

**Ecohealth and Displacement:  
A Case Study of Resettlement and Return in Ethiopia**

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## **Abstract**

This Major Paper is based on field research conducted in the northern highlands of Ethiopia investigating the situation of farmers returned from resettlement in southwest Ethiopia under a government program that resettled 800,000 people in the late 1970s and mid-1980s in an attempt to counter environmental threats to food security. The returnees fled ill-health and conflict with local people in resettlement areas and returned to their places of origin. The paper explores the impact of displacement on a broadly defined concept of “ecohealth” in terms of environmental change over three historical periods: pre-resettlement, resettlement, and return.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The research for this major paper was carried out with Gelila Terrefe as part of a larger research project that focused on the connections of food, health, and environment in the context of resettlement as a famine-relief strategy. The project was funded by the Tokyo Foundation and by an International Development Research Centre (IDRC) award for research using an ecosystems approach to human health with a particular focus on gender. Based on our collaborative research, Gelila and I pursue different concentrations in separate major papers. This paper considers how the experience of resettlement changed the living environments and the health status of people moved to resettlement areas who later returned to their place of origin in one administrative area in Amhara Region in Ethiopia. These people are called returnees. Returnees are considered as a group within which the experiences of individuals differ according to social variables such as gender and age.

This paper is divided into five chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction to the paper; it presents the thesis statement and the conceptual framework of the paper. As well, the context of the research, the research methodology, and the literature review are described. The second chapter explores the social, political, economic, and ecological environmental contexts of the first two of three historical periods that are used throughout the paper to compare the situation of returnees over time: pre-resettlement and resettlement. The third chapter describes the environmental contexts of the third historical period: return. The periods are outlined in the timeline below. The fourth chapter analyzes the health of returnees in terms of an “ecohealth” framework as described below. The fifth chapter considers how research for this major paper contributed to the fulfillment of the learning objectives in my plan of study and also summarizes the case of returnees in terms of the forced migration literature.

**Timeline: The Three Historical Periods**

Pre-Resettlement		Resettlement		Return	
Imperial Gov't	Derg Gov't	Phase 1 resettlement	Phase 2 resettlement	EPRDF Gov't	
			Pre-1991 return	Post-'91 return	
	1974	1977	1984	1991	2000

**Context: Historical and Geographical**

This paper is based on a case study involving returnees in Kutaber Woreda, South Wello Zone, Amhara Region, Ethiopia (formerly Dessie Zuria Awaraja in Wello Province).<sup>1</sup> Returnees in this case are among hundreds of thousands of mainly ethnic Amharas and Tigrayans from throughout the northern highlands who were resettled to several lowland sites in southwestern Ethiopia, formerly in the provinces of Wellega, Kaffa, Gojjam, Bale, and Illubabor in two phases: 1977/78 and 1984/85, by the former military socialist government of Ethiopia (referred to as “Derg,” the Amharic word for committee). The returnees who were interviewed for this study are those resettlers who later returned from the resettlement areas to their places of origin. They returned at different times

<sup>1</sup> Before 1991, the administration of Ethiopia was centrally planned. The administrative levels in decreasing geographical size beneath the central government were: provinces, awarajas, woredas, peasant/farmer associations (PA)/Urban dwellers associations (Kebele). Since 1991, a decentralized federal political system has been in place. Provinces were abandoned as administrative areas and replaced by nine semi-autonomous regions. Below regions are zones, woredas, and PA/kebele. Within the current regional system most of the territory from which the resettlers originated is included in Amhara Region and Tigray Region. The population of Amhara Region is mainly ethnically Amhara and the population of Tigray Region is mainly ethnically Tigrayan. This research was conducted in Amhara region and all research participants were ethnic Amhara.

between 1978 and the present (2000), depending on the specific circumstances of their resettlement. The majority of returnees, however, returned following the fall of the Derg government in 1991.

The returnees who participated in this research are people originating from and currently residing in Kutaber Woreda and who were resettled in several different sites at different times. The details of each household's resettlement location are listed in the annex on Interviews and Interviewees. The research was conducted in Kutaber Woreda from February 2000–May 2000.

State resettlement programs were implemented initially in the late 1970s as a preventative measure to mitigate the negative effects of overpopulation and land shortage on the ecological environment and food security situation of the northern highlands. Some areas of Kutaber Woreda were designated as protected forests from which people were obliged to move. In other areas, the former government recruited resettlers both voluntarily and through force to move to new farming areas in the country. The government-stated objective of the resettlement programs was also to make the less populated but fertile southern areas more productive in order to fuel the centrally planned economy.

By the mid-1980s, a combination of human and ecological factors contributing to the degradation of farmland, land shortage, drought, and lack of infrastructure led to famine. The famine was predictable, yet it was realized as a result of insufficient response by the Ethiopian government and international governments and agencies. In 1984 a hastily planned resettlement scheme that failed to integrate the lessons learned from the earlier schemes was implemented by the Ethiopian government as a means of famine relief for people from the northern part of the country where drought and famine were most severe. Over half a million people from Wello and Tigray provinces were resettled to Gondar, Gojjam, Wellegga, Illubabor, Sidamo, and Bale (see Appendix III: Map 2) in the hopes that they would become self-sufficient food producers again.

The resettlement program occurred in a complex political context of civil conflict. The government of Ethiopia was entrenched in a long and brutal civil war with rebels advocating the separation of Eritrea from the state of Ethiopia. The

Eritrean rebel group, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), was supported by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) based in the northern highlands dominated by the Tigrayan ethnic group, and by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) based in the central southern territories of Ethiopia dominated by the Oromo ethnic group.

The resettlement program was further complicated by international aid interests. The Marxist military Derg government was allied with the Communist East in Cold War politics. There was little support for Ethiopia from the West until horrific images of famine were broadcast in the international media in 1984. Then, an unprecedented outpouring of relief was channelled to Ethiopia. For the most part, the international media reported that the resettlement program was motivated by the political interests of the government, and that the implementation of the program was brutal. Many governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) condemned the resettlement program. Internal and external groups supporting rebel groups charged that the resettlement program was implemented with the objective of destabilizing the Tigrayan rebel base through depopulation. Moreover, it was charged that ethnic Amhara people (the dominant ethnicity within the Derg government) from the highlands were resettled to Oromo areas in effect as colonizers to protect the claims of the government in those areas (Clay and Holcomb 1986; MSF 1985; Kloos and Zein 1993). The French NGO Médecins Sans Frontières wrote a scathing report denouncing the resettlement program and as a result were expelled from Ethiopia (MSF 1985). Although there were a few UN agencies and foreign governments, notably Italy and Canada, interested in providing assistance in the resettlement areas, the programs were criticized so heavily in the international media that they were terminated before the planned 1.5 million people had been moved.

A few international NGOs, such as Irish CONCERN, implemented development programs within the resettlement areas. However, the resettlement areas were administered almost exclusively by the Ethiopian government. The harsh conditions of recruitment and initial life in resettlement caused tens of

thousands of resettlers to die or to flee illegally from the resettlement sites, especially in the mid-1980s. Those who fled crossed the border into Sudan as refugees, moved to other parts of Ethiopia, or returned to their places of origin. The stream of resettlers leaving the sites slowed to a trickle as those who remained adapted to the new life. However, the fall of the Derg government to the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1991 created new circumstances. A new government was formed that granted resettlers the right to return to their places of origin. In the wake of the fall of the Derg, violent attacks from local people who resented the resettlement sites forced tens of thousands (there are no accurate records available) of resettlers to return home. Different groups with distinct perspectives emphasize different objectives of resettlement in their analyses of these programs. The stated objectives of the Derg government at the time resettlement was implemented were for the socialist political and economic development of the farmers themselves and the country as a whole (Relief and Rehabilitation Commission 1980). This view described the resettlement as a voluntary permanent settlement scheme with state assistance. The views of academic researchers in Ethiopia, such as Alula Pankhurst (1991), Alemneh Dejene (1987, 1992), and Dessalegn Rahmato (1988a, 1988b) portray a balanced view of the socialist objectives of the resettlement. These authors acknowledge the economic hardship and conditions of ecological degradation that demanded government action at the time of resettlement. However, these authors also document the lack of social, logistical and ecological planning in the implementation of resettlement. This view of resettlement places the programs in a category of development-induced displacement (described in the literature review below).

Strong critics of the resettlement programs, especially those in the international aid and media communities in 1985, such as MSF (1985), Clay and Holcomb (1986), and Vallely (1985 a–h), focus on the connections between the political objectives of the Derg government, engaged in civil conflict with rebel groups, and the resettlement program. According to this view, the resettlements

were, in forced migration terms, internal displacements that in many cases created refugee flows across the border to Sudan.

## **Definitions and Conceptual Framework**

### *Resettlement*

Resettlement in this paper refers to programs sponsored by the former Ethiopian state in two main phases: in 1977/78 and in 1984/85. These programs took place entirely within the state of Ethiopia. Primarily, farmers from drought-prone areas in the northern highlands were moved to more fertile farming areas mainly in the southwestern lowlands of the country.

### *Environment*

Environment in this paper refers to an overall surrounding context during a given time period. I consistently refer to four environments: social, political, economic, and ecological. The social environment is primarily norms of human interaction within families, neighborhoods, workplaces, recreation places, and the like. The social environment determines the types of activities that people of different genders, ages, classes, education levels, types of employments, etc., engage in. The political environment refers to the influence of the existing system of government on a society and determines the legality of activities, and the rights and freedoms of various members of society. The economic environment pertains to the type and status of the economy, the primary sources of income in a society and the influence of these factors on the activities of members of the society, i.e., the way they earn and expend income. The ecological environment refers to the natural resources and climate of a given physical area. It determines which resources people will employ in all activities and provides a physical space for all the other environments. Many elements of these environments overlap and all interact and influence each other, and change over time. My model of four



environments allows for a broad exploration of the wider interacting repercussions of activity in any environment.

