commercialization of agriculture. Until the 1960s, the government did not have a satisfactory strategy for agricultural development. Budgetary allocation for agriculture was 2% in 1967. There was correspondingly a low growth rate of the agricultural sector. When the government did turn its attention to agriculture, in the third of its Five-Year-Plans, 1968-73, priority was given to commercial rather than to peasant agriculture reflecting both the government’s eagerness for higher revenue as well as the ruling elite’s class interests, since it was the big landlords who stood to gain from commercial farming. The last decade of the old regime thus saw extensive commercialization and mechanization of agriculture. Some observers even began to
speak of the birth of an agrarian bourgeoisie (Bahru 1991: 194).

The commercialization of agriculture in this rapidly changing social and economic climate created hardship for peasant producers, the small rist-holders, who began to lose their land. These threats were further aggravated by the increased demands for taxes by the state discussed above. These dual processes had contradictory results. On the one hand, they were creating marginality of the peasant economy, on the other, the state was becoming increasingly dependent on peasant production. In societies where there is development of industry and market, commercial rather than peasant agriculture produces the wealth and the bulk of the surplus needed to support segments not directly involved in the processes of production (see Gillermo 1982). In Ethiopia, however, peasants continued to be the primary producers of local wealth.

Although capitalism was developing in Ethiopia, there was no discontinuity between the feudal and the capitalist mode of production. Instead, the two were amalgamated with each another. In fact, the feudal relations were becoming a fertile ground for capitalist development (see Lefort 1983: 20-33). By the 1970s mechanized farming and the concomitant forms of capitalism were expanding. This expansion did not displace traditional feudal land tenure. Rather, there was "a growing alliance between the feudal and commercial forces that [had] undercut the dynamics that would otherwise operate within the Ethiopian state (Gilkes 1975: 101).

Starting from the mid-1960s, landowners began to increasingly use the contracting system under which rent was established before hand irrespective of the harvest, weather conditions, and so on. This led to a worsening of the position of the rent-paying peasants (Galperin 1981: 147). Tenants were often compelled to sell their livestock and serve the usurer (who was usually the lord himself) in order to pay back the rent. On the other hand, this led to an increase in the practice of renting by rich farmers of tracts belonging to the landlords, which resulted not only in a great extension of rented holdings, but also in a

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1 For instance, it has been observed that large-scale agricultural enterprises are growing to compete with the peasants for economic resources and opportunities in Latin America. This has produced a world-wide "crisis of the peasantry" (Firth 1952: 12), related to the increasingly marginal role of the peasantry within the prevalent economic system" (Firth 1952: 12 cf. Gillermo 1982:87).
limited introduction of modern farming equipment. The typically capitalist practice of hiring hands, especially during seasonal work, became more frequent and also involved recruitment of the urban unemployed. Thus, capitalist relations actively permeated the feudal structure of Ethiopian agrarian relations through tenure and sub-tenure operations. Capitalist forms of land tenure were grafted on the existing feudal system of landownership. The two systems reinforced each other. The feudal relations were used to benefit capitalist accumulation. The tenure relations were characterized by high rent, a continuing feudal system of law, and diversity of tenure, depending on the object leased, e.g., land, draught, cattle implements, seeds, and so on (Bahru 1991, Lefort 1983).

c) Insecurity of Gult Tenure and Its Implications: Increasing Vulnerability of the Tenants

With the development of capitalism, the lands cleared by the settlers of Berekha became more attractive to gult holders, resulting in more disputes and litigation among competing landlords. Right to the time of the 1974 Revolution, land disputes between gult holders in the area were still taking place. Even the site of Berekha village and the surrounding farmlands which constituted the gult of Dima were under dispute. Ato Mersha, an administrative official for the town of Alem, who had in turn worked in the same position for Haile Selassie, the Derg, and the present government reminisced,

There were disputes and competition between different landlords on the lands around Alem river. Dei-azmatch² Shewa was claiming that he had fought and won the legal dispute. Therefore, Alem town and Berekha belonged to him not to qan-azmatch Dima. While he was still making a court case, arguing that "Qan-azmatch Dima worishewalehun (he had inherited qan-azmatch Dima) asking the government to pay him gimit (an estimate, i.e., compensation), the Revolution of 1974 took place.

This can be interpreted that Shewa's feudal title dei-azmatch, was higher than that of Dima, who was a qan-azmatch, and hence his claim to superior economic-political rights over the land in dispute.

Another case cited by Ato Mersha was from Majete, a neighbouring area, where

² Dei-azmatch means commander of the gate, a political-military title below ras (see Bahru (1991).
disputes and litigations over fertile agricultural lands were common. Disputes even on lands granted during the time of Menelik were brought to court. Ato Mersha describes an important dispute of this kind:

When Aboye and Ato Zanaba Haile-Mariam, from Warka, Eyarico\(^3\), had a fight on the Jara River, bordering Fursi and Majete. Aboye brought a proof which showed Mahteme Dagmwi Menelik (the seal of Menelik II) that legitimized his claim to the land, as his **gult**. It was stated in the document that, "for receiving and escorting Azaj Wolde Tsadiq (one of Menelik’s important generals and officials)\(^4\) and others accompanying him on their way to Awsa (northeastern Wello) [during the preparation for the Battle of Adwa], when their passage was blocked by the Jille Oromo, I have given him Sadaq as his **irista-gult**\(^5\).

As the landlords competed with the state and with one another over their **gult** rights, they grew weary even of their tenants/ sharecroppers and became more cautious and severe towards them. Some of them even wanted to get rid of the sharecroppers altogether.\(^6\) The settlers of Berekha were directly affected by this process. Through their labour, they had cleared the lands and made them agriculturally productive. These lands began to lure mechanized agriculture and the settlers were being pushed by the landlord to the peripheral areas. The combination of this factor and the increase in the number of new migrant peasants from Wello put the settlers under great pressure.

What made the settlers’ position particularly vulnerable was that the leases were almost invariably unwritten and for an indeterminate term. It was in fact wholly a matter of the landlord’s discretion whether a lease was renewed or its terms extended. The peasant could not be certain that tomorrow he would be cultivating the same piece of land he was cultivating today (Lefort 1983: 10). The major beneficiaries of increased investment or

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\(^3\) Located between Majete and Kara-Qore.

\(^4\) See Prouty (1986: 143,155).

\(^5\) This land dispute took place in 1955 Ethiopian calendar (1963 in Gregorian calendar).

\(^6\) In general, land litigations were not limited to landlords only. Ambitious peasants with connections also tried to expand their existing land holdings or acquire new ones through litigation. The fact that peasants were also entitled **gult** land for their loyalty, military service, hard work and talent, created an avenue for those ambitious enough to move up.
working harder and thus raising agricultural output would be the landlord. Raising output also meant taking the risk that the landlord, deeming that his land being better exploited should bring in more, could stiffen the terms of the lease or even take on a more compliant tenant; or, in the northern highlands, the lure of substantial profits would attract the attention of one of numerous claimants and drive him off through successful legal action. Incidentally, the success in legal action depended by and large on good connections. The law did indeed provide that a cultivator who was evicted should be compensated for improvements he had made; but either it was not enforced or it led to endless and costly legal proceedings (Lefort 1983: 11).

During this period, Lefort (1983: 9-10) argues that shortage of land was deliberately created by the landlords to make the tenants vulnerable. If land was in short supply, the degree of exploitation of the mass of peasants could be high. This shortage, however artificial, maintained the level of ground rent and ensured the existence of a vast number of landless peasants ready to take the place of an existing tenant objecting to the terms of a lease.

The Civil Code of 1960 permitted the landlords to evict the tenants if the land rented was to be sold, or if a tenant was unable for one reason or the other to till the whole plot. Since about ninety to ninety-five per cent of tenure arrangements were verbal, the landlords behaved more and more arbitrarily. On the other hand, old traditions relating to peasants’ obligations, including even those prohibited or abolished by law, were slow to disappear, particularly in outlying areas. For instance, under feudal law, the peasants were forced to render the landlord various services. This practice continued in spite of the fact that labour services were officially abolished in 1966 (Galperin 1981: 147-48, Bahru 1991: 193). As mentioned above, the settlers of Berekha continued to be subjected to meet these now illegal obligations right up to the Revolution of 1974.

The impact of commercial foreign-induced agriculture was particularly disastrous for the pastoralists who depended for their livelihood on the availability of pasture. In the Valley of Awash, the area was appropriated for the development of cash crops under the Awash Valley Project, a multi-national undertaking involving Holland, Israel, Italy, England, and the United States (cf. Hussein, 1976). The pastoralists and their cattle were driven out of the
valley. When the famine of 1974 struck, the largest number of casualties comprised of these expropriated nomads and their cattle.

To sum up, modernization did lead to some development, especially by commercialising agricultural production (Bondstam 1975). However, the profits made from modern, commercialised agriculture were appropriated by the big landlords and foreign companies, while large numbers of subsistence peasants and pastoralists lost their means of livelihood. The landed aristocracy, on the other hand, indulged in consumerism encouraged by the increased import of luxury goods. The gap between the rich and poor was made more conspicuous with aristocracy and commercial landlords consuming more and more, while the majority of the people were being pushed to the brink of bare subsistence and famine. This sharpened the contradictions among the landed aristocracy between those who were able to adjust and the rest who were sinking. In addition, it also increased contradictions between the declining section of the aristocracy and emerging petit bourgeoisie and modern educated intellectuals. At another level, it increased the contradictions between the privileged sections of the society comprising the prosperous section of the aristocracy, bourgeoisie and the urban educated on the one hand, and the unemployed proletariat of the urban areas and small towns, and the overwhelming majority of the impoverished rural population, on the other. These social and economic conditions precipitated the Revolution of 1974 and the turmoil that followed it.

d) Corruption in the Ranks of the State Bureaucracy

A final element contributed to the downfall of the old regime. According to the testimonies of both landlord and sharecroppers, the state bureaucracy before 1974 was mired in corruption. Both shared the same moral outrage towards the bureaucrats representing the state in the district. They were disgusted with their appetite for *gubo* (bribe). They also shared a belief that the violence in the aftermath of the Revolution was sent by God because the former state officials had become unethical and corrupt. The narratives of both show that they were victimized by the corruption of the bureaucrats, who were perceived by them as parasitic. However, the ways landlord and peasants expressed their sentiments about the outcome of the Revolution were divergent. The narration of Berekha peasant settlers carries a
tone of harsh vindictiveness and even endorsement of the violence against the former rulers. The landlord, on the other hand, attached to it a supernatural meaning, a kind of divine retribution. He articulated his views as follows:

Taking bribe is like eating someone’s flesh. What destroyed our country was bribery. Those who were appointed to an office were quickly corrupted into bribery. That is why our country, Ethiopia is cursed. The corruption and the bribe brought to us the calamity we have witnessed until now (1993-94).

The responsibility for the corruption and mismanagement of the administrative apparatus, according to the landlord, did not, however, lie with the emperor, but with the bureaucrats of the state. The cruelty, injustice, and lack of will on the part of these bureaucrats was evident in their ignoring the massive death of peasants and pastoralists during the Wello Famine of 1973-74. The landlord explained:

Shimagilew (the old man, that is, the Emperor)\(^7\) was aging, and the ministers began to abuse their powers. When they went with the Emperor to tour the famine affected areas in Wello, they held their nose so that they don’t smell the odour caused by poverty, sickness and death. They looked down on the famine victims, and that is why God sent them the execution. It is toor/gif nawi (unfairness/unjustness) that brought them the punishment and made them suffer like that.

The landlord’s narrative was filled with comparisons of his own style of administration with that of the bureaucrats sent from Addis and other urban centres:

My father died in 1949. In 1950, I got his post as the district administrator. It was a hereditary office. Because we were strategically located between the Amhara and Afar, and we knew the people and the customs of both sides. When I took the office I did not even know the alphabets. But they [the emperor and his officials] knew we had the experience of administration. So I got posted in the desert of the Afar for four years. I knew the area very well. I served there for over twenty years without any complaint.\(^8\) When I was administrating Efratana-Gidim, they called me imive (a term of endearment equivalent to mother, used for a person who has been very kind).

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\(^7\) When the landlord addressed the Emperor as shimagilew (the old man) he used it in the same way as he addressed his grandfather and previous Oromo chiefs of the area. The term of address carries endearment as well as respect.

Some of his observations were typical of comments from an elder, a leader, a patriarch who was deeply concerned about his troubled society and longing for the aman gize (the good days) gone by. The reference to his past position was a commentary on the turbulent present. In earlier days, he believes, both the land and the harvest were berekha (blessed): "Even the little money we had those days was blessed: we could make a lot out of it. Now, it is not possible".

It is against the above background one has to understand the reforms introduced by the Derg regime after 1974 and the response of the landlord and peasants to these reforms. This is discussed next.

II. THE LAND REFORM OF 1975
a) The Objective of the Land Reform

The immediate aim of the Proclamation of 1975 was: "To Provide For The Public Ownership Of Rural Land." Its long-term objective was to lay down the foundation for a new rural social order, which would be egalitarian, and free of exploitation and oppression:

...in countries like Ethiopia where the economy is agricultural a person's right, honour, status and standard of living is determined by his relation to the land;...it is essential to fundamentally alter the existing agrarian relations so that the Ethiopian peasant masses...may be liberated from age-old feudal oppression, injustice, poverty and disease, and in order to lay the basis upon which all Ethiopians may henceforth live in equality, freedom and fraternity.

The main objective of the Reform was to lay down the foundation of a new agrarian order in which the independent peasant small-holder would become the major force in rural production, and in which inequalities of wealth and possession would be eliminated as far as possible (Dessalegn 1985: 203-4).

b) Response from the People of Berekha

The Proclamation of Land Reform of 1975 was received by the settlers of Berekha enthusiastically. The narrative of Shaykh Hassan captures their jubilant response:

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9 Proclamation No.31, p.93.
We were suffering under the gif (injustice of the old system). Then the Derg came and declared: "maret larashu" (Land to the Tiller)\(^{10}\). It made the land available to us. They [the landlords] became equal to us. Who should they order now? They couldn’t even get land for themselves, let alone ordering us around. The one who was determined to work hard to make his living welcomed this declaration.