### *Health*

Health in this paper is considered in terms of how it is affected by the four different environments described above and it is based on the IDRC concept of an ecosystems approach to human health, or “ecohealth.” The ecohealth concept is based on the following definition of health:

Good health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Health is the extent to which an individual or group is able, on the one hand, to realize aspirations and satisfy needs; and, on the other hand, to change or cope with the environment. It is not an objective for living, but a resource for everyday life. Health includes the notions of the balance or harmony, as well as the capacity to respond and adapt to changing constraints and opportunities (Kay and Waltner-Toews 1999, 2).

In my analysis of the ecohealth of returnees in Chapter 4, I consider which environmental factors contribute positively to returnees’ ability to adapt or to cope with change and which environmental factors have a negative impact on coping and adaptation. Those factors with a positive impact protect health, whereas those with a negative impact threaten health.

### *Lifeworld*

There is also an impact of the immediate physical surroundings or “lifeworlds” on the health of individuals (Kettel 1996). A lifeworld is a location where a given individual carries out his or her daily activities according to his or her position in the social, political, economic, and ecological environments. Because individual people interact frequently with different elements of different environments, every individual’s lifeworld is unique. Within one household, members may reside in

different lifeworlds. For example, three women may reside in a household in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: a middle-aged woman who owns the house, her teenaged daughter, and her teenaged servant. The eldest woman may spend most of her time on weekdays working in an office and evenings and weekends with friends and family in the sitting rooms of her own home and in the homes of her friends and relatives. Her daughter may spend most of her time weekdays in school and evenings and weekends with friends and relatives at home in the sitting room or out in cafés. The servant may spend most of her time in the kitchen, moving into other parts of the house to clean or to serve, or going outside to shop. Each woman occupies different spaces, or lifeworlds, depending on her social position, her economic activities, the political freedoms she has, and her physical surroundings.

The concept of a lifeworld is significant for any analysis of ecohealth because it determines with which elements of a given environment any individual has the greatest contact. Therefore, any individual's ecohealth depends on his or her lifeworld. In the example of the three women, if there are threats to health located in the kitchen, the servant is most at risk because she spends the most amount of time there. If there are health risks at school or on the way to school, the daughter is most at risk from those. If generalizations can be drawn between the lifeworlds of particular groups of people within a wider population, for example, servants, or students, or female students, or fifteen-year-old females, then generalizations can also be drawn about the common ecohealth of that group.

### *Household*

A variety of household compositions exist in any community. Household composition refers to the number of individuals living under one roof (or in one compound) by gender, age, relationship, fitness, employment, and education. The composition of a household often determines the household's access to income and economic status depending on the lifeworlds of the household

members. For example, if there are more jobs open to men than to women in an economy, then households with more men will have greater access to jobs than households with fewer men. Control of resources and decision-making power within a household is determined both by environments and by household composition. Therefore, household composition also determines intra- and inter-household power relations. For example, in Ethiopia, according to the social environment, it is generally an adult male family member who is considered the primary decision-maker and controller of household resources or “head of household” in demographic statistics (which are used in planning for programs such as relief food distribution). In the absence of a fit adult male, an adult woman is considered “head of household.” Such preferences also exist in inter-household relations. For example, men and “male-headed households” are given more decision-making power in the community than women and “female-headed households.”

### **Thesis Statement**

The Derg resettlement programs were hastily planned and failed to maximize the voluntary participation of resettlers in the planning and implementation of the program. The Derg’s resettlement planning failed to adequately consider the impact of changes in the ecological, political, economic, and social environments on resettlers. Such changes created overwhelming threats to the ecohealth of resettlers such that life in the resettlement sites was generally unsustainable. One consequence is the existence of tens of thousands of returnees, 53,816 reported in Kutaber Woreda alone out of a total population between 120,000–140,000, according to Records of the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau in Dessie, South Wello.

The ecohealth of returnees serves as a measurement of the efficiency of planning for resettlement. The ways in which returnees’ ecohealth was positively affected by resettlement indicates successes of resettlement while the negative impacts on returnee ecohealth indicate failures. Overall, returnees’ ecohealth

was negatively impacted by the experience of resettlement. The experiences of returnees, and their impact on their community of origin in Kutaber, serve as an important example of possible long-term repercussions of poor planning in population resettlement.

## **Literature Review**

The literature that informs this research paper is derived from a combination of disciplines that can be generally classified as: Environmental Studies, Forced Migration Studies, and Development Studies and specifically classified as follows. This paper draws on a combination of theoretical and practical literatures. Several bodies of literature, combining aspects of these fields, are detailed below.

### *Forced Migration*

The field of refugee studies has expanded in the 1990s to Forced Migration Studies. This field encompasses theory on Convention refugees, and also other forced migrants such as internally displaced people (IDPs), development-induced displacees, environmental refugees, and economic migrants. Convention refugees are generally defined as having been forced outside of the country of their nationality due to persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Internally displaced are defined as those displaced due to persecution, conflict, or natural disaster within their own state (Deng 1998). Development-induced displacees are defined as those who have been forced to leave their place of residence when plans for a large development project, such as a dam, require the land on which they live (Cernea 1995; McDowell 1996). Development-induced displacees are usually within their country of nationality. Environmental refugees are broadly defined as people forced to leave their place of residence due to problems in the natural environment, such as long-term depletion of natural resources from which people

derive their livelihoods, or environmental disasters such as large-scale leakage of toxic industrial materials (Otunnu 1992). Economic migrants are not able or willing to sustain a livelihood in their place of residence and move in order to seek better economic opportunities. Forced migration studies also look at the overlap and interaction between these categories.

I have employed the above literature in classifying the complex case of forced migration that returnees represent.

### *Forced Migration and Identity*

This approach to analyzing the experience of forced migration is presented by Liisa Malkki (1995). Malkki emphasizes the political and historical context of refugee situations that explain how refugeeness is defined by refugees themselves and by agencies mandated to assist refugees. I have used this model to consider the wider political and historical context of resettlement as forced migration. Malkki also analyzes how differences in definitions of refugees, for example, between refugees in camps versus urban refugees, and between refugees and aid workers, have significant implications for the extent of and approach used in implementing refugee protection and assistance. In Chapter 5, I have analysed the theoretical effects of different definitions of resettlement on protection and assistance for returnees (see Chapter 5).

### *Gender and Development*

The field of Gender and Development is acknowledged in theory to be the evolution of decades of thinking that combines ideas of feminist theory with ideas of international development theory. Eva Rathgeber (1990) describes the evolution from Women in Development (WID) to Women and Development (WAD) to Gender and Development (GAD). Theorists in the 1980s began to consider more closely the divisions within the all-encompassing categories of “men” and “women” in processes of development. The GAD approach has led to

further analysis of the differences between men and women of different races and classes.

A Gender and Development approach was important both in data collection and data analysis stages of this research. Our methods attempted to find a full picture of the activities of men and women of different ages and wealth groups in Kutaber Woreda, and to consider how the activities of men and women with different social characteristics have been affected by displacement to different environments over the three historical periods of pre-resettlement, resettlement, and return.

### *Gender and Forced Migration*

Doreen Indra, who has long called for a greater interconnection between feminist theory and refugee studies, argues in the edited volume *Engendering Forced Migration* (1999) that the theoretical evolution of WID, WAD, and GAD is parallel in forced migration studies. Indra concludes that forced migration studies, in theory and in practice, currently employ a “women in forced migration (WIFM)” approach. This paper attempts to employ a “gender in forced migration” (GIFM) approach in analyzing the experiences of returnees; that is, I attempt to explain how men and women have experienced forced migration differently, and how the experience affects their current situations and their relations.

### *Women, Environment, and Development*

Within this field, Bonnie Kettel’s (1996) consideration of women’s health in relation to the environments of their “lifeworlds” directly informs my concept of ecohealth. The use of the concept of lifeworld identifies the spaces occupied separately by women and men in their daily lives. The approach allows for an analysis of the social relations that result in gendered activities and gendered environmental health. I have adopted the concept of lifeworld to describe the ways that any given individual interacts with environments, based on the social

norms that shape lifeworlds. This model allows for diversification within an ecohealth analysis of a population such as returnees.

Also within this field, Bina Agarwal's (1998) writing informs my research focus. I am particularly interested in Agarwal's analysis of gender relations and access to land and natural resources. The social environment of South Asia described by Agarwal is similar to the social environment for rural women in Ethiopia and therefore provides a helpful model for application to the case of returnees.

### *Gender, Ethnicity and Nationalism*

Several readings from the course Gender, Ethnicity, and Nationalism instructed by my supervisor were very helpful in considering the implications of political environment on the ecohealth of returnees. For example, Barbara Einhorn's article "New for Old? Ideology, the Family, and the Nation" (1993), which analyses the interaction between the progression of political systems in Eastern Europe and the gendered division of labour and access to services, is useful for application to the case of resettlers in the changing political climate of Ethiopia. Ana Maria Alonso's (1998) article on the imagining of history also provides a useful analysis of the invention of national histories that helps to explain the ideologies of Ethiopian governments and the rationale of economic policies. Nira Yuval-Davis' (1997) analysis of gender and citizenship is important in considering gender rights to land in the Ethiopian case.