The villagers understood the egalitarian implications of the Land Reform. They knew the reform was in their interest and contradictory to the interest of the landlords. As a result, they were shrewd in defending themselves and taking advantage of the change. However, although the reform was meant to empower them, many of the settlers preferred not to abandon the cautious political and social skills they were taught by their Shaykh. They resorted to the same old method of survival.

Whatever nationality the landlords belonged to it didn’t matter.\(^{11}\) After the Revolution, the Derg declared, 'everyone is equal'. Then, the landlords of Ifat began asking us if we thought we were equal to them. But our answer was that: "Us? How could we be equal? We are tillers. It is the government, and let the Government say we are all equal".

Shaykh Hassan’s wife, Aminat Ali, who was preparing coffee in the back of the room remarked with a tone of irony: "ikul honu!" (they all, that is, landlords and peasants, became equal!).

The settlers’ testimonies clearly show that both men and women were aware of their class position vis a vis that of the landlord. Women were always enthusiastic and animated to join in the discussion and give their opinion on reforms. They never missed any opportunity to express the view how the Land Reform empowered them by giving them usufruct land right and freeing them from dependence on landlords. To describe how this aspect of the reform was welcomed by all tenants, Haji used a local form of expression:

Lawtu tilik, tilikun zaf gandiso talelin (The [social] change selected and uprooted the biggest trees and made them fall for us).

\(^{10}\) ‘Land to the Tiller’ has become an integral part of peasants’ vocabulary.

\(^{11}\) When he states that for the Derg, the landlords’ national, or linguistic origin did not matter, but their political and economic position that was challenged, he is making a commentary on the present regime’s policy of dividing provinces, districts, and administrative regions on the basis of linguistic and ethnic origin.
The former hereditary nobility and the big landlords are metaphorically equated with trees that were not only big in size, but also had deep roots.

There were some who were more vocal and politically engaged. They took advantage of any opportunity to enhance their interest, both collective and personal. They allied with students that were sent for Idiget Behibret Zemecha (Development through Cooperation Campaign) launched by the government involving some 60,000 students from grade ten up to university level and teachers to assist the implementation of the new reforms and educate peasants. Mehammed Girma put it as follows:

When the students came, the whole of Berekha joined the campaigners. The student asked us to chose from among us a man who could be articulate in speech. They said: choose someone who can speak boldly. So, I got elected. I was the tenant of Dima's sister's children. I said to the landlords [Amhara and Oromo]: From the Amhara land to the land of the Adal (Afar), it is your father's land; you inherited it, but you never worked it. So you cannot have it any more. You can only farm where you reside. This offended the landlords, and the people of Berekha had to protect me and my house.

c) The Landlord's Reaction to the Land Reform

The landlord talked about the loss of his lands with sadness and a feeling of betrayal by his former tenants. He recalls their behaviour towards him during 1974-75, with a profound sense of defeat:

The Derg came, took away our land and proclaimed maret larashu ('Land to the Tiller') and gave it away to our tenants. They started coming out and began burning our houses. We had our house on the top of the hill south east of Berekha, they burnt it down and it became life threatening for us to continue staying there. We are still alive. It is because those Allah does not want to die will not die. Now we are simply waiting for 'the day Allah calls us'.

He interprets the action of his former tenants as betrayal. With an ironic twist of laughter, he remarked "we got uprooted":

It is these people we brought here to our land who are now going to uproot us. It is the bashita (the illness) that we begged for and brought on us, to our land that is destroying us. It is those I brought thinking they would eat first and then feed me as well. The sedecha look human, because they are wearing clothes. But, they are sick people.
In the perception of the landlord, the settlers have no commitment to anyone or any values, excepting their own selfish interests. His class prejudice is reflected even in his comment on their folk religion. For him as a devout Muslim, they are heretics:

They are dangerous, always into trickery and deceit. They are neither Christians nor Muslims. Even in their religion, they do not follow the quran. Their religion is witchcraft. Though they have galitcha (learned and wise men) among them for guidance, but they don't even follow them sincerely. They are not trustworthy and honourable people.

The same factors - their disciplined labour and ethics of hard work for success - once created a high demand for them are now used by the landlord to degrade them. He denounces them for the same attributes that he once valued and depended on so much so that he pleaded with them to move from Wello to Efratana-Jille and provided them land and political protection. With a tinge of class prejudice, he looks down on his former tenants for their great perseverance:

Wherever they go they move ahead of us [local landlords, both Oromo and Amhara] in everything. It is them who are now known in this area. It is them simachew yemiteraw (whose names are held high in public), while we [the landlords] are hiding in our houses. We can't even get out.

They multiply and fill the land, while the earlier populations fall behind economically and otherwise. We are not even reproducing like them. They have reproduced fast and outnumbered us around here; they are more than us. They have made us fall behind and taken over the region.

d) The Decline of Agricultural Output

However, despite the promise of the Land Reform it did not lead to the expected expansion in production. Rural production after the Land Reform consisted of three types of cultivation: small holder peasant farms, "group cultivation" farms, and large-scale state farms (Dessalegn 1984). Both group cultivation and state farms were large-scale enterprises, using more improved methods and modern inputs, and were given more support and encouragement by the government than peasant farms. However, they made up only a small percentage of the rural production. By far the greater portion of the land was under small-holder cultivation which also supplied almost all the agricultural products of the country. After conducting a
study on the impact of Land Reform in three different regions, Dessalegn (1985) concluded that average yields on peasant farms were greater than those on state farms. In view of the fact that the latter enjoyed a high level of investment, used a great amount of modern inputs, and were highly mechanized, whereas peasant production continued to be traditional as before, this finding was rather surprising. His argument is that this result was not because peasant agriculture had become vigorous and innovative, but because the centrally planned cultivation was poorly organized and mismanaged. The question is why did the government still insist on investing in state farms? Penrose (1987) has argued that the government did so in order to ensure a regular supply of food to the urban centres. After the Land Reform peasants were no longer forced to sell their produce by landlords who had controlled the marketing system. They were able to consume most of their produce. This reduced the availability of food for the urban centres and groups, particularly the army. In the later period, as the civil wars got intensified, another disincentive for peasants to sell their produce was the system of price controls.

The main limitation of the Land Reform, however, was that it failed to achieve its central objective, that is, to create a new agrarian order in which the productivity of independent peasant small-holders would increase to become a major force in rural development. The reform had a long term objective of not only enabling peasants to protect themselves from starvation, but also contribute to the overall development of the society. However, as the subsequent developments, especially the famine of 1984-85, clearly showed, the Land Reform of 1975 was not sufficient even to enable the peasant producers in the countryside to protect themselves from starvation. The challenge of hunger, involving the lives of millions of people, continued to be the central issue in Ethiopia. For various reasons, there was an unbalanced relationship between the rural and urban economy. The urban population continued to be dependent on the rural economy without being able to provide goods and services to the rural population, or technical and infrastructural support necessary for increasing agricultural productivity. As Dessalegn argued, this in turn resulted in promoting the process of further "peasantization" of the rural society, whereby the peasant world turned inward rather than outward (1985: 222).

Ethiopia shared the above problem with other Third world countries that tried to
follow the socialist path of development. Utting (1992) notes that, socialist regimes in the third world countries were faced with the problem of coordinating between three areas of power and interest groups. These are: i) The state ii) the urban groups, and iii) the peasantry (the majority of rural society, who are the primary food producers). One of the key issues here was how the state related to the peasantry and the urban groups. In order to finance industrialization and provide cheap food for the urban working class and other support groups, such as the army and the bureaucracy, the state sought to appropriate a large surplus from the peasantry. At the same time, the state attempted to develop agriculture through increase in productivity and the transformation of social relations. These measures created contradictions and distortions. They generated contradictory class and state practices which undermined "the capacity of the state to mobilize and appropriate surplus, plan the economy and maintain hegemony" (Utting 1992: 4).

The problems of agricultural productivity in the USSR and China raised by Utting (1992) are relevant here. In the USSR, the assumption was that agriculture would be supplier of "wage goods and surplus." In order to achieve a satisfactory level of production, massive quantities of modern inputs had to be pumped into agriculture. The flow of capital goods to agriculture was such that the latter was, in fact, a net receiver, rather than a net supplier of resources to industry (Ellman 1979, p. 96 cited in Utting 1992:25). The problem in the case of China, on the other hand, was 'bureaucratism' and 'egalitarianism' which characterized the commune system that acted as a disincentive to individual effort and initiative and resulted in low levels of labour productivity (Bettelheim 1988: 8; Ghose 1984: 254, cf. Utting 1992: 25).

One of the important reasons for the failure of the Ethiopian Land Reform of 1975 to achieve the intended objective was that it was designed and implemented from above by the state policy makers. While the policy makers had the good intention to help the rural poor, they lacked the experience and understanding of the rural reality. Moreover, they did not involve the rural people who were supposed to benefit from the reforms. As Dessalegn (1985) observes, the Land Reform and other policies which were thought to improve rural conditions were done in haste without consultation and participation of the rural people. During the Derg regime, household, small-holding agriculture was far more efficient than state farms, even though most state support went to the collective farms (ibid). If almost all
the support went to the state farms, why then was the household agriculture more efficient? On the basis of my research with the people of Berekha, this was so because peasants work harder and more sincerely when it is to the direct and immediate benefit of their household.

There were other reasons for continued low productivity of agriculture. The Land Reform abolished landlordism and made peasants autonomous. But, it could not by itself increase the productivity of agriculture, which required a much higher level of industrialization and urbanization to provide stimulus for rural growth in return for absorbing the surplus from the countryside. Instead, urban-industrial development did not take off in Ethiopia. So, while the city absorbed the agricultural surplus from the countryside, it did not provide any stimulus or technical aid for rural development. This was one of the main reasons why agricultural productivity under the socialist policy did not increase (Dessalegn 1985:221-22).

III. THE PRODUCERS COOPERATIVES
a) The State Objective

Related to the redistribution of land under the Derg as the reorganization of the peasantry. The Land Reform Proclamation of 1975 already contained within it the plan to create the Producers' Cooperatives (hereafter PCs). It stated:

...only by instituting basic change in agrarian relations which would lay the basis upon which, through work by cooperation, the development of one becomes the development of all.\(^\text{12}\)

This was a precursor to the Proclamation of 1978 providing for the establishment of PCs, which had the following objectives:\(^\text{13}\)

1) "to put the means of production under the control of cooperatives and to transform them gradually to collective property..."\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{12}\) Proclamation No. 31, p. 93.

\(^{13}\) A Proclamation to Provide for the Establishment of Cooperative Societies (1978).

\(^{14}\) Article 3, #2, p.42.
2) to conduct political agitation
3) to eliminate reactionary culture and customs

The PCs implied equal access to land and participation by all the members. This generally meant a considerable change in social relations at the village level, with many poor peasants, landless labourers and the unemployed from the small towns joining the PCs and being granted access to land.

The PCs provided the blueprint for the transformation of the individual property of each peasant household into a collective property in order to prevent the development of capitalism, increase agricultural production and build up socialism in the countryside. This was planned to be accomplished in three stages, the last stage being Weland. At this stage, the entire population of a PA was supposed to have joined the PCs, completing the process of socialist transformation of property. Poluha (1989: 40-44) reports that until 1982 no PCs had reached the final stage (Weland). Another study shows that in 1985 only 2.4 percent of the peasant population had joined the PCs (Tegegne 1988: 134 cf. in Poluha 1989: 42).

b) Response From the Village of Berekha

The freedom and independence from the landlords the peasants enjoyed after the Land Reform was brief. It was interrupted by the introduction of the PCs. Peasants supported the abolition of landlordism and the creation of equality in the rural areas by allowing peasants to hold land in their own right. But, they did not respond favourably to the creation of the Producers Cooperatives. During our discussions both men and women expressed their objection to it. Their typical response was:

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15. Article 3, #5, p.42.
16. Article 3, #6, p.42.
17. See also Dessalegn 1987.
18. Peasants' cooperativeness was based on traditional culture. However, the cooperativeness required by the PCs was based on the policy makers' understanding and interpretation of socialist principles. The reasons for their failure were complex. But, one of the reasons why peasants did not respond to this policy of the government favourably was the failure of communication.
We were happy with the Land Reform, but what hurt us was the amratch (PCs). The governing body of the Peasant Association decided about the make up of the amratch and set the rules for its administration. It brought people who did not know how to plough and mixed them with those who were skilled agriculturalists and accustomed to working hard.

The villagers were particularly critical of the policy for encouraging people from the neighbouring small towns, who did not have the knowledge of farming joining the PCs and getting equal access to farmlands and produce. Our conversation on this topic always centred around the central idea behind the land reform: "if the ‘Reform stated Land to the Tillers’, aren’t we the tillers?" According to them, the main problem right from the beginning was the criteria (set by the governing body of the Peasant Association) for the selection of the members of the PCs. Here is how one of the village elders summed it up:

They put together the merar gebare (the skilled and hard working farmer) and the lazy one from anywhere, who did not eat (i.e., did not make his livelihood) by ploughing, those who did not even have the basic skills to assemble the yoke and plough together, and did not know how to weed efficiently. They were all put together in one amratch unit. Then how could the lazy ones be sorted out from the hard working farmers? They were never sorted out!

At the time of the Revolution, half of the labour force in Addis Ababa was unemployed (Palen 1977). In other, smaller towns throughout the country as well there was a high rate of unemployment. It is this unemployed mass of the urban centres and small towns spread over throughout the country who subsequently played an active role in the conflict and violence in the aftermath of the Revolution and succeeded in taking control of the Kebeles (Neighbourhood Committees), PAs, PCs, etc. They were the beneficiaries of the reform measures taken by the government. They were encouraged by the government to play a leading role in the implementation of the reforms. When the people of Berekha opposed the PC and complained about people who did not work hard but took share of the produce, they were referring to these people.

The settlers critically reflected on how the socialist ideology was allowed to prevail over the reality of rural life based on farming. As Mohammed Girma summed it up:

For the sake of equality, the amratch decided to give land to women, the feeble, old, lazy, and to all of those who couldn’t work the land. They all got the fertile land, just by joining the amratch. Even the office worker who did
not know the soil, got equal land with the merar gebare. This made the hard working farmer sit idle.

Until 1974 a household with productive labour in the village of Berekha would seek for additional sharecropping arrangement wherever it was available (see chapter six). Under socialism, the Land Reform and PCs were introduced, and the hiring of labour was prohibited. A household was only allowed to farm the land that was allotted to it by the PA. Once a household farmed the land allotted to it by the PA, it had no other engagement and sat idle.

In the pre-1974 agrarian structure, in addition to the differentiation between landlords and tenants, there was a differentiation within the sharecropping tenants. Some had more sharecropping contracts, draft animals, livestock, and family labour than others. This internal differentiation was not interfered with by the landlord or by the state. Under the Derg regime, however, the village differentiation was directly challenged. The privileged tenants, while they welcomed the abolition of differentiation between them and the landlord, did not react favourably to the levelling of differences within the tenants and the mixing together of tillers and non-tillers from the small towns. In particular the typical reaction from older generation of the village was:

The amratch was intolerable. It was created with people who did not have anything. Even those who did not have a single ox joined it and became powerful. A neighbour who would borrow an ox to pair it with his in order to plough his land could join the amratch and become bossy.

This attitude of peasants did not go well with the government’s professed objective to create a socialist society and economy, wherein the PCs were to play a vital role in rural development. The majority of peasants did not like the process of decision making by the leaders of the PCs. They felt excluded from this process that affected their lives. They found the decisions taken by the PCs arbitrary, but felt rather helpless, not knowing where to turn to for appeal. Because they were treated as passive recipients of Reform from above, they remained bystanders. Their narrations were punctuated with a strong sense of fatalism, based on an awareness of their weak position in the power hierarchy:

The amratch incorporated the adjoining lands of those who did not want to join and compensated for it with another plot of land in another location. The lands given in compensation were usually less fertile than those taken over by the amratch. Everything was decided by the amratch. We couldn’t sell our land,
nor could we rent it. What to do? Where to go? It was bad.\textsuperscript{19}

c) **Peasants' Moral Economy and the Producers' Cooperatives**

Against the textbook expectations of the transition to socialism, after the introduction of PCs, a large section of the peasantry actually withdrew their support for the Derg. Even those who remained with the PCs were unhappy with their functioning, which they perceived as inconsistent with their professed objective and essentially unethical and immoral. They expressed their moral outrage as follows:

We were told to plough and harvest together and share the produce equally. We were told the produce was ours. But, instead what we witnessed was that the \textit{teff}\textsuperscript{20} was being taken out. The chairman and guard of the PA, along with some of the officials from the Ministry of Agriculture and the district administrative office will arrange for the transfer of our \textit{teff} at night from the storage. So, we were left with \textit{mashila} (sorghum) to share among ourselves, while our \textit{teff} was gone. Where then, was the equality in this?

d) **Traditional Work Ethic verses Socialist Work Ethics**

The requirements to be successful at the PCs were contradictory to the traditional work ethic of the peasant way of life. According to the villagers, in order to be successful at the PCs, one had to have a subservient attitude, while as peasants they were used to working for themselves, notwithstanding their dependence on the landlord:

A person who has worked as servant/is used to servitude during good time would always benefit [from the previous experience]. The one who had never worked as a servant, it does not suit him. A person who is used to eating by ploughing [making his livelihood by farming], does not know how to be a servant for others. Why? Because, a person who is used to ploughing does not have the skills to be sociable. He is not used to it.

Like the other villagers, Mohammed Girma uses the \textit{aman gize} (good time) to refer to the period before 1974. The current rapid and unpredictable conditions are compared with the

\textsuperscript{19} The land Reform gave peasants usufruct right, but not private ownership of land. The land was owned by the state. However, the villagers considered themselves as owner of the plots they were given to farm.

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Teff} (\textit{Eragrostis Abyssinica}) in Ethiopia is the most important and highly valued cereal.
old way of life. In spite of being one of the staunch critics of the administrative injustices of the state and the landlords, this period for him was still aman gize, that is, free of war turmoil and confusion. Despite the fact that as tenants in the changing social, political, and economic conditions in pre-1974 Ethiopia, and that they had been the direct beneficiaries of the reforms introduced by the Derg, the villagers nevertheless nostalgically refer to the period as aman gize.

The villagers emphasized the value of hard work to maintain their household autonomy and their status as independent producers. Mehammed Girma’s narrative further illustrates this point:

I am used to eating by farming [making my livelihood by farming], but not of being a servant. Those who work for the government and the PA are accustomed to bowing for others [greeting, which could also have a feudal connotation of accepting submission] and manipulating. They have always known how to be a servant and thus know how to survive.

He repeatedly emphasized the contradiction between one’s desire for an independent way of making a living and the importance of social skills to survive by working for someone else. At the time of the interview his nephew was visiting him from Wello, and he used him as an example to explain this issue, which seemed so dear to him. He said:

Let me give you an example of my nephew, who is "ye angafatvitu ihite lii" [my eldest sister’s son]. He is used to "ashikarinat" [servitude/working for the notables]. Right from his childhood, he used to work with his uncle and also with the atbiya dagna [a traditional judiciary official of a village/neighbourhood], the official I had a fight with and left my home land. So, he knows how to do it. If you want me to prove this to you, let three of us go to the town you will see that he already knows everyone and greets everyone. He will say: good morning and good afternoon to all. But, me who has been farming and living here all these years hardly knows any one and no one greets me either. But, everyone calls for him. Men, women - everyone knows him. Nobody says good morning to me. Why? Because ishkirina lamidual. I don’t like chatting with people. I prefer to focus on work, and that is why I had hard time with the amratch.

Mehammed Girma is politically conscious and he was actively interested and involved in the Revolution. According to him, what distinguished the rural people (peasants) from the urban was ishkirina (servitude). It is important to note that although peasants were dependent on the landlords for land, but they did not consider themselves their servants. This was an
extremely important distinction to M. Girma, and he wanted to make sure that I understood him clearly on that point. To elaborate on this point, he used an historical analogy which was familiar to him. He defines *ishkirina* as master-servant relationship of the feudal times. For instance, where one of the jobs of a servant was to follow behind the mule of a landlord or a notable. He elaborated:

*Mislenew* (the lord) receives land from the state in *gasahs* (local term for land measurement). 21 Out of this land, the *mislene* will say to a man: ‘*Ye hulat ken mawaya maret isetihalehu*’ (I will give you a land that will engage you for two full days) in return for your labour. 22 On the basis of this agreement the man will work for the *mislene*. He will carry his cloak and rifle and follow behind his galloping mule all over the place. While the *mislene* chats with the people in authority, the servant waits. His job is to attend the mule while grazing and carry the gun of the *mislene* and work for him as his private guard/soldier. *Mislene* shows to the people that he is a man of power; he has people working under him. He can afford to do this and take the man anywhere, because he has given him that piece of land.

According to the settlers, what mattered in the long run was not the agricultural skill and the hard work, but being in the good books of the chair of the PC:

In the amratch, *Ya boudin mari* (group leader) was the one who organized each group for production. One who had the social skill got a good share. But, the one who did his job, just because he was not favoured, he did not get along with the *boudin committee mari* 23 (the leader of the group committee) and the chair of the amratch, he got less than his share despite his hard work. The smart one with the social skills of pleasing others got 8-9-quintals, while the other one got just 5-quintals of grains. If he objected and enquired why he was not getting the same amount, he was simply told that he was getting according to his labour contribution and would be silenced.

Since we were peasants we focused on working hard to produce. We could not be good in dealing with people and socializing well. But, those who knew how to please and manipulate, so they always ended up getting the higher produce.

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21 Gasha also means shield.

22 This is another folk form of measurement, in reference to the number of days (time) required to plough the size of land. For instance the most common measurement referring to sharecropping arrangement in Berekha and the neighbouring villages were "*gimash qen mewaya*" (half-a day spending).

23 Elected by the members of PA.
e) Villagers’ Traditional Sense of Cooperation versus Socialist Cooperation of the Producers’ Cooperatives

The Producers Cooperatives required central planning and organization that did not go well with what peasants were accustomed to. It needed a different arrangement of social relations and cooperative culture. This does not, however, mean that peasants lacked cooperative culture. Rather, their sense of cooperation under a traditional system was different. The peasants are aware that to work in urban areas and with the bureaucracy required different social skills than subsisting on farming for oneself. The spirit of cooperation the settlers had developed in their traditional milieu under the guidance of their Shaykh couldn’t be applied directly to the Producers’ Cooperatives which were more like urban bureaucratic organizations.

The socialist ethics of hard work and collective labour was not accepted by peasants mainly because they were perceptive enough to see the contradiction between what was preached from the top (at the state level) and what was practised at the grassroots level. In other words, how these rules were applied in the operation of the PCs did not receive the same kind of acceptance and approval from the villagers as for instance, the teachings and instructions by their Shaykh earlier.

The underdevelopment of the infrastructure and the absence of technologically advanced farming and craft (which promotes cooperative and planned work) has left the rural areas with a serious lack of experience to work collectively/cooperatively outside the traditional form of organization (based on religion and other traditional institutions). Rather than trying to understand and utilize the peasants’ traditional mechanisms of cooperative work, the ideology of the new regime negated them in the name of scientific socialism, and tried instead to impose a bureaucratic form of cooperativeness. This resulted in the development of authoritarianism and domination based on coercion. For people had to be coerced into a new form of social and economic organization. Because the regime required a speedy and constant supply of food and human labour for the war, more coercion was applied as peasants persistently resisted. The resistance by peasants was explained by the regime in terms of their sense of individualism and apathy to organize.
f) Customary Form of Cooperative Work in Pre-1974 Ethiopia

In order to contextualize peasants’ response to the social and economic changes introduced after 1974, it is necessary to give a brief account of traditional forms of community organization in villages scattered throughout in regions like northern Shewa and Wello.

The customary form of cooperation (or a lack of it) in Ethiopian society, particularly among the Amharas, is a complex issue. As mentioned in chapters five and six, the settlers of Berekha under the guidance of their Shaykh had developed and maintained a spirit of collective/cooperative work that was essential to their survival. However, that kind of cooperative spirit or consciousness cannot be treated as universal for all of Ethiopian peasant community. I will raise some of the common factors in the traditional system that facilitated and/or hindered the development of cooperative spirit/consciousness among peasants in Ethiopia (particularly Amharas).

Gult (fief) rights, apart from providing economic and political support for the nobility, also constituted the framework for the administration of the peasantry in their respective territories. Virtually all arable and inhabited land was held by some individual or some institution as gult. There was "no land without a master" (Hoben 1973: 98-182). For administrative purpose, and from the point of view of the peasantry, each gult estate was a distinct unit with its own internal organization. Gult estates provided minimal and most enduring units of secular administrative organization in traditional Ethiopian society. Allan Hoben (1973) in his study of Gojjam has stated that if Gult rights were the basis of vertical ties, rist (land-use) on the other hand rights constituted the base for horizontal community ties. Hence, rist rights played an important role in the social and economic organization of the peasantry and the local community. In spite of the fact that peasant households were characterized by competitiveness and a strong sense of privacy, they were tied to one another through the parish or mosque. Fellow parishioners had a sense of common identity in opposition to people from other parishes. Thus the traditional structure of

24 Ethiopia's feudal land tenure system is extremely complex and varied. Writing the detail of it will burden the reader with too many terms, concepts and descriptions. Hence, gult and rist land rights will be mentioned to show what basically distinguished the peasantry from the lords.
land relations met the needs of both class hierarchy and community solidarity.

Hoben situates his study of the pivotal role of kinship in the social organization and inheritance of land in Gojjam. He suggests that cognatic descent, unlike unilineal descent, recruited an individual to more than one group which could potentially turn into a source of disorder, ambiguity, or conflict in the community. The restriction of membership in cognatic descent groups was often related to the territorial localization of each group's economic resources, most often, land. Although the descent group's land was concentrated in one locality, members of the descent category associated with the land were widely dispersed over a much larger area. As a result, the probability of their participating in the affairs of the descent group and holding a share of its land decreased with the distance of their residence from the group's land. The restriction of descent group membership by geographical proximity, that is, distance from the descent group's resources, may have resulted from purely pragmatic considerations. In the absence of modern transportation and economic and legal conditions it might have been impractical for an individual to maintain active membership in a descent group whose estates were very far from his residence (ibid. 20).

The decisions regarding restriction by geographical proximity were made in the context of community - village and parish. These decisions were influenced by popular notions of the rights of neighbours, the propriety of allowing non-residents to hold land without sharing the burdens of statute labour, and the expedience of attracting clergymen who were needed to offer mass in the parish church. In some regions the rules relating to membership in terms of geographical proximity were more formalised. Thus in parts of Eritrea in Northern Ethiopia, in addition to descent from its founder, residence on the descent group's land, was a prerequisite to holding land, (Nadel 1946 cf. Hoben ibid. 20). Although Hoben's arguments are based on field research among the Amhara of Gojjam, it has wider applicability. The villagers of Berekha coming from Wello region which is embedded in both the tradition of gult and rist could fit in this scenario. Given this historical background, it is then understandable that they were particularly critical of outsiders from the surrounding small towns joining their PAs and PCs to have access to land.