### *Political Ecology*

Political ecology, based on political economy theories of unequal power relations in economy but concentrating on relations between human activity and natural resources, is an important framework for this paper. Political ecology, as described by Keil et al. (1998), Kalipeni and Oppong (1998), Grossman (1998), and Blaikie and Brookfield (1987), and feminist political ecology, as described by

Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari (1996), helped me to formulate the relationship among elements of social, political, economic, and ecological environments and to apply these to the three historical periods in the case of returnees.

### *Food Security*

Current theory on food security is heavily influenced by the political economic work of Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen (1989; 1990) on entitlements to food and income. I used this work to consider the availability and accessibility of food to returnees during the different periods.

The UK-based NGO Save the Children has spearheaded the Household Food Economy Approach that is currently used to interpret food security in Ethiopia. This approach reviews the variety of ways that households of different compositions and capacities gain their income and their food in a typical year in order to analyze the food deficit that exists in years of depression and to allocate how this gap should appropriately be filled.

### *Resettlement in Ethiopia*

Alula Pankhurst is an experienced author on resettlement in Ethiopia who referred us to several other researchers who are currently considering the topic, such as Wolde-Selassie Abbute. These researchers and other authors, such as Dessalegn Rahamato and Alemneh Dejene, who have contributed to the literature on resettlement in Ethiopia provided essential background reading and discussion to familiarize us with the environments surrounding the resettlement programs and guide us to our key questions of investigation. I have compared our findings to this literature to confirm the broad picture of resettlers,' including returnees' experience, and to expand on the literature by describing the more specific case of returnees in Kutaber in the present day.



Other research published about various aspects of life in Ethiopia contributed to the description of environments in the areas of origin and in the resettlement areas. For example, Kloos and Zein (1993) contributed significantly to the application of the concept of ecohealth to this case. Helen Pankhurst's (1992) work gave me insight into the gender division of labour and access to resources in Ethiopia.

## **Methodology and Methods**

The methodology of the collaborative research conducted by Gelila Terrefe and me employed a broadly anthropological approach, emphasizing the collection of qualitative data through Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods directly from returnees as the primary sources of data.

Our approach was based on IDRC's Ecosystems Approach to Human Health, or, "EcoHealth" methodology. Central to the EcoHealth approach is the concept of a system as an essentially self-organizing unit that can be physical, political, social, or otherwise in nature. Conceptualizing a framework of interdependent systems allows for a complex analysis of multi-layered problems. Moreover, it allows the researcher to structure the research from a number of perspectives, depending on the issues brought to the fore by the participants. The approach envisions feedback loops, or interactions and reactions, between overlapping ecological, political, social, and economic systems in the research site. The approach also aims to investigate the implications of gender relations in the health of men, women, girls, and boys.

Our research was conducted over an eight-month period. In the fall term of 1999 we conducted a detailed literature review in preparation for our fieldwork. This provided us with background on historical ecological, political, social, and economic contexts that led to the resettlement programs and to resettlers' return to their places of origin. In January 2000 we travelled to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to begin our field research. We held meetings with key informants at Addis Ababa University (AAU), Save the Children UK (SCF UK), the United Nations

World Food Program (WFP), and the Ethiopian Government Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC). Based on the key-informant interviews, we changed the intended subject of our research from resettlers still living in resettlement areas to returnees from resettlement in their places of origin. Our key informants suggested that it is apparent from their fieldwork that the situation of returnees was of interest to NGOs and UN agencies working on food security in Ethiopia because returnees are often among the most food insecure people in the northern highlands. Thus, with advice from our key informants, we chose a research site that would allow us to study the situation of returnees from resettlement.

We rented a room in the main town in Kutaber where we stayed much of the time (sometimes commuting 20 km to Dessie for shopping, showers, and telephone) in order to be available to the research participants who sometimes visited us, to be visible so that people understood our purpose well, and to be able to observe community interactions. By living in the area where we conducted our research we learned a great deal about the types of social and work events that take place there. We became known to those in the community and therefore they felt more comfortable sharing information with us. We also had the opportunity to attend community events, such as food distribution. Before we began our interviews with returnees, we were able to observe an experienced team of researchers employing the household food economy approach by accompanying a survey team composed of representatives from SCF UK, DPPC, and the Ethiopian Ministry of Health, for four days in Kutaber Woreda. The household food economy approach incorporates the political economy context of food shortage that framed our research. The approach provided us with insight into the use of research methods for gathering specific data on household access to food and income through production, purchase, gathering, and gifts. Observing the survey also gave us insight into the community not easily visible to outsiders. For example, we learned the key assets (land, livestock, labour) that determine levels of household wealth within the community. The survey team determined wealth groups by using two focus

group discussions; for each, two men and two women were randomly selected in the village. These groups were asked to describe: how many wealth groups were distinguishable in the community (i.e., better-off, middle, poor, very poor); what were the main assets of each category in a typical year; and what percentage of the community fell into each category. The survey team used focus groups of representatives of different wealth groups and gender to gather qualitative data on access to land, food, and income, and on household expenditures.

We sought permission to conduct research from the various levels of government: zonal government, woreda council, and peasant (farmers) associations. After consulting with the farmers' association leaders about the nature of our research, we were formally introduced by the leaders at community meetings. There we had the opportunity to describe our research and our roles as researchers clearly. At these meetings we requested volunteers to participate in our study. Most of the research participants were recruited in this manner. We were also referred by some participants to other participants, in a "snowball" style of selection.

Following the community meetings where we were introduced, we set up appointments with those who volunteered to be interviewed to visit them in their homes for the first interview. We conducted two interviews for each of twenty households comprised of different members. The first interview was semi-structured and concentrated on recalling the pre-resettlement and resettlement environments. The second interview employed several PRA techniques such as activity matrix, transect walk, and community mapping, concentrating on the return period up to the present, especially concerning access to food and income, and the household division of labour. Gelila and I discussed the content of the interviews before and after each interview. Interviews conducted by Gelila were in Amharic, the language of research participants, while I was present. With the permission of research participants, interviews were tape-recorded. The tapes were later translated into English by Gelila and by Brook Mezmur, a trusted friend hired to assist us.

We spoke to a variety of household members, depending on who was present on a given day, in order to get a holistic picture of the household situation and in order to minimize the disruption caused by our presence. The interviews were conducted in the homes of the research participants, which allowed them to feel comfortable and allowed us more insight into their lifestyles and livelihoods. We reciprocated the generosity of the research participants by offering them a traditional gift of coffee and sugar at the end of the second interview. We felt that this gesture was appreciated.

We suspected that participants might feel suspicious of the motives of our research and/or feel anxious or at risk about answering questions they perceived to be politically sensitive. In order to minimize this risk to participants, we avoided sensitive topics and carefully explained the purpose of our research carefully in person, and requested informed consent, explaining that participation would be anonymous and confidential. The most appropriate way to request informed consent in the context of our research was to first become affiliated with Addis Ababa University, then to request permission to conduct research from zonal, woreda, and PA levels of government (in that order). We received each permission in the form of a letter informing lower levels of administration to assist us. At the level of individuals, it was not appropriate to ask research participants to sign letters of informed consent as this was perceived as threatening. Rather, we explained our purpose and requested permission verbally to include individuals' opinions in our research. All individuals interviews remain anonymous and data regarding individuals is confidential.

We intended to make some contribution to the community where we conducted our research by facilitating dissemination of the information we learned to various local and international institutions mandated to support the development of the area. In order to achieve our objective of contributing to the community where we conducted our research, we requested information from the households we interviewed on the types of community projects that would be most helpful and passed on such information to key informants involved in supporting development activities in Kutaber.

## Chapter 2: Pre-resettlement and Resettlement

This chapter serves to highlight the significant aspects of life in resettlement, in comparison to pre-resettlement, that affected the ecohealth of returnees. The data for this chapter is drawn from our research interviews as well as from other researchers' accounts of life pre-resettlement (see Dessalegn Rahmato and Bahru Zewde) and in the resettlement areas (see Alula Pankhurst and Wolde-Selassie Abbute). The chapter provides a broad picture that applies to resettlers in general and to returnees in particular.

The resettlement programs that affected the research participants in this project were implemented in two rounds. The first began in 1977/78 and the second in 1984/85. Government enforcement of the resettlement areas was maintained until the change of government in 1991, the time when most returnees returned. However, there are many returnees who came before and after 1991. Although there is some overlap between the three periods, pre-resettlement refers approximately to the late 1970s and early 1980s — the end of Haile Selassie's regime and the beginning of the Derg regime. Resettlement refers to the time the Derg was in power between the early 1980s and early 1990s. Return, the third period, is considered in Chapter 3.

In describing the three periods, the historical progression of interactions between interdependent ecological, social, economic, and political environments are considered. Certain elements, particularly of the ecological and social environments, have remained relatively constant over the past thirty years, such as, the general distinction between highland and lowland climate and ecology, and the distribution of ethnicities and language groups throughout Ethiopia. However, these constant elements have interacted with other environments differently at different times. For example, the change from Derg to EPRDF government created a very different context for the relationship between highland and lowland ethnicities in the resettlement areas.

In order to analyze the environmental change created by the experience of resettlement, a brief description of the context of pre-resettlement is required.

### **Pre-Resettlement**

Geographically, Ethiopia is known for its high plateaus. Half of the land higher than 2,000 m above sea level in Africa is located in central and northern Ethiopia. In these highland areas, the resettlers' place of origin, 80 percent of the population live as subsistence farmers.