The ecological conditions, that is, scattered settlement on mountains and plateaus affected the meaning of community sentiment among the Amhara population. Their isolation
was further fostered by underdevelopment and lack of urban centres. Under these conditions, the highland Amhara preferred not to associate with people outside the immediate kin groups. However, larger aggregations were common on the estates of noblemen and monasteries.

Another factor which is relevant in this context is the emphasis on observance of etiquette in socializing. Thus, a breach of etiquette might create friction leading to litigation at court. Donald Levine (1986: 251) mentions a case where a man was accused and convicted for addressing his father-in-law, whom he normally addressed by the polite form erteowo, with the familiar form anta in a moment of anger.

In traditional Ethiopian society litigation was endemic. Levine (1986) comments that such disposition is prevalent in most peasant societies and compares Chinese peasant life which according to him showed a marked contrast. In traditional China interpersonal conflict, far from being relished, was deliberately avoided, and going to court was considered an extravagance, and the village judge was one of the most underemployed members of the community. In China, parties to a dispute preferred to assemble at the teahouse and to seek a solution through discussion and negotiation, while it was the opposite in Ethiopia. In fact, ordinary sociability among the Amhara was saturated with references to litigation, where current court cases comprised one of the more common topics of conversation. He concludes:

Some indication of the gross national significance of this phenomenon is afforded by the following comparison: twenty-seven high court judges are sufficient to handle the litigation for all of England and Wales; the corresponding number for Ethiopia is one hundred and eighteen (248).

Levine’s study is situated within the modernization and psychoanalytical paradigm ignoring the structural factors. Nevertheless, his (and Hoben’s) observations provide some clue to the villagers’ negative response to the inclusion of outsiders unfamiliar with the community’s etiquette in their PAs and PCs.

**IV. THE POLITICAL OBJECTIVES OF THE PRODUCERS’ COOPERATIVES**

The Derg’s political objectives in creating the Producers Cooperatives were to foster equality and homogeneity to bolster the spirit of collectivity among the villagers. But, these objectives were not met. There were many who were adamant not to join the cooperatives
from the beginning, while others joined but left soon afterwards because they were dissatisfied. This created a new kind of divisiveness within the village between those who joined and remained in the cooperatives, and those who did not. The divisiveness percolated down even to the village children who were herding the family cattle. The common explanation was as follows,

It created a split between us. Our calves were prohibited from grazing freely while those of the people in amratch did. Even our daughters and sons began to be divided: between "ya-gilena" (private person, that is, individual peasant holders) and amratch (those who joined the cooperatives).

The official ideology focused on the class contradictions. Accordingly, it assumed that once the landlordism was abolished, there would be no source of conflict and divisiveness at the village level, the entire rural population would have solidarity, and work cooperatively for the common good. When the divisiveness and conflicts began to surface in the process of operation of the Producers' Cooperatives, the party bureaucrats, rather than trying to understand and redress them, took refuge behind official ideology which treated peasants as backward and conservative unable to grasp the advanced principles of socialist society. Those who did not join the PCs were labelled as reactionaries.

The PCs' responsibility to carry on political agitation at the grassroots level was meant to raise new consciousness. However, the attempt to eliminate the so-called "reactionary culture and customs" only amounted to undermining the local tradition, without offering a viable alternative. As a result, people became confused. The traditional values that governed the village society were based on the teachings of religious leaders and village elders. The PCs undermined the authority structure based on religion, kinship, age and status, creating a political and moral vacuum. The new authority figures governing the PAs and PCs, consisting of younger men engaged in administration and politicization, lacked legitimacy. The village elders did not accept their authority. This became a new source of tension and potential conflict.

In the perception of the villagers, the new leadership was also incompetent. Whenever this issue was raised, they typically expressed their disappointment as follows:

While we were happily saying that the change uprooted all the biggest trees and made them fall for us, it brought the amratch and made it sit on the chair.
[left by the past rulers]. They filled the space. The members of the amratch brought the uneducated and undisciplined from the highlands and lowlands; mixed them without a pattern. It passed us on to the uneducated and rural. When uneducated people are given power, they would always like to oppress others. Because they don’t know the meaning of governance. The amratch members began to tell us: "mangist nan" (we are the government). That is what really made us suffer.

In the villagers’ view educated persons are better administrators and leaders than ordinary peasants. But, the educated leaders for them did not mean those with modern and formal education. Rather, they were referring to the hereditary rulers with experience of administration.

The villagers were not mentally prepared for a complete break with the past. The Land Reform and PCs created a new form of hierarchy without the substance of the moral economy of the old hierarchy. One comment on the radical social change following the Revolution was as follows:

Change can be supported at least at one tchaf (end). But it has two sides. Benefit is not the only outcome of change. One end is gain while the other is loss. People thought they will only benefit from (the radical social) change. At least the bal-abatochu (the landlords) liked to keep a good name, so one could go and complain to them, when injustice was done to you. But, the leaders of amratch were those who could not trace who their mothers/fathers were. They screamed at us and mistreated us. They did not treat us like human beings.

The villagers were aware that public administration required special kinds of skills and a good sense of judgement, which in their opinion the leaders of PAs and PCs lacked. They expected that the government would understand their grievances and provide them with good administrators, not the kind of leaders who occupied the leadership positions in the PCs. and PAs.

In the peasant world, where social relations are dependent on kin-and community-

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25 Pattern refers to rural order and social gradation of life. The difference between status, age, temperaments of highlanders and lowlanders, etc.

26 The new people in the position of governing are contrasted with the old ones who had the experience, and who were conscious of their moral obligations. This does not however mean that they endorse the old system. It was rather a reflection on the inefficiency and lack of legitimacy on the part of the new leaders.
based (non-market) forms of exchange, social obligations are maintained mainly by moral pressure. The Great Shaykh, for instance, enjoyed no right of land ownership in Efratana-Jille. He was only allowed to have a temporary and conditional access to land. Nor did he have any formal political power. The elements of force and physical constraint were entirely lacking in his authority. He had only moral (saintly) authority over his followers. His saintly attributes and charisma commanded obedience. His followers saw his saintliness and religious knowledge as a divine grace which had passed on to him from God due to his good deeds and prayers. He was perceived by them as one to guide them to salvation both on earth and in heaven. In addition to his charisma and religious knowledge, it was also due to his style of life that the Shaykh earned the devotion of his followers, that is, he dressed, ate and prayed like them. He dedicated himself to his followers to guide them and give them advice. The power of the Great Shaykh was spiritually sanctioned. It was thus a truly legitimate authority, which contrasted with the authority of the PAs and the office bearers of the PCs that lacked the former’s moral authority and legitimacy.

There was yet another reason why the political authority of the PCs and PAs was opposed by many peasants. Even though, the leadership of PAs and PCs was elected by peasants themselves, it became hierarchical, authoritarian, and politically coercive. The leadership had to implement policy decisions made by the party and state bureaucracy from above, which gave them tremendous power vis a vis the ordinary members. The difference was that unlike the pre-1974 period, the political coercion was now coming from their own people. This divided the community and caused distress. In the old system peasants were aware that they were subjects of the landlord. Under those conditions, while they obeyed the authority of the landlord, it also provided them the basis of unity among themselves. The new leadership structure that emerged from the grassroots differentiated them by creating political hierarchy among themselves. Neighbours and kin members who were equal suddenly became in a position of authority. This became difficult for them to accept. The new leadership was more difficult to challenge since it was no more the landlord, or the tax

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27 As we have seen in the previous chapters, coming from another region the villagers of Berekha had developed a cohesive community, that was based on a common interest, that is the search for land to make their livelihood.
collectors, but their neighbours and kin who were now in the positions of authority. In addition, the self government through the PA, which evolved out of the village level political engagement paved the way for direct state interference in the everyday life of people. In the old system, the villagers were under the authority of the landlord, who was not part of their everyday life. He was a remote authority. The PA on the other hand was part of everyday life of the villagers, which was new and a pervasive form of surveillance. The villagers became resentful and critical of this form of "self-government." The revolution undoubtedly converted the peasants into active political actors and whenever there was an opportunity they tried to articulate their viewpoint. Other times they actively plotted.

The introduction and enforcement of the PCs alienated the mass of peasantry from the state. The EPDRF during the war especially, on the eve of its takeover of state power was able to exploit the rift between the wider population and the state to its advantage. One of the important factors that expedited EPDRF's success in 1991 was winning over the population that was alienated from the state.

It is important to note that not all villagers were opposed to all the measures taken by the Derg regime. One important illustration of this is found in the way some of them expressed their reaction to the recruitment of their young men to the government militia during the civil war. They took it as part of their duty. Their typical reaction to the war was as follows:

The Derg was sending our sons away to the military service. But, that did not affect us: because "Binimot le hagar naw" (If we die, it is for [our] country).

On the other hand, the typical expression of those opposed to the war was "ba-torinat issat teqatelin" (the fire from the war consumed us).²⁸

When the PCs were finally abolished in 1989 under a new Declaration of the Derg, it was supported by the majority of the peasants. But at that point, the villagers were divided in their opinion. Those who were in the PCs at the time of the new declaration, believed that

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²⁸ During interviews, there was a clear difference between men and women on what they emphasized and considered as important regarding the government policies. While men emphasized the politics of land and how they have been mistreated by the PCs, women put more emphasis on the loss of their sons or brothers, etc being sent to the war and its impact on their well being.
the PAs distributed the land fairly among all its members, both men and women. But, there was no general agreement on this. Those who were not in the cooperatives were again disappointed by the government. Because, they were anticipating that under the new declaration the government will return the plots integrated into the PCs to the original holders whom the Reform of 1975 had given usufruct right. That did not happen, partly because the Derg did not last long. Nevertheless, they kept their hopes even after the fall of the Derg, thinking that the new government under the EPDRF will correct the mistakes of the past regime. When that did not happen, they retreated to God, prayer, and fatalism. Their typical response to the current situation was:

    Now also who knows what the Lord [God] is going to bring next? It is only God. Who else knows what kind of change [i.e. what kind of government] is going to come next.

V. WHY THE STATE REFORMS FAILED TO ACHIEVE THEIR OBJECTIVES

The main objective of socialist reforms in post-1974 Ethiopia was to improve the conditions of rural masses so as to free them of underdevelopment, endemic poverty and inequality. This objective was not realized. One of the main reasons for the failure of socialist reforms was the overemphasis on ideology at the cost of the objective conditions of the society and economy. The long years of feudal rule created the absence of a pluralistic political tradition. It was a predominantly agrarian society with the overwhelming majority of the population being rooted in traditional consciousness dominated by religion. The success of socialism in Ethiopia depended on tackling these issues in a realistic manner. I will discuss briefly these issues.

a) Ideology verses Objective Reality

    One of the serious problems with the social, political, and economic "transition" in Ethiopia during the Derg period was the high ideological content of public policy. Far too often, as it has been pointed out, long-term or short-term decisions were made on ideological grounds rather than grounds of practicality. Economic and practical issues were turned into political ones, and the planners viewed "even the most technical problems through ideological
spectacles" (Dessalegn 1987:175-76).

The development strategy chosen by the government aimed at "completing the national democratic revolution and laying down the foundation for socialism" (Program Of The Party). Dessalegn (1987) points out that in order to make the development program successful, the Derg had to solve the two interrelated problems; the problem of capital accumulation and dependency. "These two problems, which also happen to be central in all Third World countries, socialist or otherwise, do not respond positively to ideological manipulation" (Dessalegn 1987: 176).

The same tendency to emphasize ideology over the objective reality was evident the implementation of the Producers' Cooperatives. Engels (1966) noted it long ago that small-holding peasant would be initially resistant to giving up his property. It is only "by dint of example" that he can gradually be led towards a cooperative form of production, that is, common ownership of land combined with cooperative labour. He warned that small holding peasants, given their objective conditions and consciousness will inevitably resist any attempt to push them towards cooperative production in haste (Dessalegn 1985: 219-20).

Lenin (1976) was similarly aware of peasants' hunger for land and consequently the counterproductive nature of any programme of agrarian socialism involving the expropriation of the peasantry from the land. Therefore, he emphasized that land reform will not by itself change the reality of the rural society characterized by backward technology, scattered and subsistence production, and medieval forms of culture and social relations (ibid: 220-221).

The fact that socialist transformation in Ethiopia was carried out by the military created another problem. In societies where civilian political and social organizations are weak, the military takes over. Ethiopia until 1974 was ruled by an absolute monarch. After the deposition of the emperor, space was created for the military to take over.29 But despite its good intentions, can military government empower a civilian population? Military organizations are hierarchical and command- oriented. Their training is to accept orders and carry through the line of command, to instruct rather than to listen. Accepting the will of those who are beneath them is considered out of norm, or rule. Rather orders are to be

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29 See Haliday and Molyneaux 1980:98, for class analysis of the army.
executed within the rules of the military. Could the Party give orders to the Generals? In other words, could the generals accept military orders from the Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE) which held supreme power over the government including defense? The cross section of people I spoke to during my research believed that there was a wide gap between the Party and the military. In particular, when the civil war got intensified, this became a very serious problem. As the conditions further deteriorated, I was told, the whole society was split into three separate groups: the Party, the military, and the civilian population.

b) Negating Traditional Values and Institutions

Traditional Ethiopian society had a cultural nexus of meeting the shortage of food caused by famine and other calamities. In this nexus, religious institutions were central. The state, represented by the monarch, was another pillar of the traditional cultural nexus. The feudal lords were also part of this nexus. In times of famine, people looked to religious institutions (Church and Mosque), the emperor and the landlords for relief.

In the ideological, political, and economic reforms of the Derg, there was an attempt to replace the old forms of feudal relations by the new institutions based on secular values. The old nexus of the church, state, and the ruling class (the landlords) was replaced by a new secular organization, Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (hereafter RRC), at the centre. During the 1984-85 famine, the RRC was rated as "efficient and unique with no equivalent in the developing world" (Janson 1987:45-77). Because of the excellent organization of the RRC, the state was able to reach out effectively everyone in need of help. The residents of Berekha confirmed how the Derg was able to help them through the RRC during the famine and save their lives.