Wello, the former highland province where Kutaber Woreda is located, is mythologized in highland histories and music as the breadbasket of Ethiopia. The pre-resettlement period is remembered vaguely even by urban Ethiopians as a golden era; lush forested highlands overlooked fertile fields that produced abundant crops of wheat, barley, and teff (a staple highland grain) and broad fields that provided pasture for vast herds of livestock. In reality, the ecological environment of the immediate pre-resettlement period of the late 1970s and early 1980s was similar to the current ecological environment in Kutaber. Reportedly, at that time there was more forest, less cultivated land, and less erosion than today. By the first phase of resettlement in the late 1970s, government, researchers, and residents were concerned that topsoil erosion caused by deforestation posed a major threat to the continuing availability of farmland under pressure from a rising population. The land was becoming increasingly unproductive as a result of overuse and a lack of regular rainfall. By the mid-1980s, on the eve of the second phase of resettlement, drought had rendered farmland completely barren in some pockets of Kutaber although others produced minimal crops.

Subsistence agricultural production has been the mainstay of the economy since the pre-resettlement period into the present. Farming occurred within a feudal system under Emperor Haile Selassie until 1974 when the Imperial regime was overthrown and the Derg took power. Under the Imperial regime, agricultural production was dependent on the labour of the small

landholder and the tenant, both of whom were dominated by upper-class landlords who were powerful in government. Landless cultivators paid a major portion of their production, between one-third and one-half of the harvest, to landlords in rent, often in the form of sharecropping. Rights to land were generally usufruct. That is, users of the land were not owners and were generally prevented from selling, mortgaging, or giving away their land. Land users could, however, pass on their land to heirs, or lease it to tenant farmers (Dessaegn Rahmato 1985).

By 1973, the rule of Emperor Haile Selassie was under severe criticism. Marxist ideology was spreading throughout the country, especially through student groups based at Haile Selassie University (later renamed Addis Ababa University) and at high schools throughout the country. These were supported by groups of Ethiopian students studying in North America and Europe. The exposure of famine in the northern highlands served to delegitimize the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie, who was depicted by opposition groups as an ailing monarch out of touch with the suffering of the masses that had been caused by the exploitative feudal system.<sup>2</sup>

A series of uprisings among student, worker, and military groups in early 1974 led to the formation of the Co-ordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police and the Territorial Army, referred to as “the committee” — in Amharic, “the Derg” — comprising mainly major units of the army. The Derg initially produced a policy document “Ethiopia Tikdem” (Ethiopia First), emphasizing national unity across class, ethnic, and religious lines. Emperor Haile Selassie was deposed by the Derg in September 1974. In late 1974 and 1975, the Derg, formally renamed as the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC), responded to Leftist criticisms and began advocating the nationalization of land, property, industry, and farming. This new political stance led to the slogan “land to the tiller” and to the policies of villagization and resettlement. Land reform under Proclamation 3 of 1975, called the “Public Ownership of Rural Lands Proclamation,” was designed to eliminate inequalities in wealth and ownership throughout Ethiopia,

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<sup>2</sup> British journalist Jonathan Dimblebee is credited with showing the world the Ethiopian famine in his 1973 documentary broadcast on the UK program *This Week*.

empowering the small landholder in the interest of the development of the country as a whole.

The social environment for peasant farmers in Kutaber in the pre-resettlement period revolved around the system of agricultural production, as it does today. Every community follows a seasonal calendar of agricultural activity according to the crops most preferred for consumption or sale that can be supported by the land. Some social differentiation existed within the peasant class on the basis of wealth in terms of assets, especially land, livestock, and labour. A gendered division of labour that creates different working environments for men and women has changed little since the pre-resettlement period. A culture of ox ploughing is predominant in the Ethiopian highlands. Almost without exception, men have always been responsible for ploughing and sowing. Women also participate in sowing activities, but they concentrate their productive agricultural labour on weeding, harvesting, and threshing.

Government provision of social services such as schools and health centres was minimal in the pre-resettlement period. Traditional healers practised curative health care in the absence of professional institutions. When the Derg took power in 1974, the introduction of new political structures had a significant impact on the four environments: social, political, economic, and ecological. A new system of local government and social organization, Peasant Associations (PAs), was introduced in 1975. Initially, the primary objective of the PAs was to carry out the Derg's first major policy: nationalization of land. PAs were quickly granted extensive responsibilities. They were expected to administer public property and to build schools and clinics. They were also expected to establish a number of committees that governed many aspects of farming life. These committees included service co-operatives, 'producers' co-operatives, defence squads, and women's associations. Farmers were obliged to attend a wide variety of meetings. PAs were also responsible for the establishment of judicial tribunals for a variety of civil and criminal cases. Finally, PAs were expected to carry out the unpopular villagization programs, as well as the resettlement programs. The villagization programs were designed to bring



dispersed farmers into areas where population density warranted the provision of government social services (Dessalegn Rahmato 1985, 38).

The membership of the PA was, and continues to be (since the PA was maintained as a local government body after the Derg government fell), composed of farmers within an identified administrative region of a maximum size of 800 hectares. Dessalegn Rahmato describes the membership of the PA as follows:

Every head of a household, permanently resident within the jurisdictional area of a PA, is entitled to be a member of the organisation and must register as such. Although membership is not compulsory, peasants choose to register because the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. The basic unit of the rural community as well as that recognised by the PAs is the family or household. A peasant is registered as a member of a PA not just on his own behalf but on that of his household. . . . As soon as peasants come of age (i.e., reach 18 years) and establish their own homestead, they become accepted as heads of a household and thus members of the PA. That they are not married is of no consequence, since everyone expects that this “deficiency” will soon be removed. Indeed this is not a problem at all, because peasants are often married by the time they become eligible for membership.

Under existing socio-cultural practices, it is the *male* member of the household who is accepted as *household-head*; it is he who is registered on behalf of the family in the PA, and in whose name the allotment is made. In effect therefore, rural women are excluded from PA membership and, consequently, cannot acquire land in their own right. The exceptions are widows, divorcees, and those whose husbands have, for one reason or another, temporarily left the community (Dessalegn Rahmato, 1985, p. 49) [emphasis not added].

Research participants in our study reported that there was coercion to join PA, and punishment if they didn't join. For example, some farmers who refused to join the producers' co-operatives were punished by having their best lands expropriated for the co-op. Some reported that they were forcibly recruited for resettlement as a punishment for non-compliance with PA policies, as the adult woman in Household K reported:

*We were forced to go to resettlement because my husband wouldn't join the farmers co-operative. We were resented for that. We had livestock and crops, teff, that were about to be harvested but it didn't matter. At first we resisted joining the co-operative but my husband was marked by the kebele [PA] for having refused, so once they started telling us that we had to go to resettlement because he had refused to join the co-operatives, my husband proposed that he join the co-operative but they said, "No, it's too late, you have said no once."*

As described by Dessalegn, the basic unit of the PA continues to be the household.<sup>3</sup> There was little, if any, consideration in government policy of intra-household dynamics and power relations and how these affect control of and access to resources for individual household members.

A common romantic conception that socialist ideals prevail naturally in rural Ethiopia leads to the assumption that everything is shared equally among peasants, that everyone is well taken care of by "the community" and therefore there is little need to guarantee the rights of everyone, particularly women, in practice. This is apparent from the analysis of the following article 4(1) from Proclamation 31/75: "Without differentiation of the sexes, any person who is willing to personally cultivate land shall be allotted rural land sufficient for his maintenance and that of his family" (cited in Original Woldegiorgis 1999, 3). As the use of masculine pronouns in the preceding passage indicates, the reference to "without differentiation of the sexes" is no more than a token acknowledgment that, in the socialist theory of the Derg government, women and men should have equal access to the most important economic resource in Ethiopia: land. Dessalegn points out complications indicating that this policy was never intended to be implemented:

If the land reform had been actually implemented along these lines, the difficulties during land distribution would have been far greater than they actually were. In addition, abuses would have been harder to control, particularly in areas where multiple marriages

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<sup>3</sup> Ethiopian authors are generally referred to by their first name.

were prevalent. In these areas, men-peasants would register their wives in more than one PA and acquire land for *themselves*, since social customs oblige women in many rural cultures to surrender property to their husbands. Furthermore, women in almost all areas of the country are customarily prohibited from engaging in some forms of farm work, such as ploughing and sometimes sowing, although their participation in all other forms of farm labour more than matches that of their husbands. This would have meant that in the end the control of the land policy would have eventually passed to their husbands. It therefore seems that the policy of the PAs to allocate land to *households* rather than *individuals* was, in the circumstances, a rational one (Dessalegn Rahmato 1985, 50) [emphasis not added].

Dessalegn notes how the pre-existing gender division of labour and social expectations are inconsistent with the expectations of the Derg's new political theory. However, rather than suggest that attention should be directed to the implications of these power imbalances for men and women, he simply concludes that the decision of the government to ignore the demand for land reform "without differentiation of the sexes" was indeed pragmatic.

To some extent, Dessalegn's comments can be qualified by acknowledging that, in fact, there was, and is, not enough land to adequately support the population in the northern highlands. There is no way to allocate land so that everyone has enough. This is the fundamental reason behind much of the political discontent, and even the resettlement program itself. This issue of unjust land distribution has resurfaced over and over again in the Ethiopian highlands. However, it has consistently been women who are disadvantaged in relation to men by the shortage of land. The example cited by Dessalegn with regard to the 1976 land distribution indicates how this is often reinforced by official policies. For example, proclamation 31/75 made it illegal to hire labour to cultivate land. This was to reinforce the concept of "land to the tiller" that the land should be cultivated directly by the farmer to whom it is allocated. Considering the social restrictions against women ploughing, if households without adult male labour are legally prevented from hiring someone to plough their land (which already places women in a disadvantageous position), the only option is to find a male

neighbour or relative to agree to plough for nothing. This is an unreliable method that places women in a weak position relative to men.