Notwithstanding the organizational efficiency of the RRC, the government measures were, however, unable to meet their professed objectives. As Penrose notes, few countries could claim to have achieved the creation of such a widespread network of grassroots organizations as Ethiopia during the Derg regime, but they could not have their anticipated effect in generating self-development and mobilisation for change. One of the problems was that these organizations lacked trained cadres with the expertise and competence to lead the peasants to initiate their own programs. Hence, peasants showed much inertia as they simply
awaited government directives: "The long years of subordination and subjugation in a feudal setting, illiteracy and isolation, have tended to make the general membership apathetic and passive rather than assertive" (Penrose 1987:113-29).

Penrose's observation on the lack of trained cadres is well taken, but her conclusions regarding peasants' apathy and lack of initiative are one-sided and cannot be supported in light of my own study. In fact, the traditional values and symbols which governed people's action and defined their expectations and response in times of famine were not included in the ideology of the Derg regime. That was a shortsighted policy. Many elements in the traditional value system which could have been used positively to empower the peasant population were not utilized. For instance, the discipline and strength of the Ethiopian peasantry, which have been observed and appreciated by foreign relief workers (cf., Janson 1987) among others could have been utilized by the state rather than labelling peasants as universally apathetic and self-centred.

The Derg regime aimed at a complete transformation of the political and economic structure and value system of the society. Two observations need to be made here. First, as discussed above not everything in the old system was negative. Secondly, and most importantly, the competence and ability of the new rulers and the material conditions of the country were not congenial to the realization of this broad objective. Based on his observation while working in Ethiopia, Davis argued that the government plans might seem good and well-intentioned, but their implementation too often was inadequate, largely because of financial constraints and the lack of enough adequately trained personnel. Similar problems have been faced elsewhere by Third World societies that have tried to implement socialist policies. Mozambique is a case in point. Judith Marshall and Otto Roesch (1992) comment on the relative ease RENAMO supporters became prominent because of the lack of political and administrative experience of FRELIMO. In fact, the main reasons why traditional authorities that were conservative were able to "reestablish their legitimacy over large numbers of their former subjects stemmed...[due to] the political and administrative inexperience of elected local Frelimo leaders"(4). This resurgence of traditionalism was "an expression of the Mozambican peasantry's attempt to reconstitute new systems of meaning and social order out of the war-shattered wreckage of Frelimo's post-independence
d) **Underdevelopment and the Rural-Urban Gap**

Another factor that hindered the development of new, collective consciousness among the peasants was the rural-urban gap. The political cadres entrusted with the task of politically educating the peasants came from the urban areas. Even if these political cadres were dedicated to the task of empowering the peasant population, the wide urban-rural gap, compounded by the poverty and underdevelopment of the rural areas, could not be overcome. Despite the sincere efforts of some of the cadres, they couldn’t bridge this structural gap. For peasants, the political cadres were outsiders coming to their villages with views sometimes difficult to comprehend. As a result, notwithstanding the political indoctrination, the peasantry could not transcend the narrow, family-centred, immediate interest-based consciousness to acquire collective-based socialist consciousness. Peasants did not trust the cadres. They did listen to them, but interpreted the doctrines propagated by them according to their immediate interest. The new ideas did, nevertheless, create dissension and conflict within the peasant community, without accomplishing the desired objective of creating a higher form of socialist consciousness based on the collective interest of the society.

e) **The Impact of War and Famine on Society and Economy**

Government planning was also hindered by the overall underdevelopment of the country and massive destitution of the rural population caused by the civil wars, and famines. An important factor which must be taken into account for Ethiopia's social and economic problems during the Derg period was the escalation of the civil strife and aggressive warfare following the Revolution of 1974, which disrupted food production and contributed to further underdevelopment. In addition to famine, the prolonged civil wars perpetuated social destitution. Being preoccupied with the continuing civil war which took up most of the country's resources the government was unable to provide any credit or technical assistance to peasants. Thus, peasants had the land but were left with the still primitive technology and no investment. Among other things, this affected peasant’s perception of the government and its credibility: they thought the government had failed to provide the necessary assistance to
enable them to maximise their productive capacity. On the other hand, the government tried to shield itself by shifting the responsibility for the disaster on the previous order (Lemma, 1985:44). Here, the socialist ideology was used by the government almost like a religion.

The trauma of a relatively isolated, loosely integrated and underdeveloped society was further aggravated by its sudden exposure to international rivalry for supremacy between superpowers.

Famine is a great leveller. Widespread poverty has led even the upper classes to sink down and get absorbed into the wider population. Fatalism, the sense of being satisfied with little to maintain their age-old ways of life, needs to be seen within this context of the widespread poverty of Ethiopians.

To illustrate the above point, one can draw parallels from the Russian case after the 1917 Revolution without, however, overlooking the vast differences in the historical context between the two situations. In Russia, the policy-makers in their attempt to improve the conditions in the countryside did take into account all relevant economic factors for the development of agriculture. However, major non-economic events like the 1917-18 Revolution, the wars between 1914 and 1921, and the famine of 1921-22, that were responsible for aggregate downward shifts and some possible levelling in peasant communities were ignored. As Shanin (1972) points out, there were two major breaks in continuity in the life of the Russian peasants in the period: the first was in the years 1914-20, with wars and revolution, and the second was in 1921-22 with famine. The famine led to the destruction and a consequent shortage of the basic means of production, in particular, livestock. It also led to a sharp increase in emigration and extinction of households and to a drop in rates of land partitioning which could be interpreted in terms of the economic crises involved, exacerbated by the inflexible manpower supply and limited equipment, savings, and credit characteristic of peasant households. The net result was levelling and aggregate shift downwards in peasant society (Shanin 1972: 129).

One of the most important factors in the context of the persistent poverty, drought, and famine in Ethiopia is the peasant body itself. Recurrent famines and persistent poverty reduce peasants' physical ability to work or travel to seek work or migrate during famine. On the one hand, famine creates migration, and on the other, it also limits the mobility of peasants.
and the long term consequences of this contradictory impact of famine on the peasantry has not been adequately studied. They have to remain healthy, adequately fed, and productive to live, to work, and to make the journeys to distant market and pilgrimage sites. These journeys are important in breaking the isolation of people from one region to the other, promoting contact and encouraging the flow of ideas, etc.

f) Environmental Degradation and the Productivity

Population increase reduces both the productivity of labour and resources. Farm plots get pushed into new, previously uncultivated areas of lowlands and slopes that are prone to run-offs and erosions. Slopes are areas difficult to cultivate. They require more time because ploughing requires a slow pace both for the sake of the farmer as well as the oxen. Grazing on cliff side areas may mean losing the livestock falling over precipices. This is one common cause of peasants losing their livestock in Ethiopia.

Furthermore, in drought-prone regions, lack of rain affects resources such as land, forage, and draught and pack animals. These resources have specific effects on people according to their gender, age, and social status, which must be considered when wider policy is implemented. For instance, when forests and scrub areas are brought under cultivation, it results in the elimination of forage and firewood sources, increasing the demand for labour. Women and men have to spend more time walking back and forth from their homes to their farms and fields covering long distances. Women often have to travel far away to deliver lunches. They also have to find extra labour to protect crops from pests and thefts. At harvest, crops have to be brought to a central point for threshing and winnowing and then carried to granaries near the homestead. The overall impact of all of these factors results in the increase of labour required for production per unit of land.

VI. CLOSING REMARKS

On the eve of the Revolution the relations between the state, landlords and peasants were marked by increased contradictions. The state was interested in acquiring more power by trying to make direct contact with peasants bypassing the landlords. This was resisted by the landlords. Capitalist development in agriculture had opened new opportunities for
landlords and they were engaged in a two-pronged battle with the state on the one hand, and the peasants on the other. In their fight with the state, they wanted to convert their customary gult rights into private property in land in a modern bourgeois sense. At the same time, they wanted to expropriate the customary rights of peasants so as to reduce them to wage labourers or equivalent to wage labourers. The peasants were not passive recipients of these forces of change. However, caught between the state, landlords and capitalist forces from outside, their position was becoming increasingly vulnerable. It is important to be aware of this background in order to understand the Reforms introduced by the Derg regime after 1974 and peasants’ response to them.

The reforms introduced by the Derg discussed in this chapter are the Land Reform of 1975 and the Producers’ Cooperatives introduced in 1978. The main objective of these Reforms was to transform the agrarian political-economic structure and culture so as to free peasants of endemic poverty, give them democratic political rights and provide conditions for the development of socialist consciousness. These objectives were far from realized, and in that sense the reforms were a failure. Peasants’ response to the Reforms were mixed. They welcomed the Land Reform, but did not respond favourably to the Producers’ Cooperatives. They responded negatively to the Producers’ Cooperatives not because the peasants are individualistic lacking in a spirit of cooperation. Rather, the Cooperatives deprived them of what for them was the most positive outcome of the Land Reform. Moreover, they found the leadership of the producers’ Cooperatives and Peasant Associations incompetent and morally inept. Rather than including them in the process of decision making, the PCs excluded them. The most serious outcome of PCs was the decline in agricultural productivity and alienation between the peasant masses and the regime, exactly the opposite of the intended objective of the reforms.

The villagers used their own resources, material and cultural, to cope with the crisis without waiting for outside help. Religion is one of the most important resources that has helped the individual and community in myriad ways. Like their material resources, their religion was also facing an increased challenge, that is, from the forces of proselytization. Just as they are struggling to save their material resources from the erosion caused by natural and human factors, the villagers are also struggling to save their traditional religion by
resisting the proselytization. Ordinary people’s will and capacity to resist and struggle is a valuable human resource that needs be recognized.

Finally, the ethnographic data presented here raises an important but complex question. Were peasants really for equality in the absolute sense? They welcomed the abolition of landlordism, however, when it came to the PCs, the sharecroppers with resources opposed the inclusion of those who were resourceless. Thus, while they strive for equality with those who are higher up, they may not be prepared to concede the same to those who are lower in the hierarchy. If, however, one believes that in order to bring about social transformation and reduce poverty in the rural area, it requires not only the distribution of land, but also new egalitarian values and cooperative spirit among people, one must face two important questions. Firstly, whether peasants who have internalized hierarchy will not become hierarchical themselves if there is an opportunity? Secondly, under what conditions can the people who have always been ruled from above transcend the sense of hierarchy, accept equality, and become agents of cooperation and self-administration?
CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

From what has been discussed in the last seven chapters, the following issues emerge: the theoretical framework of the study, causes of famine, the reforms introduced by the Derg regime and their implications for the peasantry, the local people’s own initiative in utilizing their traditional resources to find solution to their problems of survival, during times of social crisis. Also important are the problems of doing research in one’s own society in the midst of poverty, famine, war and political instability, the relevance of Anthropological research and, finally, the two-way relationship between researcher’s political consciousness, theoretical perspective and field work.

I. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is situated within political economy framework that treats famine as a process. This framework, moreover, emphasizes the connection between macro and micro in a historical perspective. Within this framework, I have discussed the topography, ecology, population distribution of the region where the study is conducted, to provide necessary information on the social and ecological environment of the villagers of Berekha. I also briefly discuss the land tenure system, with a focus on Wello and Northern Shewa, and state power structure in pre-1974 Ethiopia, and the role of religion and religious leaders in the people’s social organization.

To place agrarian poverty and famine as a historical-structural process, the intervention of the state, wars of external aggression before and during World War II, the Cold War, and the civil wars are outlined. Moreover, this historical-structural exposition is used to show the two-way relationship between the macro and micro as it affects the ability of the peasantry to attend to their day-to-day problems of survival. In an underdeveloped society with a fragile economy like Ethiopia, the local (village level) conditions that govern the lives of people are extremely vulnerable in the face of the national and international economic, political and ideological intervention, because local people with limited resources quickly exhaust their energy to confront external forces.

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The literature on famine in different societies under different historical periods attempts to address famine as caused by a complex combination of natural and human factors. My conclusion is that while natural factors play an important role in causing famine, they can be overcome by the intervention of human factors, such as economic development, equitable distribution, peace, and political stability.

Malthusian theory premised on an imbalance between population growth and society’s ability to feed its population, particularly peasants’ inability to foresee the consequences of their own action to reproduce more, has been revived in the context of famine in many Third World countries in the present century. Sen’s theory of "Exchange Entitlement" and Food Availability Decline" (FAD) refutes the Malthusian thesis. His key argument is that it is not the availability of food, but the entitlement of certain groups given their location in social structure which is the main cause of famine. Unlike the neo-Malthusians, Sen does not hold the victims of famine, peasants and pastoralists in the context of Ethiopia, responsible for their misfortune. He emphasizes the position of these groups in the political-economic hierarchy as responsible for their famishment. Sen also focuses on distribution and the role of the market in defining the position of a group. Using the case of India, he demonstrates how the state in a democratic political system with free press and mass media can effectively intervene to avert famine. Sen’s thesis deals with macro structures, not with how, in the absence of such macro structures, local people living in an underdeveloped society like Ethiopia skilfully use their traditional resources as part of their survival strategies in ordinary times or during moments of social crisis.

II. THE LAND QUESTION

Ethiopia is a predominantly agrarian society, subsistence from the land being the main preoccupation of the overwhelming majority of the population. In the day-to-day conversations I had with the villagers, the issues of land, mekasab (to toil) and eating injera were among the most important. What brought together the three principal actors at the grassroots level, the villagers of Berekha, the Great Shaykh, and the landlord was land. As discussed in Chapter Six, the common preoccupation of all the three is expressed by their use
of the same idiom to describe the process of migration and settlement of the Welloye peasants in Efratana-Jille: "let us farm and eat". Guided by their Shaykh, the villagers of Berekha made this arrangement on their own, without outside intervention by the state, political parties, or the mass media.