The PA in theory should have provided the male labour for such women. Some returnee women who stayed in Kutaber for up to three years after their husbands left for the resettlement areas reported that indeed this service was provided. However, the service was up to the discretion of the PA leadership and many women who did not have powerful relatives were left to beg for ploughing, or were forced to pay illegally.

Although the land nationalization was designed in theory to equalize land holdings among all Ethiopians, social differentiation continued to exist. Since the creation of the PAs, their leaders, who are almost exclusively men, have held a great deal of control in the way that land is distributed. Many sources, including the research participants, confirm the generally accepted notion that PA leaders favour their relatives in distributing the best land. Those who have no powerful relatives are usually left with the poorest quality land. Therefore, both gender and class inequalities continue into the socialist period of the Derg.

### **Recruitment for Resettlement**

All research participants reported that they were forced to go to resettlement. Only Household G reported they were forced by drought to volunteer to go to resettlement:

***Household G:** People were all over the streets trying to fend for themselves. We heard from kebele [PA] leaders “You can go to resettlement, you’ll have a little bit of food with you, and then you’ll look for a place where you’ll be self-sufficient.” They had a tent. In the tent they were saying “Do register, there’s nothing more important than eating, you’ll be better off”. That’s why we registered.*

All other households reported that PA leaders or government soldiers selected them against their will to go to resettlement. Most research participants had some

idea that the government's objective in resettling people was linked to food insecurity caused by drought and environmental degradation. Most had little explanation for why they personally were selected for resettlement:

**Household B:** *We went to resettlement in 1971 because the government just said we need to go. There would be a meeting and then they (kebele leaders?) would just point at people and say, "You, you, you, you will be going to resettlement."*

**Household C:** *We were kidnapped.*

**Household D:** *They said those who have nothing to earn income with must go to resettlement. That's how my husband was recruited. He was working and they just took him along with other people.*

**Household F:** *At the time (1978) there were Derg Cadres and they had power. If you had a relative there, you were protected. Moreover, those with no money had no power to resist orders from the Derg.*

As discussed in Chapter 1, there are several other motivations of the resettlement programs that have been suggested by critics, for example, that the project aimed to depopulate rebel areas in the north, particularly Tigrayan rebel (TPLF) areas. The research participants from Kutaber Woreda were exclusively Amharas and they did not report any objectives related to organized government opposition. Certainly, this may have been because of an unwillingness of participants to discuss sensitive political issues. Or, it may have been that such objectives were not issues in an Amhara area that was perceived as pro-government. Rather, within Amhara areas, those who were taken to resettlement were intended to colonize the resettlement areas, creating a pro-government presence in areas dominated by Oromo and other ethnicities known to support rebel groups. Such political objectives were not apparent in the reports of research participants.

## Resettlement

Resettlement was not unknown to Ethiopia before the Derg took power. A few resettlement programs had been implemented before the Derg, including the policy of granting land to supporters of the Imperial regime. Alula Pankhurst has documented that,

Prior to the Revolution of 1974, resettlement was not a major Government concern. Schemes were set up on an ad hoc basis on the initiative of administrators. . . [In] 1968, settlement schemes were seen as necessary to relieve population pressure in the northern highlands, and to raise production by exploiting underdeveloped lands in the south. . . . By the time of the Revolution, resettlement had made little impact on the economy. . . The results were poor and the viability of many schemes remained open to question. . . After the Revolution, the pace of resettlement increased dramatically (Pankhurst 1992, 14–15).

Resettlement was even suggested by international agencies, such as the World Bank in 1973, as a strategy for mitigating the effects of overpopulation, land shortage, and degradation of farmland in the northern highlands. Zolberg writes:

It is important to note that the resettlement programs were not invented by the PMAC but by a 1973 World Bank recommendation for the relocation of peasants from Tigray [*sic*] and other northern areas suffering from population pressure, erosion, and deforestation, to underutilized parts of the south (Zolberg 1989, 117–18).

Resettlement programs were initially undertaken by the Derg in the late 1970s as a preventative strategy to mitigate impending famine and degradation of natural resources. Farmers from the overpopulated north were moved to more fertile and less populated lands in the southern part of the country, mainly Bale and Arsi. Although these projects were not reported as very successful,

President Mengistu Haile Mariam insisted on vastly increasing the pace of resettlement to move 1.5 million people over two years. The program was halted at the beginning of 1987, largely because of international condemnation, after approximately 800,000 resettlers had been moved.

### **Ecological Environments**

The vast differences between the ecological environments of the areas of origin of resettlers and the resettlement areas created major challenges for resettlers. Although the highland culture of the Amhara and Tigray ethnicities is most often presented as the national culture of Ethiopia, half of the land in Ethiopia is mid- to lowland — below 1,500 m above sea level. This land falls mainly in the border regions with Sudan in the west (the location of many of the resettlement sites), Kenya in the south, and Somalia and Djibouti in the east. In the lowlands, the majority of people live as pastoral nomads and small numbers of shifting farmers. In these areas, the people are more closely tied with ethnicities of the neighboring states than with the Ethiopian highlanders.

The benevolent development intentions of the resettlement program promoted by the Derg government envisioned the ecology of the resettlement areas as superior to the highland ecology in terms of agricultural capacity. Thus the program aimed to utilize the untapped and abundant natural resources of southwestern Ethiopia for the improvement of the country as a whole. However, the new ecological environment posed significant physical and psychological challenges to the ecohealth of the resettlers and, at least during the initial period of the program, the combination of these challenges were simply intolerable for thousands of resettlers who either deserted the areas (including early returnees) or died. The most often-cited complaints of the ecology of the resettlement areas are outlined in the following.

The flora and fauna of the highland and lowland regions are dramatically different. Resettlement was founded on the theory that the ecology of the resettlement areas represented abundance and fertility for agricultural

production, in stark comparison to the drought and land degradation of the north. Indeed, as those resettlers who remained in resettlement and prospered in the long run can attest to, the potential for agriculture was real. However, visions of bountiful harvest overlooked the challenges that a new ecology, located in new social, political, and economic environments posed for resettlers. Moreover, planning for sustainable land use was minimal in the haste to implement the resettlement programs. This is gleaned from anecdotes relating to the selection methods for resettlement sites. For example, many key informants reported, though the truth of the story is uncertain, that President Mengistu Haile Mariam flew over vast tracts of forest in a helicopter pointing to areas that looked to be particularly fertile from the air, which were then designated as resettlement sites. Planning was insufficiently co-ordinated with the seasons. In many instances, resettlements were not timed to ensure that farmers could prepare a crop on time for harvest, or even harvest the crop they had planted in the place of origin. Resettlers were often dependent on the state for food aid for an extra year because of such poor planning. Moreover, the physical logistics of resettlement were forced to grind to a halt in the rainy seasons (not uniform throughout the country) when many roads became impassable.

The ecological environment represented enormous social change for resettlers in a number of areas. To begin with, resettlers were terrified by the wild animals unknown in the highlands and reputed to live in the resettlement areas — deadly snakes and insects, lions, and crocodiles. Certainly, these animals accustomed to a tropical environment do live in many of the resettlement areas and did pose a significant threat to the health of resettlers. However, rumours and fear of such wild animals, even if they were never actually encountered, caused tremendous stress for resettlers over safety of themselves and family and neighbours. Casual conversation with research participants revealed cultural fears of highland wild animals. Stories were recounted about hyenas reputed to eat children. The unfamiliarity of animals in the resettlement intensified this fear. Household H reported:



*There were parasites that went in through your feet; you would worry that they would enter you at any moment. There was so much wildlife that could attack you so you were always saying, "Oh! I'll be eaten by a wild animal! Or I'll get one of these sicknesses!" You were always worried.*

Not only were there new unfamiliar animals, but familiar animals, especially cattle, could not survive in many of the resettlement areas because of a preponderance of tse tse flies that transmitted tripanosomiasis, a deadly disease for cattle. Living without cattle created many changes for resettlers. They could no longer use their traditional ploughing methods. These were replaced with tractor ploughing or hoe cultivation, both of which were unpopular with highlanders. Moreover, it meant that milk, butter, and beef were not available. These are important foods for special occasions such as holidays, weddings, and funerals in times when such luxuries can be afforded. Butter is also important for head and hair care. One NGO, Irish CONCERN, attempted to stock some resettlement areas in Wellega with cattle, but had little success. It should be noted that some resettlement areas can support cattle and this was important to the long-term adaptation of resettlers. In Gambella, for example, Tigrayans resettled to that area currently own vast herds of cattle and as a result dominate the dairy market in the region.

The different agro-ecological zones in resettlement areas were unable to support many of the crops, especially legumes, produced and preferred by highlanders. Moreover, the co-operative farms encouraged mono-crop cultivation so that in many areas only maize and sorghum were produced. Resettlers had small household plots where they tried to grow the vegetables, cereals and pulses they were accustomed to, with little success. Returnees complained about the food in resettlement:

***Household R:*** *We had food problems. Even the food that we got, it was not comfortable, it gave us a stomachache. There were too many problems. There was no shiro [staple stew made from ground chickpeas], there were no lentils, there was no berebere [staple*

spice made from hot peppers]. *We were using maize to make a shiro.*

**Household S:** *We ate rice, sorghum, maize. Here [in Wello] we used to eat beans and peas, sorghum, maize, everything.*

**Household C:** *We only got teff [staple grain], maize, and sorghum there. We couldn't grow what we were used to, like horse beans, there. The food didn't sit well with us. . . The resettlement area is better in terms of food availability, food is abundant. Nevertheless, the food here [in Kutaber] is nourishing. Whatever we grow here is nourishing. There is abundance in resettlement but it is not nourishing.*

Resettlers learned to cultivate the new crops, although they missed the highland crops they were unable to grow, especially specific foods required for traditional rituals and holidays. Many of such foods, such as barley porridge typically served to pregnant women, were not available in the resettlement areas. Using new crops had many social as well as agricultural and nutritional implications. Women had to learn to grow and prepare nutritious foods for their families using new ingredients, especially maize and sorghum.

There were two main types of resettlement areas: conventional and integrated sites. The main difference was that conventional sites were set in a bush area, far from any existing settlements, while integrated areas were close to existing towns and markets. The majority of the research participants were resettled in conventional sites as is apparent from their descriptions of the resettlement areas. Resettlers in conventional sites were especially overwhelmed by the vast uncultivated forests in resettlement.

**Household G:** *It was a bush. When we arrived there was nothing that was prepared. For miles it was a bush. We cleared it and built cottages and then slowly day after day it turned into a livable place. . . . They took people to a desolate place where there are no houses, and put them into an overcrowded shelter where disease spread easily. Following that situation, the ones that died and the ones that were left were made to move again. They herded people together and we had to clear a bush and build our places. It was*

*very swampy; there was no purified water; the water was murky; perhaps many lives were lost from drinking that water.*

Several returnees described the resettlement as thickly forested, emphasizing that it was a wild, uncultivated place. Returnees felt that they were banished by the government to forgotten hinterlands and they resented that they were expected to tame the wild and unfamiliar land.

### *Health and Disease*

The prevalence of diseases and dangers unknown in the highlands severely threatened the health of resettlers. The perception of poor health conditions was a leading factor in the decision of almost all returnees to leave the resettlement areas.

Fear of lowland diseases, which pre-dated resettlement, inhibited easy adaptation for highlanders in the lowlands. Kloos and Zein describe the ecology of health and disease in Ethiopia:

The lowlands are endemic for malaria, trypanosomiasis, yellow fever, onchocerciasis, schistosomiasis, visceral leishmaniasis and a number of other vector-borne diseases absent from the highlands above 2,000 m, an important factor in the concentration of the population and environmental deterioration at higher elevations. A recent study of 27,850 children reported higher mortality rates in the lowlands. Thus altitude is probably the most important single factor in the distribution of many diseases in Ethiopia (Kloos and Zein 1993, 30).

Research in the resettlement sites has documented, and research participants confirmed, that unfamiliar diseases, especially malaria, threatened and took the lives of thousands of resettlers. The psychological effect of observing prevalent disease was also damaging to the coping ability of resettlers who perceived the resettlement areas as dangerous and unhealthy. Research participants described the air, water, and even soil in the resettlement areas as unhealthy and sometimes fearsome in comparison with their memory of healthy

air and surroundings in Kutaber. Whether or not they ever contracted diseases, they were in constant fear that their health, or the health of their families would deteriorate. Many believe that they continue to carry disease and weak health as a result of their resettlement experience, even though they have returned home. The following comments illustrate these points:

**Household C:** *Many people died of sickness. The number that died is greater than the number that survived. The number that died? Who knows, we didn't count.*

**Household G:** *Diarrhea was very prevalent. It's very toxic. People's bodies get very weak once they have diarrhea. When cared for, some people would recover and some never would. I'd say the majority would die. It's very dangerous.*

**Household Q:** *We were infested by diseases. Many people died because of the malaria in lowland areas, and at least six people were buried in one grave. Malaria really finished many of our people. My husband died at that time, nine months after we left. He died because of malaria. Even myself I was sick and in bed because of malaria but I survived because of God. Even our daughter survived because of God's mercy. I was in bed for three months and I was praying that I should be home and breathe my air, the air in Wello. We were really praying to go, that one day we should breathe our own fresh air in Wello. That's why we came back to our home, in order to get our own air and to live in our own place.*

**Household R:** *People were dying, so how could we feel better there? Look at her [indicates his sick wife] now even; she brought this disease from there. She was "eaten" by the evil eye.*

The socialist ideology of the Derg called for rural health care. Accordingly, health clinics were eventually located in virtually all the resettlement areas, and subsequent research has noted that resettlers were privileged to have better access to professional health care than most Ethiopians. All research participants agreed that health care was eventually provided, and they reported that they visited the clinic; however, they used these clinics less when user fees were

charged for service as the co-operative system was liberalized near the end of the Derg regime in 1989:

**Household E:** *There was a government clinic there and they provided medicine. It was free; you didn't pay, so whoever is sick you take to the clinic. It's in the village. If you complained of headaches and stomachaches you would be given pills. That is until 1982. After 1982 they reduced their services. There wasn't as much government hand anymore.*

A very small number of resettlers benefited from training and employment in professional health care, as one male research participant reported:

**Household U:** *I was a health assistant. During the daytime I worked in a health centre because I worked there, I received more rations, about 11 quintals [1 quintal = 100kg] in a year. Sometimes I receive 6 quintals. . . . I was also a birth attendant in the clinic. I was also trained in the farmers training association. [A famous general] gave me the certificate when I graduated. The General was also the minister of health. I used to serve about 500 people . . . it wasn't common for people to work like me in the health centre and farm as well but sometimes even if the farmers were farming, some families would engage in food for work and receive some assistance.*

However, although he was privileged in resettlement to receive this training and employment, in return there are no opportunities for him to be employed in a health clinic. Therefore the training has done little to improve the current position of this research participant and it cannot be considered a major benefit of resettlement.

Childbirth is often cited as a major challenge to women's health in Ethiopia. Professional maternal health care was reported by women returnees who gave birth in resettlement to be very good, probably much better than what was available to most Ethiopian women:

**Household D:** *There was excellent health care during childbirth provided by the government. For babies there was fa fa formula and boiled milk. There was a lot of care.*

Research participants did not report specifically about the gender relations of non-maternal health care. However, because of the gender division of labour, the environmental health of men and women was different in resettlement.

Particularly in the earlier resettlement programs, men were sent first to clean the land and prepare it for farming. Their wives and children were sent one to three years later. Men were thus more exposed to disease vectors, especially malaria-carrying mosquitoes, to snake bites and animal attacks, and to the physical stress of hard labour. Women experimented with cultivating and collecting new foods that exposed them to the same disease vectors that men faced in the forest, and perhaps put women in greater danger of consuming unfamiliar toxic plants.

Despite the relatively high accessibility to professional health care in resettlement areas, some research participants were not satisfied by the mere availability of professional health care:

**Household R:** *There were doctors but they can't treat us very well. They couldn't even cure the diseases.*

**Household V:** *We faced health problems like asthma and typhoid . . . there was a clinic but it couldn't cure the disease called asthma.*

Some research participants reported that over time, they were able to re-establish the traditional health care practices they had employed at home. We observed that practices such as “duah,” where men and women gather together to pray for health in sessions that can last several hours, are currently widely practised in Kutaber. In resettlement, such practices depended on the presence of healers and medicines, as well as on the vigilance of the authorities that were in some areas strongly opposed to traditional and religious activities for ideological reasons:

**Household E:** *We were able to take whatever traditional healing practices that we had here because the medicine people from here were among us there. We found the appropriate medicinal plants there so we were able to carry out “duah” and “megat.”*

**Household F:** *For health we do things like “duah” so we thought about doing these there [in resettlement] but there were restrictions from the government so we didn’t quite practice it, we just had it in mind. The guidelines came from the Derg and were carried out by Kebele [PA] people.*

Research participants feel that the best way to prevent disease and to preserve health is to be attentive to hygiene, and to eat properly. Thus, health in resettlement was very closely linked to adaptation. Being aware of disease vectors, of the best sources of nutritious food, clean water, and other basic facilities for primary health care require familiarity with an environment. Resettlers needed to re-learn the practices they had known in their home environments. In many hastily selected resettlement sites, no attempt was made by authorities to equip resettlers with knowledge about their environment. Physical separations and language and cultural boundaries between resettlers and local people prevented the easy exchange of such information. Over time, the challenges of protecting health diminished:

**Household W:** *We didn’t face many significant health problems in Illubabor. We had health problems for the first few years after we arrived but then we became resistant to the diseases.*

Among returnees, poor health was an often-cited reason for return:

**Household K:** *We received a permit to return because my husband was sick. Because of his illness we were able to receive permission to come back. . . . Had my husband not been sick we would have stayed. . . . Also, it’s not good to be away from home in your old age, as you get weaker and your strength fades. Especially if you’re not healthy it’s not good to be in someone else’s country. It’s best to be at home. When you’re sick, it’s best to be among relatives.*

**Household F:** *First and foremost we returned because when we were taken from here it was against our will. Secondly, there were health problems there. As you know, my father died there of malaria. Thirdly, we didn't like the weather. We couldn't get used to it.*

The lowland climate of most resettlement areas are much hotter than the temperate highlands. Kloos and Zein report that the mean average temperature of the highlands (above 2,400 m above sea level) is between 10 and 16 degrees Celsius. The midlands (1,500–2,400 masl) have an average mean temperature of 16 to 29 degrees. The mean average temperature of lowland climate (below 1,500 m) is 23 to 33 degrees Celsius; but during the dry season the temperature can exceed 50 degrees Celsius in some areas. Many resettlers complained bitterly about the heat, which made work difficult, and was perceived as a threat to health.