III. STATE REFORMS AFTER 1974

The centrality of the land question was recognized by the Derg regime. The Land Reform of 1975, its first and foremost measure, had the objective of giving peasants autonomy freeing them from the economic and non-economic pressures by the landlords in the short run. It was assumed that this would automatically increase peasant productivity so as to free them of poverty and famine in the long run. The villagers of Berekha welcomed the Land Reform, mainly because it gave them usufruct right to the lands they were tilling. They were also happy with the idea that the landlord was no more able to order them around. However, under the political and economic policy of the Derg, peasants and peasant agriculture remained marginalized. This may sound ironic, considering that the key slogan of the Derg as discussed in Chapter Seven was to empower peasants by increasing their productivity in order to end rural poverty and the cycle of recurrent droughts and famine.

Why was peasant agriculture marginalized during the Derg period? The Derg driven by its interpretation of Marxism and the implementation of socialism in the USSR perceived the organization of peasant production as backward and unscientific. As a result, peasant agriculture, the predominant productive sector of rural economy involving the overwhelming majority of the country's population, did not receive any state help. Instead, more attention was paid to the land under the Producers' Cooperatives and state farms, where production remained even lower than production on peasant lands. Despite the end of feudal rule (which was held by the Derg as responsible for agricultural underdevelopment) and the implementation of socialism, the severity of the 1984-85 famine was unparalleled in Ethiopian history, and was a result of the state policy failures, aggravated by the civil war and the Cold War geopolitics. It swept through almost all regions of the country, including those which in the past had been drought-free. Among the populations seriously affected by the famine were those living in the agricultural belt of Tiger, Wello, and Northern Shewa.
The Land Reform of 1975 was followed by the introduction of the Producers’ Cooperatives in 1978. One of the objectives of the Producers’ Cooperatives was "to accumulate capital and to mobilize human resources to sustain economic development". Their broader objective was to promote equality in economic and political spheres and create a new consciousness free of class hierarchy, ethnic, religious and regional differences. The Producers’ Cooperatives failed to meet these objectives, mainly because their implementation was driven primarily by ideology, based on an abstract interpretation of theory in isolation from the peasants’ objective conditions, consciousness, their needs and potentials for development.

In the peasant world, where social relations are dependent on kin and community-based forms of exchange, moral pressure plays important role in maintaining social norms. The Great Shaykh enjoyed no right of land ownership in Efratana-Jille, although he had conditional access to land; he had no formal political power. The element of force and physical constraint was entirely lacking in the power he exercised. He had only moral authority over his followers. His saintly deeds and charisma commanded the obedience of the villagers. It addition to his charisma, religious knowledge and political wisdom, it was his style of living that earned him the devotion of his followers. He dressed, ate and prayed like them. In what ever ways he could, he dedicated himself to his followers to guide and help them. In contrast to the authority of the cadres who were sent from the towns and the leaders of the Peasant Associations and the Producers’ Cooperatives, his authority was spiritually sanctioned and confirmed by his style of living. In comparison to the Great Shaykh, the villagers found the leadership of the Producers’ Cooperatives and Peasant Associations incompetent, coercive and inconsistent. Their leadership seemed to lack moral authority and thus true legitimacy.

The highly politicized nature of the Producers’ Cooperatives brought conflict in the village, and divided the villagers. It introduced a new form of pervasive surveillance intruding into the villagers’ day-to-day lives. As a result, the majority of peasants felt alienated from the regime, a condition that was exploited by the Ethiopian Peoples’

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1 The Proclamation No 138 of 1978, Article 3, No. 8, p.142

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Democratic Revolutionary Front in its bid for power. However, the peasants, who were dissatisfied with the Derg due to the policy of the Producers' Cooperatives, remain dissatisfied under the current regime. This is because, contrary to their expectation, the new regime did not restore them to the holdings to which they had acquired usufruct rights after the Land Reform of 1975. The land issue that made them leave their home in Wello still persists. The re-privatization of land after 1989 continues to worry most of the peasants.

Socialism in Ethiopia focused on changing the relations of production and distribution, and not on increased productivity. It resulted in a general spread of poverty rather than overall improvement in social standards of living. The plight of the peasantry was further aggravated by the civil wars, drought and famine, causing destitution. Future research can examine the long-term implications of diverting the material and human resources from development projects to the civil war and violence in the aftermath of the Revolution, and how that process contributed to the famine of 1984-85. I want to emphasize that investment in developing irrigation and other infrastructural facilities to boost agricultural productivity, along with a system of equitable distribution in an environment free of the civil war and ethnic strife, can go a long way to solve the problem of poverty and endemic hunger and avert famine. Following the takeover by the Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Revolutionary Front, re-privatization that started before the fall of the Derg is receiving increased impetus. As a result, there is an alarming rate of disparity growing between a tiny minority of the new rich and the overwhelming majority of the population who remained poor, or became poor, as a result of the reforms. The majority face the problem of survival which can only be addressed by the economic development of the society. But economic development is not an isolated process. It requires a conducive political and ideological environment. Emphasis on ethnic identity politics in the current situation will only take the society backward, acting as a blinder to the macro economic-political and ideological forces that are adversely affecting development.

The Derg was successful in legislating the abolition of the traditional hierarchy of feudalism, which was based on a particular system of land holding and power structure. But, it could not establish a non-hierarchical society. In the vacuum created by the dissolution of the old ruling class, another form of hierarchy based on access to political office from the
lowest level to the highest reaching the state emerged. As we have observed in Chapter Seven, the new form of hierarchy operating through the Producers’ Cooperatives and Peasant Associations permeated even at the village level.

The problem of hierarchy in Ethiopian society was more complex than what the Derg regime thought. Ideologically, the majority of the population in the country was not prepared to absorb the socialist ideas being pushed from the top. Ideas are resilient. Centuries of feudal rule and hierarchical notions could not change at once. Most people had internalized the traditional notions of hierarchy and could not instantly develop a consciousness of comradeship and egalitarianism emphasized by the official ideology of socialism. This raises a serious question about the problem of building socialism under conditions of economic backwardness and political conservatism, that is, is it possible to build socialism in an underdeveloped society where the majority of people struggling to survive have also internalized a consciousness of hierarchy? In fact, it is possible to argue that a combination of unstable economic, political conditions in a traditionally hierarchical society is prone to creating authoritarianism and political violence.

The point that needs to be underlined is that there is a fundamental continuity between the pre-Derg, Derg and the post-Derg regime with regard to the position of peasants: throughout these regimes the peasants have been marginalized. During the pre-Derg regime, peasants remained marginalized due to their economic, political and juridical subordination to the landlords. During the Derg regime, notwithstanding the Land Reform and the Producers’ Cooperatives, the two most important reforms introduced by the state with the objective to empower them, peasants were marginalized both economically and politically. In the ideology of the regime, peasants were not to lead the transformation to Socialism but to be led into it by the working class. The irony was that in Ethiopia, a predominantly agrarian society with the overwhelming majority of the peasant population, there was no working class to provide the leadership. The present regime has no specific policy for improving the lot of the peasantry. In fact, increased impetus to re-privatization, along with re-structuing and liberalization of the economy, is likely to worsen the condition of the majority of the peasants. To find a viable solution to the marginalization of the peasantry is one of the most serious problems facing the country.
IV. THE OVEREMPHASIS ON CONTRADICTION AND CONFLICT

After 1974, the dominant discourse emphasized contradiction and conflict in the previous system, overlooking the interconnectedness and cooperation among the various nationalities and ethnic groups. The consciousness of hierarchy and differentiation was accentuated by the political (ideological) bias of the Derg regime based on the assumptions of class contradictions between lords and peasants. As a result, the cooperation and unity among people of diverse ethnic, status and class backgrounds, particularly during times of crisis, were drowned in the official discourse. In reality, however, the polarization of the two classes (landlords and peasants) was not the whole truth. There were moral and ethical ties, which also bound the two classes together and prevented the accentuation of the alienation between the privileged and non-privileged. In chapter seven, we have discussed how the villagers compare the style of administration by the leaders of the Producers’ Cooperatives and Peasant Associations with that of the former landlords. They hold the landlords higher because of their moral attributes, in addition to their administrative competence. Indeed, the villagers’ notion of good government is not from their experience of state socialism, but from what they knew under feudalism. This illustrates that peasants did not abandon the old system entirely, nor did they completely accept the new system. The majority of peasants were motivated by practicality than by the ideology of the Derg regime.

V. THE DECLINE OF THE TRADITIONAL MORAL ECONOMY

It was part of the collective moral obligation of the ruling classes in agrarian societies to help peasants in times of crises. In the traditional system, the peasantry in Ethiopia looked to the elites, the landlords and the Emperor for relief in times of crisis. Both peasants and the ruling class shared a common moral universe. They partook in each other’s weddings, funerals, death rituals, weddings and in celebrations of Saints and religious holidays. Out of the surplus they extracted from the peasants, landlords and traditional leaders built and maintained parishes, mosques and shrines. These institutions among other things, took care of the poor, the old and the vulnerable groups of the society. However, this traditional mechanism of dealing with crisis began to weaken during the twentieth century as a result of the rapid economic, political and cultural change due to Ethiopia’s integration into the
international system. These changes had significant implications for the relations between the state and society, particularly the state and religious institutions. With the increasing commercialization of agriculture and the growing influence of consumerism on the aristocracy, the traditional feudal obligations were weakened, and the traditional form of charity declined. The state and the ruling classes (the landlords, emerging bourgeoisie and the educated) were alienated from the majority of the peasant population. At the same time, the traditional close relationship between the church and state was weakened as the state empowered by international connections began to impinge on the role of religious institutions. One evidence of the consequent breakdown of the traditional moral obligation of the state was evident in the way the Emperor responded to the Wello famine of 1973 - 74. When the peasants of Wello came to Addis Ababa, specifically to seek the help of the government, rather than receiving and providing them with relief, as it was traditionally done by the Emperors of Ethiopia during famine, they were removed from the city. This act of the Emperor and his officials caused widespread moral outrage and became a catalytic agent for the 1974 Revolution.

The policies of the Derg regime contributed to the erosion of the traditional moral economy. Its ideology and actions weakened the various webs of social relationships which, in the absence of developed market economy, mediated many of the economic, political, cultural transactions. For instance, in the absence of modern institutional infrastructure for the care of the old, poor, or unemployed, the majority of the population relied on religious institutions, kinship and community networks. These networks were weakened as a result of the radical political and economic changes resulting in generalized poverty after 1974. The former ruling class became resourceless. It lost its economic and political status and became downwardly mobile. The emerging elite, on the other hand, is indifferent to the plight of the poor in general and the rural poor in particular. Unlike the old one, the new elite has no direct connection with the peasantry. The post-1974 state has not been able to create an alternative structure that could effectively replace these networks.

VI. LOCAL INITIATIVE AND STRATEGIES OF SURVIVAL

One of the key issues addressed in my study is that of local initiative and strategies of
survival. The residents of Berekha used their own initiative and efforts to overcome poverty, landlessness and repression by landlords and tax collectors in pre-1974 Wello, by migrating to Northern Shewa. It is an instructive case study for spontaneous migration and settlement as opposed to the forced resettlement and villagization carried out by the Derg regime (see appendix A). The research also shows how peasants creatively used traditional resources to find a solution to their problems. Berekha was settled by Muslim Amhara peasants from the province of Wello, one of the centres of Ethiopia’s age-old agriculture and history, characterized both as a land of plenty and a land of famine. It is from this region that the haunting faces and cries of the victims of the 1973-74 and 1984-85 famines came from. What needs to be stressed is that this local initiative involving the process of migration and settlement was possible because there were no state imposed ethnic or regional boundaries restricting people’s movement. In the current situation, where the state is imposing ethnic and regional boundaries, local initiative like this will not be possible.

The Great Shaykh and the shrine in Berekha encouraged a culture of sharing, and discouraged the display of wealth. People had to be careful not to demonstrate what they had. Shared poverty was emphasized, where the villagers were expected to empathize with a person in misfortune rather than celebrating individual achievement. As a result, the shrine was able to save the villagers from destitution and help them overcome starvation during the famine. It was also able to perform another very important function for the villagers. During the last days of the battle between the Derg and the Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Revolutionary Front, there was an abundance of ammunition in the area, accompanied by a collapse of law and order. People left their homes to take shelter in churches and mosques. This was done by all sections of the society: poor and rich, rural and urban. They did so partly because in general, places of worship were respected by all sections of the population - including all the armed groups. As we have seen in Chapter Six, during this period the people of Berekha took shelter in their shrine to protect themselves from the war.

The problem with outside food aid and relief is that it arrives too late, and as mentioned in Chapter One, it tends to focus on those who are on the brink. Moreover, in order to receive food aid, people have to travel to the shelters, which are a source of epidemic, where people famished by hunger become an easy prey. It is here that the role of
the shrine needs to be highlighted. Unlike the state and international food aid and relief, the crucial role of the shrine was to help the villagers not when they were on the brink of collapse. The tradition of the villagers of Berekha built around the shrine worked as antithesis to this kind of aid and relief effort. It encouraged the villagers to be cooperative and provide mutual support to create a safety net for all time. In other words, the shrine was not invented in the face of a crisis. Rather, it was built around a tradition that was contrary to the ideology of food aid that tends to turn the vulnerable people in times of crisis into an object of pity and compassion.

Ethiopia is an overwhelmingly peasant society, dominated by pre-capitalist sentiments in which religion and religious figures played a crucial role in the life of the majority of people. In an agrarian culture, where secular values were minimally developed, religious figures and institutions had the task of defining human righteousness, requiring humbleness on part of those who wielded power in the secular (political-economic) hierarchy. This traditional moral code was devalued and discarded in the post-1974 period. This process encouraged violence, degeneration of human values and abuse of human rights. The argument here is not to romanticize the traditional agrarian culture rooted in religion, but to show that in the absence of social and economic development and a corresponding tradition of secularism, the traditional values sanctioned by religion provided a degree of respect for human life, social harmony, and political stability.

Even though, after 1974 religious institutions have been weakened due to the loss of traditional support they received from the state and the dominant groups in society, they are still held high by the overwhelming section of the population. Rather than negating this important traditional resource, it can be integrated with secular values and institutions. The need for this integration is particularly significant in the current conditions where the new elite increasingly shows a lack of collective moral responsibility towards the poor and the vulnerable section of society, creating a moral vacuum. The uncertainty and anxiety caused by this moral vacuum has resulted in a massive return to religion.

Both Ethiopian Christian and Islamic institutions and rituals have served as important cultural resource for the individual and society. As in the past, their crucial role in helping people during crisis is indispensable. However, local religious institutions are under a
renewed threat from external proselytizing forces. The high level of poverty and the recurrent famines have rendered them vulnerable to these forces. Ordinary Ethiopians, just as they are struggling to save their lives and material resources from the vagaries of nature and political mismanagement, they also have to struggle to save their age-old religious values and institutions (see the Appendix B). This is an additional source of stress.

a) Political Skills and Social Adaptability

Ethiopian peasants are ever faced with the possibility of recurring famine. They are aware that the failure of even one harvest may cause famine and starvation. Indeed, as Arnold (1988) has observed, peasants in all societies feel vulnerable against the forces of nature and turn to the supernatural for intervention to save them from starvation by guaranteeing good harvest. This is, however, not to propose that religion is the only recourse for Ethiopian peasantry to cope with crisis. In reality, different strategies that combine both religious and non-religious means of survival are employed. Thus, in the case of the people of Berekha, they skilfully combined their religious tradition with their knowledge of agriculture and their political and social skills in the process of their migration, settlement and survival in Efratana-Jille. As the ethnographic material presented in Chapter Six shows, they resorted to various innovations, such as multi-cropping system, shifting from teff, the cereal they revered most, to other cereals like millet and sorghum, and so on. Their challenge was not only economic. In addition, it involved adjusting to the new and rather difficult social environment. In adjusting to this new environment, in addition to their habits of disciplined labour and agricultural knowledge, they utilized their political and social skills. Although the settlers are modest and tend to downplay their skills and achievements, nonetheless, the ability to manage the turbulence of Efratana-Jille’s social and political landscape is a testimony to their social and technical ingenuity that should caution us against treating religion as the only recourse of Ethiopian peasantry in times of famine, or otherwise.

It is only when forces both natural and social outweigh the cautious political ingenuity and agricultural skills they possess that a sense of apparent hopelessness seems to take over. The same thinking which made them leave Wello for Ifat was very much discernible during the time of my research. The exodus of Ethiopians after the Revolution during the Derg
period is seen by some of the villagers as a possibility of migrating out of the country. In particular, there are some local people of Oromo background who have already migrated to Saudi Arabia. The rumours of the financial success of these migrants abroad adds to the others’ desire to leave.

The cumulative pressure of the recurrent droughts, protracted civil wars and political instability has created a sense of helplessness, defeat and resignation with no hope of a better future in Ethiopia. My research was done during an unstable social and political period when the mood of the people was generally pessimistic about creating a secure livelihood in Ethiopia. Most of the villagers I engaged in discussion on this subject clearly showed their desire to move to Gida (local dialect for Jiddah). Given their experience of prolonged political instability, social insecurity and economic hardship, there appears to be a willingness on the part of many to give up on Ethiopia. This attitude is developing despite the fact that until the end of the Derg period, most of the settlers approved of the idea of fighting and dying for "the mother land".

b) Local Knowledge

Welloye settlers take pride in their traditional knowledge and skills in agriculture, the main source of their subsistence, and the basis of their self confidence, social status and identity. Even though they were looked down upon by the local Oromo and Amhara population the villagers of Berekha take pride in their occupation. In order to keep their agricultural tradition and skills they need access to land. What will be the basis of their identity and dignity, if they have no access to land? Having no access to land means loss of social status and identity creating feelings of being dispossessed, destitute, and desolate. Moreover, faced with the rapid and radical change, civil wars, and recurrent droughts and famines, even the existing local knowledge is under the threat of extinction. Exposed to the destructive forces of war and famine, people die prematurely and even those who survive their lives get disrupted and dislocated, and their memory fades to the point that the survival of local knowledge handed down from generation to generation is threatened. Preserving the local knowledge in current conditions is one of the challenges of anthropological research.
c) **Interpreting Popular Response to Crises**

How do people in traditional (non-industrial) societies respond to social crisis created by radical social change, war, drought and famine, is an important question for anthropological research? An anthropological interpretation of popular response should be situated within people’s own system of meanings, that is, their cultural context. Thus, for instance, the Tuaregs choosing to die alone in the desert may appear strange or irrational to those who have internalized rational urban corporate culture, or an act of passivity and lack of resistance to others. But, what did it mean to the Tuaregs themselves? For the Tuaregs, walking away to death in their natural environment (Franke and Chasin, 1980) was perhaps more meaningful than standing for food aid, with no chance of success, or being hired as a guard in the city for someone who does not understand the notion of self respect, dignity and freedom they have maintained in their age-old tradition. The dignity and poise of Ethiopian peasants, waiting for food aid, rather than rioting or looting, discussed in chapter one, should be seen in this light.

VII. MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF THE 1984-85 FAMINE

The representation of famine is an important issue. The international media is a powerful instrument of representation that is very effective in shaping the popular consciousness about famine at the global level. Social scientists studying famine are accountable to their audience as well as to their informants. They are also subjected to the professional norms of their discipline. What is the accountability of the media? Who are they accountable to? What are the norms governing their conduct? Whose interests do they serve in the last analysis? These are important questions. In representing the Ethiopian famine of 1984-85, the international media focused on sensationalism, presenting the famine as an event and the famine victims as helpless, passive victims, with no history and no identity. The tragedy of the famine was strategically converted into profit for business. While the media focused on the aid provided by the developed world, the voice of Ethiopians was absent. The efforts of ordinary Ethiopians to help themselves and each other during the crisis was ignored. The media representation created an understanding that Ethiopian peasants are dependent only on international aid without which they can not survive. Even Consuming
Hunger, a documentary apparently critical of the media representation of the Ethiopian famine of 1984-85, suffers from the same shortcomings. It excludes the perception and action of Ethiopians helping themselves through mutual support and cooperation. The efforts of people at local level, like those of the villagers of Berekha discussed here, provide an example of how people use their own resources to meet the crisis and do not simply wait for outside intervention.

VIII. DOING FIELD WORK IN ONE'S OWN SOCIETY

Anthropological field work creates a dilemma for the researcher. In order to establish rapport with the informants, the researcher has to be close to them, so as to win their trust and also to keep a distance from them in order to meet the criterion of non-partisanship. When the researcher is from the same society, to maintain objectivity, neutrality and distance becomes particularly difficult. It was, however, neither my intention, nor was it possible for me to distance myself from the people I was doing the research with. I was identified with them at various levels. I also wanted my research to be useful and relevant to ordinary Ethiopians.

Political instability and social chaos prevalent at the time of my field work proved a serious impediment. In the current political conditions, people were generally suspicious, insecure and cautious. I had to continuously negotiate to assure them that my research did not have any partisan political objective and that it would not compromise or expose them. In addition, they were vulnerable people, and needed immediate help which I was not in a position to provide. On the other hand, I needed their cooperation. So, I had to live with the tension of good will for the people to help them without being able to do so, while being totally dependent on their good will, cooperation and trust for doing my research.

The rapid and radical social change in 1974, the civil war and the trauma in their aftermath have not erased those values which have sustained the masses of Ethiopian society through the recurrent droughts, famines and other calamities over the centuries. These values include hospitality, respect for each other, for their history and identity. This dignity and pride in their collective identity as Ethiopians, cuts across ethnic, religious and regional boundaries and is shown by the majority of the rural poor in their strong attachment to their
past. The persistence of these values gave me the strength to continue with my research. Despite the fact that I had been brought up in an urban-based traditional Christian family, I was accepted and welcomed by the Muslim villagers of Berekha to participate in their ceremonies, festivities, funerals and other rituals.

My predicament did not end with the completion of field work. It continued during writing my findings. The people I am writing about are marginalized in the national and international political economy. They are living under conditions of persistent poverty, drought and famine exacerbated by the civil war and political instability. Yet, they are an important source of Ethiopian history. How to represent their viewpoint to the people outside, whose life experience has little in common with theirs? An understanding of their point of view is nonetheless very important both as a contribution to anthropological knowledge, as well as to development plans meant to improve their life. In attempting to interpret their history, to translate their narrative into ethnography, I hope this research contributes to create a more informed and realistic view of Ethiopia’s rural masses, their problems and prospects among academics and policy makers both at the national and international level.

Anthropological study can make important contributions in terms of its disciplinary emphasis on field work and sensitivity to local perspective. By elucidating local initiatives and understandings, it can highlight their value in the devising and implementing of development programmes. By putting local level initiatives and knowledge like those of the people of Berekha discussed here along side the information generated by the state and outside agencies, anthropological research can be helpful to the people from whom the research information is collected. In this context that simply documenting the information is not enough. Anthropologists have an additional responsibility to ensure that the data they acquire through intimate contact with the people are not used as a tool for their domination and marginalization.

There is a two-way relationship between a researcher’s political consciousness and field work. Researcher’s political consciousness and theoretical framework shape the field research in terms of the specific questions asked and the data collected. At the same time, exposure to the field affects researcher’s theoretical perspective and political consciousness.
Thus, the assumptions I had about agrarian social and political issues (class consciousness and political engagement) were challenged by people’s ability to comprehend their economic-political problems and their attempt to find solutions to these problems that provided an alternative not only to my ideas and understandings, but also to those of the state and other outside agencies involved in their lives.

Finally, what came to me as a surprise during the research was the pivotal role of religion in the organization of the social life of the villagers, in their day-to-day concerns as well as during crisis. Given my exposure to political economy and my inclination towards an equalitarian social order, I was aware of the pivotal role of the political, economic, and ideological factors. However, my notion of the ideological was secular pertaining to the consciousness of power relations, and the need for political organization to bring about social transformation, etc. But I had very little knowledge of how much the consciousness of peasants and of wider sections of Ethiopian society, was conditioned by religion. The consciousness of ordinary Ethiopian peasants was critical to the Revolution; while the Revolution aimed at changing their consciousness, the success of the Revolution itself depended on the consciousness peasants had. Yet, there was little understanding of peasants’ consciousness among the Party bureaucrats and even among the intellectuals sympathetic to the Party.
APPENDIX A

RESETTLEMENT AND VILLAGIZATION

The long-range aim of the Derg reforms was to achieve self-sufficiency in food production, including overcoming the effects of droughts and preventing future disasters. This included, in addition to the Land Reform, two other programs that had been highly controversial, namely, the resettlement of peasants from drought-stricken areas and the villagization of scattered peasant families into small peasant villages.

a) Resettlement

Internal (spontaneous) migration of population from north to south has taken place throughout the country's history, as drought and famine continually created migration. This had, however, been a risky undertaking as the migrants had to fend for themselves. Therefore, traditionally, every wave of spontaneous migration from north to south claimed its toll of cattle and human lives (RRC 1985, Janson 1987). With the massive Resettlement Programme undertaken during the first decade of the revolution, the government claimed that its officials and institutions were facilitating the migration by providing transportation and a place of settlement\(^1\). However, implementing such a programme which affected the lives of so many human beings turned out to be not as simple as the government made it appear. Even with the government Resettlement Program many people were dying (see for instance, Pankhurst 1991).

During the Derg period, the state's understanding was that because of the overall backwardness of the country, specially the "unscientific organization of production forces in the agricultural sector," the rate of growth in agriculture was well below the rate of population growth. Due to the traditional development pattern in the past, population distribution in different parts of the country bore little relationship to resource availability. As a result, while vast areas of fertile lands remained underpopulated on the one hand, on the

\(^1\) It is important to note that, starting from the period of Haile Selassie I, resettlement has been an agenda of the state. Pankhurst (1992:15) states that, "Resettlement became an issue of government concerns with the establishment in 1966 of the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration".
other, there was a high population concentration in regions that had for various reasons been progressively depleted over centuries. It was within this context that the Resettlement Programme was supposed to draw up a rational plan for combining the productive labour, concentrated in the north, with the available and under-utilised land resources concentrated in the south.

In the north, overpopulation gave rise to all the usual phenomena that accompany it: soil impoverishment, deforestation, reduction of the size of holdings, etc. Most of the land still available, situated in the south and east, was recently acquired, having been integrated into the empire in the late nineteenth century. It was thus obvious that what was required was a migration from the north to south. But the lack of infrastructure, the embryonic state of the administration and the intensity of regional feeling ruled this out (Lefort 1983:10).

It is important to note that although the government claimed that the Resettlement Programme was part of its socialist policy, it was in fact, consistent with the policy recommendation of the World Bank.² The World Bank and the USAID, on the basis of surveys undertaken by Western specialists, recommended the resettlement programme as early as 1971 (Janson 1987:64, Pankhurst 1986:5, Haliday and Molyneux 1981:69).

I have collected oral history from people who had gone to Resettlement, but returned to join their relatives in Berekha after the project was disbanded following the fall of the Derg. The contact with relatives in the village of Berekha was made because they had nowhere to return to in Wello. I shall use three case studies to illustrate this point.