### *The Social Environment and Adaptation*

The physical separation from homeland and relatives was extremely painful for resettlers. Adaptation was generally easier for those who moved with close family members, although there were cases observed by researchers of people escaping abusive family or marriage relationships at home. For those who were resettled in the earlier program, married men were resettled one to three years earlier than their wives and children. Emotionally, it was difficult for families to be separated during this time. Moreover, each partner missed the labour provided by their spouse in the household. Women left behind were dependent on the PA to plough their land and assist with other farming activities. Men had to depend on food provided in the form of aid. Even when whole households moved together, they invariably had to leave close neighbours and relatives behind. It was a difficult decision for many young married women who had to choose between living with their husbands or close to their parents when one and not the other decided to go to resettlement (A. Pankhurst 1992). Communication was limited to letter writing, although some resettlers were even prevented by



resettlement authorities from sending letters home. Many resettlers were allowed to go back to visit their relatives at home, and they were sometimes able to receive visitors. However, movement was severely regulated by the local authorities and resettlers were forbidden to leave the resettlement area without written permission from the state. Moreover, travel was costly, although many resettlers could afford occasional trips when they began to produce a surplus after a few years. Letters and visits allowed for information to be passed between the resettlement areas and areas of origin, and decisions to return were often based on news such as the harvest conditions at home.

Return from resettlement meant breaking new household and community ties formed in resettlement. Some members of households, for example, children, who were in school in resettlement, sometimes remained when others from their household returned. Marriages were very common in resettlement, especially between resettlers from different parts of the highlands. Couples then had to decide whether to return to the husband's or wife's homeland. Decisions were linked to local politics and gendered policies of access to land. This will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

Interaction between resettlers and local people varied a great deal in different resettlement areas depending on the ethnicities of resettlers and local people, their physical proximity to each other, the resource and land use of resettlers and local people, market interactions, and politics at the village level. In integrated resettlement sites close to existing towns, resettlers had closer relationships with local people than in isolated conventional sites. However, cases were reported where resettlers in identically planned resettlement villages in close proximity to each other had very different relationships with local people. Resettlers in integrated sites may have adapted more quickly because there were other facilities like roads and markets. Other authors on resettlement schemes (Hansen 1993, Malkki 1995) also theorize that it is psychologically easier for people to adapt to life in existing settlement rather than in isolated encampments.

Local people's reactions to resettlers and to resettlers' use of resources in the area were neglected in resettlement planning. In many cases, there was deep resentment of the resettlers by local people who saw them as privileged by the government (marginalized local people benefited slightly from the government services and provisions for resettlers, as well as from markets created by resettlers). Moreover, resettlers were criticized for severe deforestation and unsustainable agricultural practices. Resentment turned to violence in many resettlement areas when the Derg government fell.

*The Political and Economic Environments and Agricultural Production*

State co-operative farming was the central economic activity in the resettlement sites. The production system was designed according to a socialist modernization ideology that envisioned a communal farming environment idealizing peasant life but infusing modern technology such as tractors for economic development in the form of increased production:

All land in [one resettlement area in Wellegga] was communally owned and cultivated until the partial dissolution of the producers co-operatives in 1990. The Mechanisation Department of the Ministry of Agriculture provided free tractor services for clearing and ploughing the land (Meheret Ayenew 1994, 231–32).

This modernization approach failed to assess the many social needs of resettlers. In the eyes of the resettlers, there were many drawbacks to mechanization that were not factored into the capacity of resettlers to adapt immediately to new ways of life:

Mechanised farming could clear extensive tracts of land for cultivation. But, it accentuated the peasants' dependence on the state for continued assistance and for the provision of other farm inputs, including seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, etc. In addition, mechanised farming in [one resettlement area in Wellegga] concentrated on producing one or two crops, mainly sorghum and maize. This mono-crop culture was a principal cause for settler

discontent because the resettlers were highland farmers who used to grow a wide variety of crops . . . before they succumbed to the vagaries of drought and were thus forced to accept resettlement as a way of life (Meheret Ayenew 1994, 228).

It was not only the new ecological and economic environments, but also the new political structure and resulting system of social relations that created new challenges for resettlers.

The resettlers invariably resented the Communal System of farming. . . . [F]armers viewed the point system as unfair because it did not discriminate between active and lazy workers on the communal farm. In addition, farmers assigned for militia and security duty and peasant association members . . . were given work points without having to work on the land (Meheret Ayenew 1994, 231–32).

Under the work points system, labour in the co-operative farms was recorded and awarded with points redeemable in food and non-food rations. The distribution of work points was not equal; rather, it depended on gender, age, and ability. Moreover, certain non-farming service in the local administration and military (male labour) were awarded with equal work points for work many resettlers felt was not equal to the gruelling work in the fields.

There are two main issues relating to women's work and work points that highlight the gender relations of work in the socialist system. First, the system did not value domestic work, which was women's work. In theory, women (assumed to be living with their fathers or husbands designated as heads of household) were to work in the fields half as much as men, and so received half the work points. This was to accommodate for time women were expected to be working at reproductive activities at home. However, women were not remunerated for their domestic work. Second, it was presented falsely by the Derg that women were allowed to work at men's work in the fields for the first time under the socialist system. It is likely that the amount and type of agricultural labour contributed by women pre-resettlement varied depending on their place of origin, and on their socioeconomic status. However, considering the level of woman's

contribution documented by more recent studies, as well as the pre-resettlement descriptions of research participants, it is certain that women worked in the fields pre-resettlement. The false description of pre-resettlement gender relations of work justified the government's decision to pay women half of their work points. It is likely that men and women resented government policies that regulated their labour, as Pankhurst indicates: "The experience of loss of independence and control over production was alienating and generally resented" (Pankhurst 1999, 8). Pankhurst also observed that women "complained that they had not worked in the fields in their homeland and men protested even more vehemently at what was seen as an invasion of the domestic sphere" (Pankhurst 1999, 3).

The note that men protested invasion of the domestic sphere is indicative of the gendered notions of public and private and the divisions of labour within them. Men resented women, who belonged to the domestic sphere, invading their agricultural work sphere. Thus, similar to experiences of socialism in other countries (Einhorn 1993), socialist policies dictated an egalitarian work environment in the resettlement areas that brought women into work in the public "productive" sphere. However, such policies did not penetrate the household where the women continued to bear the burden of private "reproductive" labour, which Derg policies did not see as work deserving remuneration. Moreover, the work points policy was based on an incorrect assumption among Derg policy-makers (who were almost exclusively male) that women's normal contribution to farm labour was half of men's. Such an assumption was based on the observation, for example, that ploughing, a highly visible and labour-intensive male activity, was the only farm labour activity.

It is only in the past decade that women's work has been documented in rural Ethiopian settings (H. Pankhurst 1992). Previously, there was little published evidence of women's actual contribution to agricultural production. Academic and government attention to women's work has increased with the development of institutions such as the Centre for Education, Research and Training on Women In Development (CERTWID) at Addis Ababa University, and the Women's Affairs Committee in the Prime Minister's Office of the Ethiopian

government. however, women's contribution to crop cultivation in "normal" (i.e., not centrally planned) circumstances is nearly equal to men's, while women's labour contribution to livestock is greater than men's.

Alula Pankhurst has observed in one resettlement area:

Single, divorced or deserted women were in some instances able to retain a household plot and gain a degree of independence, leading to complaints from young men that women were privileged. Single women, as household heads, could also earn full work points, though they had to work long hours like the men (Pankhurst 1999, 4).

In another resettlement area, Wolde-Selassie Abbute observed:

In the new context, women are the main partners of daily/wage labour which they rarely practice in the origins. Moreover, on the basis of prior entitlement to land, women are officially recognized as heads of households by the village administration while they are having husbands married after the land entitlement (Wolde-Selassie Abbute 1997, 171).

Thus, there was some attempt in policy to account for situations outside of accepted "normal" situations of male-headed households. Certainly, there were many households in the pre-resettlement situation that included no adult male as "head of household," and at least one of our research participants, the head of Household S, was among them. Even if such households could have been considered anomalies, whatever had been "normal" household composition pre-resettlement was drastically changed by the resettlement experiences. Many households were separated, leaving some members at home or along the way. Deaths (many directly as a result of resettlement experience), births, marriages, and divorces (also heavily influenced by new social interactions in resettlement) continued to change the household composition in resettlement. Gendered Derg political policies, such as those regarding access to land and work points, were weighed in decisions on marriage and divorce depending on the access to

resources and labour that might be gained by the presence of a man or woman in the household (Pankhurst 1999).

Under the work points system, those unable to work in the fields, such as the elderly and the disabled, were also afforded partial rations to subsist on, and assistance with cultivation of their personal plots. This practice is modelled on co-operative practices inherent in rural social interactions. The effect, however, was somewhat unnatural. First, many farmers were uncomfortable having their private social interactions publicized and politicized by government policy:

The removal of party and government control from the shoulders of the peasants seems to have helped resuscitate voluntary models of peasant cooperation. As one peasant farmer put it, "We hated the communal system of farming but we cherish our tradition of cooperation and mutual support practices (Meheret Ayenew 1994, 244.)

Second, the practice was awkward because the pre-resettlement (primarily kinship) ties underlying informal assistance transfers were disrupted. The resettlement communities were composed of people from disparate locations throughout the northern highlands and often had differences of ethnicity, language, religion, and culture among them. Thus, neighbours were strangers and felt uncomfortable and suspicious of each other. Initially, all resettlers were dealing with the challenges of the new environment and they were not always willing to assist others with their burdens. Government enforcement of co-operation was insincere and burdensome for farmers. It took several years before informal assistance practices were re-established (Wolde-Selassie Abbute 1997).

The co-operative farms were communally run so that the proceeds of the production were to feed the farmers and the surplus was to be sold for foreign exchange for the development of the people. Centralized control was not always administered in the best interests of the farmers. Sometimes the system became severely restraining, especially if the local officials controlling food did not distribute it effectively.