**Case One:**

Beshir, a young man in his early twenties who had an uncle in Berekha, lost both his parents in a Resettlement camp in the province of Wollega. His parents died of malaria leaving behind seven children including him. Being the first child, at the age of 14 he had to take care of his six brothers and sisters until the PA at the Resettlement Camp and the RRC organized their move to an orphanage centre in Dessie, Wello. Once his brothers and sisters were taken to the orphanage, he went to E-J to look for his paternal uncle, his parents used to talk about. His uncle reported his case to the local PA, and the PA

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administrators were sympathetic enough to allot him a plot of land. As soon as he secured land, he went to bring his sisters and brothers from the orphanage to Berekha. This was in 1991, and by that time the government had changed. The EPDRF had won, and the Derg, along with almost all the institutions that were built under it were being dismantled or reorganized. In the midst of the chaos, Beshir was able to locate only four of his brothers and sisters and bring them to Berekha. In 1992, he married a young woman of his age to assist him to care for them. The marriage was arranged between his uncle and the wife’s family. Though, this was clearly discussed between his uncle and his wife’s parents, the marriage was strained and the wife was threatening to leave him because she felt he was protecting his brothers and sisters over her. Until April 1994, he was under heavy distress still hoping to relocate his lost brother and sister.

Case Two:

Aziza followed her two children, a daughter and a son to resettlement site in Metekel, Gojjam. Her son was recruited in the peasant militia and sent to “gay bahir” (red sea) [Eritrea], and she has not heard from him since then. Soon after child birth, both her daughter and grand son died. Aziza thinks they died because, in the new environment as a “dependent,” she could not fulfil her motherly duty of preparing the special food (food prepared especially and exclusively for pregnant and lactating mothers) for her daughter.

Case Three:

Alemnesh, who was during the interview 16 years of age, went to Resettlement in Wollega with her parents and four sisters and brothers. She described how every family member, including the small children and herself worked very hard to clear the bush and develop the land for agriculture. But, in 1991, they were chased away by the local Oromo population, and they had to return to Wello. After they returned to Wello, her father went to his young brother and the local PA, to get back his plot. When he left for the Resettlement, it was arranged that his plot be given to his young brother. But, the brother refused to return the land, and her father committed suicide, falling from a cliff. At this point, her mother sent her children to different relatives scattered in different parts of Wello and Shewa.

b) Villagization

Villagization was an attempt to reduce the traditional isolation of individual peasant families to facilitate the provision of sanitation and other health problems, to foster better means of educating the young, to reduce adult illiteracy, and to ameliorate the enormous work.
burden of peasant women in their traditional domestic occupations. Under villagization, the dwellings were built reasonably close together, allowing inter-family communication and cooperation. Schools, and clinics were being built. Relatively clean water sources were developed near the villages, relieving women of trudging many kilometres to obtain the supply of polluted water.

Berekha, the village I studied, was not scattered. It was a clustered settlement. As a result, it was able to avoid the problems commonly faced by the scattered settlements. The main advantage of being clustered was the feeling of a cohesive community that one may find lacking in the scattered, isolated, individual settlements. As discussed in Chapters Five and Six, the sense of community and the logistic advantages of concentrated settlement helped the settlers of Berekha in various ways to organize collective undertakings both in ordinary times as well as in moments of crises.
APPENDIX B

POVERTY, FAMINE, AND PROSELYTIZATION

There are some studies that show how poverty and famine provide a fertile ground for proselytization. In Ethiopia, after the famines of 1973-74 and more so after the 1984-85 there is an increased pressure from proselytizing forces. It is therefore necessary to briefly discuss this problem here.

Arnold (1988) makes two important observations on famine and proselytization: i) People changing their religion for immediate gain/material considerations. i) People becoming critical of their gods/goddesses, when prayers do not change adverse circumstances. He shows how Hindus were converting to other religions due to the distress of famine in Madras in the 1870s. During 1876-78 there was mass conversion movement among Mdiga and Mala untouchable castes in the southern Telugu districts. It is, however noted that famine was not the sole nor the main cause of conversion. Rather, it was the marginalization of these castes at the bottom of the local economic, political, cultural hierarchies compounded by the impact of colonialism and missionary activities that caused them to question their customary positions and roles. The famine only provided the necessary impetus, especially in light of the failure or inability of the higher castes to help the lower castes during crises. This situation was exploited by the English and American missionaries willing to help the lower caste peoples in order to win them over to their faith. Arnold uses the census reports to show how the number of the Indian Christians in Nellore rose from 3,012 in 1871 to 20,794 in 1881, and in Kurnool from 3,855 to 11,464. Other famine districts also saw mass conversions, though not at the same rate. What is also interesting is that many of these converts abandoned their new faith after the famine. As the 1891 Census suggest, their allegiance to the new faith was motivated to secure the material benefits offered by the missionaries. When grain prices returned to normal, the initial material incentives lost their attraction. Nevertheless, for a large number of the famine converts, the crisis had brought about a permanent separation from their old religion and they did not revert back (Arnold, 1988: 74-5).

Chapple (1986) has written about proselytization attempted by British missionaries
during famines in nineteenth century Shewa. He argues that in societies other than where it originated, Protestantism did not develop because of its intrinsic appeal. Rather, its ability to win converts was dependent on offering material benefits, such as medicine, education and jobs. Later Protestant Missionaries set up clinics and used medical services as a means to conversion. Schools, providing educational services, served the same purpose. The Protestant Missions, as they expanded their activities, provided opportunities for secure and reasonably well paid employment for those who had gone through Protestant schools and had become themselves Protestants. The Missions were thus a source of career, and many Orthodox Christians turned to Protestantism for material benefits (Chapple 1986: 27-28). However, protestantism could not culturally work in Ethiopia. Both Christianity and Islam had been in Ethiopia from their very beginnings and had adapted to the social and material conditions of the society, and Protestant Evangelism could not make much dent.

The material wealth and industrialization provided for and required European theology and preaching to be highly structured and disciplined. When missionaries observed the chanting and prayers and the entire ritual processes in Ethiopia, organized differently, they found it anarchical. They were equally upset by the amount of time spent on religious ceremonies and services. The peasant way of life in Ethiopia was socially isolating. Furthermore, the lack of urbanization did not encourage the development of secular centres of collective activity. It was through local churches, shrines and pilgrimage that Ethiopians were able to express and strengthen their collective identity. Monasteries, shrines and pilgrimage centres were important sources and centres of community activity.

Early missionaries who came to Ethiopia, like Gobat, Isenberg and Krapf all condemned the Ethiopian Orthodox for, as they believed, substituting unscriptural "work" of human righteousness for faith as the means of salvation. The principal issues between the missionaries and the Orthodox were: fasting Gobat (1969:246, 348-49), Isenberg and Krapf (1968: 69 -70, 189 - 90), veneration of Mary and the saints (Gobat, 1969: 226, 237 - 38), Isenberg and Krapf (1968: 121), extreme austerities (Gobat 1969: 338-39), vain ceremonies (Gobat 1969: 309), pilgrimages (Gobat 1969: 190-191), Isenberg and Krapf (1968: 245-46), and images (Gobat 1969: 291), were all condemned by the missionaries. In the case of fasting, they denied that fasting should be compulsory. Even if it were voluntary, they
doubted if it was a means of acquiring merit. They condemned also the idea of the intermediary priesthood, urging instead the "priesthood of all believers" (Chapple 1986: 30). No matter how irrational these features appeared to outsiders, they were the integral part of both Christianity and Islam in Ethiopia. As it is discussed in Chapters One and Six, they were important components of the traditional moral order shared by peasants and landlords. It is not only the Protestant missionaries, but also Catholic missionaries to Ethiopia had failed to appreciate the value of indigenous beliefs and rights. Crummey (1972b: 7) rightly points out that Catholicism in Ethiopia had in fact "discredited itself" due to its "hostility to indigenous usages," and "the price it paid was two hundred years of exclusion and a reputation gravely damaged."

It has been shown that people use their own resources, both material and non-material before they turn to outside help, the state or external agencies. Among the non-material resources, religion has been (and is) of primary importance. Like their material resources that have withered away with droughts, famines and war, even their religion is coming under pressure. The proselytization by more organized and powerful religious groups from abroad are putting pressure on people by challenging their established systems of religious beliefs and institutions. One important method used by the proselytizers is to give material rewards, such as financial benefits, jobs, access to education and foreign travel to the younger generation. The majority of the population is aware of this challenge and they are devising various strategies to protect their tradition. Therefore, ordinary people have to face not only the difficulties of drought and famine, but also the challenge of ideological pressures from external sources. Here is how a young Ethiopian Orthodox woman from Efratana-Jille, distressed by the Evangelical Born Again Christians (locally called pentte) proselytization in Efratana-Jille, expressed her sentiments after delivering the Sunday mass sermon at the St. Istifanos Parish of Alem:

Our Religion is like our mother. Can one abandon one’s mother because she is poor and dilapidated? No, a mother is a mother and she is the only one. So, our religion is also one and we shall not abandon, or exchange it for another, modern and resourceful, religion. Ya-Ethiopia Tewahado Bete Kristian (The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is our mother). But, she has become poor and is faced with many obstacles.
If the neighbours have a rich mother shining with weqq (gold) and tibeb (finely embroidered Ethiopian clothes), can one abandon one’s own mother and want to have someone else’s mother? No! Instead, one will work hard to be a good child, to grow up and be helpful to her/his mother. Good children never abandon their mothers.

The young woman’s message loaded with emotional intensity touched the heart of the audience still waiting after mass in the church compound. Her commitment to defend her religion and culture from the Born Again Protestant proselytizers had a great appeal to the people gathered for the mass. The young woman carefully selected a popular idiom of expressing the importance of attachment to their own religion and their country by equating them with mother. The country is addressed as inat hager (mother land), to evoke the highest sentiment.

In Chapter Six, it is discussed that one of the key institutions in settlers’ community life has been the village shrine. It has also been mentioned earlier that the Shaykh wanted to build a permanent masjid, but was not allowed by the landlord which eventually led him to decide about his departure for Mecca. The villagers have not given up on their (and their Shaykh’s) desire to build a permanent masjid in the village. However, their attitude towards having a well built and attractive mosque of their own is rather contradictory: they want an attractive masjid and also want to keep it away from the larger public. Had the Shaykh been allowed to build the masjid, the settlers feel they would have had greater control over it. It would have also served as a source of empowerment for the settlers and greater prestige for the village. At the same time, the villagers are aware that if they had a bigger and better masjid, which would attract more people from the outside community and they might lose control and not be able to maintain the tradition established by the Great Shaykh. This dilemma is expressed by Haji who is in charge of public affairs for the village.

This masjid of ours is a house of prayer and spirituality, but not a kind of space for legal proceedings. It is not for the general public.

They compare the shrine in their village with the masjid in the town which is new and attractive built by the funds contributed by the outsiders. While they do not want to give up the control of their shrine, they nevertheless want outside contribution to convert it into a well
The Masjid in the town of Alem was built much later, but now it has exceeded ours in everything. Haji Nuredin, the Shaykh of the Alem Masjid, who was also responsible for building the Masjid in Alem was from Wello. All the Arab merchants, and Muslims of the town contributed money together to build the masjid in downtown. Now, this same Masjid receives money from Muslim countries abroad. Had we built a masjid in Berekha Mandir, we could also be receiving money by now.

The villagers of Berekha are also under pressure from Islamic proselytizers from abroad and address them as Muslim pentte. It is important to note here that both Christians and Muslims use the same term, pentte to address the outside religious organizations that are aggressively trying to convert them, which they want to distance themselves from.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abawera</td>
<td>Household head</td>
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<td>Abay</td>
<td>Nile</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adal</td>
<td>Afar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adarash</td>
<td>Banquet Hall</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adrous</td>
<td>Mixed incense</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amba</td>
<td>Massif that served as a natural fortress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anebabero</td>
<td>Layered bread</td>
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<tr>
<td>Awraja</td>
<td>Sub-province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begamis</td>
<td>By half</td>
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<tr>
<td>Balabat</td>
<td>Hereditary Landlord</td>
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<tr>
<td>Berber</td>
<td>Ethiopian curry</td>
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<td>Birr</td>
<td>Ethiopian currency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chigregna</td>
<td>Impoverished</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dej-azmach</td>
<td>Commander of the gate (political-military title)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difdif</td>
<td>Beer paste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitawrari</td>
<td>Commander of the vanguard (political-military title)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fumo</td>
<td>Bread (origin Italian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabere</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabi</td>
<td>Thick cotton toga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genfo</td>
<td>Pure made from mixed cereals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gira-azmach</td>
<td>Commander of the left (political-military title)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gult</td>
<td>Land granted by a king/emperor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilfgign</td>
<td>Reception hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inderase</td>
<td>Viceroy or local representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingurguro</td>
<td>Lamentation and sad songs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injera</td>
<td>Crepe-like bread used as a staple food</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jiret</td>
<td>Creek</td>
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<tr>
<td>Khadami</td>
<td>Host</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mashilla</td>
<td>Sorghum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mesob</td>
<td>Round basket used for family meal/eating communally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mofer</td>
<td>The piece joining the yoke with the plow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Na-im</td>
<td>Land allotted to a Muslim cleric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netela</td>
<td>Fine cotton shawl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nifro</td>
<td>Boiled cereals and legumes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qenber</td>
<td>Yoke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qalicha</td>
<td>Muslim religious leader/cleric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qire</td>
<td>Funeral and burial association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qita</td>
<td>Bread made without yeast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qolo</td>
<td>Roasted cereals and legumes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rist</td>
<td>Lineage system of land-ownership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serebet</td>
<td>Bread made from oats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shema</td>
<td>Cotton Ethiopian clothes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidetegna</td>
<td>Exiled person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tchat</td>
<td>A mildly narcotic plant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teff</td>
<td>A Cereal grown only in Ethiopians for making injera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telilo</td>
<td>Beer made without hops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tella</td>
<td>Beer made with hops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tej</td>
<td>Mead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wefq</td>
<td>Land allotted to a Muslim cleric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woliy</td>
<td>Intellectual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wonfel</td>
<td>Voluntary labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wonz</td>
<td>River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woreda</td>
<td>District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaf</td>
<td>Tree</td>
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</table>
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