### *Government Objectives in Resettlement*

Some returnees perceived that the government intended the resettlement areas to be a sustainable alternative to the changes they faced in their place of origin:

**Household D:** *The government's intention was very good. He intended to improve our lives. He thought he would give us a place where we could farm enough. While we were trying to become self-sufficient he was careful to supply us with everything we needed.*

**Household E:** *The plan was preventative. The government was thinking of future hardship. In 1977 there weren't any major problems. They were anticipating the problems that residents would face if nature were not co-operative. I believe in their objective, it makes sense to me. Right now we are facing drought, aren't we? So the idea was a good one. It's better to be spread out than be killed when nature fails us.*

Officially, the government's motivation for the resettlement program were to prevent overpopulation and land degradation in the north and to develop the economic potential of natural resources in the south for the overall benefit of the entire country. Planning documents from the former Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), now the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC), are telling of the political and economic objectives of the government in the earlier resettlement programs. The cover of a plan of the "Large-Scale Rainfed Settlement Project" in Lower Didessa, Wellega (RRC 1980) depicts, in a sketch drawing, rows of tidy houses along a straight road, fields filled with crops, men ploughing with oxen and tractors, men sowing seeds, women gathering crops and carrying firewood, and smiling children playing. The plan states the project objectives as: agricultural development; improvement of income distribution; minimization of rural poverty, unemployment, and underemployment; earning of foreign exchange; rehabilitation of drought-prone areas; and "to establish a self-sustaining agricultural settlement model for replication in other areas by settling farm-families who are unable to meet their subsistence

requirements due to natural calamities coupled with very low land : man ratio” (RRC 1980).

The conception of the northern highlands as heavily degraded and overpopulated and susceptible to drought and famine, while the south and west were underdeveloped fertile regions, was a key factor in the state plan for resettlement. As previously mentioned, during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie, there was a prevalent national image of the highlands as the breadbasket of the country and the heartland of national culture. This image was shattered by a combination of Western media attention to “hidden” famine and Derg propoganda that associated the famine with a feudal production system. In reference to the later resettlement programs, Alula Pankhurst writes:

From a national viewpoint resettlement was justified in terms of the need to find lasting solutions to food security crises, and the settlers were referred to as “environmental refugees.” However, the basic motivation had more to do with the politics of famine. The spectre of famine, symbolically linked to the overthrow of the imperial regime, was back to haunt the Derg just as it was seeking to celebrate its tenth anniversary. . . . The regime was anxious to be seen doing something positive and opted for a “quick fix” (Pankhurst 1997, 541–42).

The government objectives perceived by most research participants were quite vague and indicative of a general sentiment that the resettlement program was simply a whim of the government that they were powerless to oppose:

**Household B:** *In 1971 there was no drought. They didn't give us a reason for going, “just go” they said. There was no drought that we were aware of.*

**Household I:** *They didn't give us any reason. They just took us [in 1977]*

**Household L:** *It was a difficult time and everyone was taken together because of the drought. . . . We were told that this is a drought area and we were going to be taken somewhere more fertile.*



**Household O:** *I don't know what the reason was for my family being taken to resettlement because I was not here, I was in Addis Ababa.*

**Household R:** *There was a problem here and they said that "You should be resettled" and that was the reason.*

The first phase of the resettlement programs were touted as extremely successful by the government. The example was used as propaganda to encourage recruitment for the second phase resettlement:

**Household U:** *There was some misconception in the news. They showed that we were producing a lot and that we were fine and doing very well and this was transmitted to the people of Ethiopia including the government and the president, but it did not show the real picture and the real situation that we were in. We were suffering there but in the TV and in the news it was transmitted that we were doing fine. . . . The idea was first to resettle those who do not have anything, any land and those who are really very poor, but some officials misused this opportunity. I don't want to blame Mengistu Haile Mariam, the previous president. It was only some corrupted officials who did bad to us.*

According to the official publications of the government, the settlers were taken from "drought-affected areas." The "economic position of the settlers" is described as "well-below poverty line, frequently toward death line and largely living on relief aid provided by the RRC" (RRC 1980, v). This description conflicts with the reports of the participants in our research project, many of whom were well-off and living comfortably in Wello at the time that they were resettled:

**Household C:** *I'll tell you how resettlement is most harmful. Derg was separating people by wealth saying people who have one cow, one oxen were not supposed to go to resettlement in the stated objectives. However, "he" [the government] took me, who had two oxen at that time. That was a mistake. I had so much I wasn't dependent on anything.*

The second phase of resettlement was both greater in scale and much more controversial than the first. Unlike the late 1970s, by the mid-1980s the

eyes of the world were focused on Ethiopia because of international media attention to famine and because of intense Cold War politics that placed Ethiopia in opposition to the West:

The dubious results of experiments with [first phase] resettlement in Arsi and Bale during the early years after the revolution could have served as a warning against the massive movements of people [President] Mengistu decreed during the famine in 1984–85. The lessons were ignored . . . Mengistu's first priority in the operations . . . was to undermine the rebellion in the north. While the Soviets initially applauded these operations and provided transport, they gave no other help. Mengistu hoped to entice Western governments and international organizations into providing development assistance that would make the new settlements viable. Condemning the brutal methods employed to round up and transport "settlers," most foreign donors refused all but emergency food and medical help. Italy and, to a lesser extent, Canada were exceptions...Far from making a contribution to national food stocks, the resettlement sites as a whole constituted a serious drain on the country's food resources, including donor-supplied relief (Kloos and Zein 1993, 22–23).

In the 1980s, highly publicized relief efforts especially from the West meant that donors felt justified in demanding accountable action by the Ethiopian government, including an end to the reportedly brutal implementation of resettlement. By the late 1980s, external and internal factors forced many changes in Derg policies. The impact of these changes on resettlement areas, and in particular on returnees is discussed in Chapter 3.

## Chapter 3: Return

This chapter describes the context in which returnees returned to Kutaber both before the end of the Derg and after, up to the present. The challenges described in Chapter 2 were simply too overwhelming for thousands of resettlers. Unable or unwilling to adapt to the changes in environment, returnees were forced to escape from the resettlement areas during Derg time, or leave after the change of government, and to return to Kutaber. Many died of illness and a lack of basic necessities before they had an opportunity to leave, or during the journey. The largest flows of exodus from the resettlement areas resulted in two main flows of return within the historical time period of return, spanning the Derg and post-Derg. The first flow occurred during the era of Derg resettlement, 1977 to 1990. The second flow occurred post-Derg, after 1991.

### *Escape: 1977 to 1990*

Those who returned during the first flow (1977 to 1990) did so because they found the hardships of resettlement intolerable. The number of returnees during the first flow was limited by the fact that return was prohibited by the Derg except in special circumstances, such as sickness. Many (there are no official records) opted to escape from the resettlement areas without official permission. Though it was dangerous, escape was the only viable alternative for many resettlers. In the following discussion, I present and analyze a case study of Household H's experiences of resettlement (during the second phase of resettlement in 1984) and return in 1988, during the first flow when escape was the only option. This case study highlights a number of issues about the conditions of pre-resettlement, resettlement, and return that are common to the experiences of many returnees:

### Case Study: Escape from Resettlement

*The year 1983 was good; in 1984 nature did change [there was drought] and people were in trouble, but personally I wasn't in trouble at all because I had wealth and I had no problems at all. The government just forced me to go to resettlement. They said "Pick up your kids, your family, and you're going off to resettlement" . . . so I had to sell all the cattle I had, I had quite a bit. I had two oxen, some cows and some goats and sheep and my land had some crops to be harvested on it that I tried to sell before we left. . . . We were told that this was going to be a protected area, that they were going to plant some trees and we had to move. . . . They didn't come to our door as such, vehicles were provided in the town of Kutaber. From the countryside, we were escorted to these centres in Kutaber by soldiers and by force we were loaded into the car and as we were being loaded we were literally crying on each others' shoulders and being separated by soldiers in order to be taken to resettlement. There were so many tears as we were taken away. All of us in my family were taken together. My kids were very little . . . I don't comprehend the government's intention. In my experience, the people that died from illness and harshness of the environment in resettlement were more than the people who died from drought here, especially those like me who had the assets and the wealth to survive the drought in 1984. We just died from the illnesses in resettlement in droves. We wouldn't have died here [in Kutaber], we would have managed. Since I didn't go to resettlement in search of a better place or a better life, I made the decision that it was better to return back to my own country where the difficulties were not as huge and I knew how to manage and I was familiar. Of course those that remained there until now are very likely to have a good life but I can't speak for them. . . . There were those like me that escaped like me. Some just ran into the bush, some went away to where they came from and some who went to find the indigenous Oromos because they just wanted to mix with them and live among them. People said "If it's going to be death, we might as well die among people." They just tried to find life among people who were living there already. . . . The combination of forest and hot weather killed off a lot of people. I thank God I made it home. . . . The government was providing wheat and maize and then we were expected to start our own production so they gave us some time for that but beyond that time they stopped providing more maize and we were just expected to be productive. . . . For the time that I was there I was digging, really, that's the only means of ploughing that we had. I got sick, I wasn't able to dig or manage the land I couldn't handle the lowland temperature so I just came back. . . . Even when other people were receiving blankets and things there, we weren't because I had sold my oxen in Wello and people said, "He's got money, he brought some with him, so he doesn't need as much assistance" so we didn't even have very much. . . . That's the money that I saved and eventually spent to get back here. . . . Everyone was getting sick all of the time . . . my kids were losing their hair and I was really worried, I wasn't well myself so I said "I*

*don't want to die and leave my kids, they are young and they need me" so I said, "I need to do something." Just as I was recovering from what I was sick with, my kids really started losing their hair. At first I worried that I wouldn't survive to see them grow, but later I began to worry that they were going to die. I decided it was better to take them home, even if they were skeletons when they made it home and they would be able to be buried at home. . . . I had a lowland sickness. I don't know the name. The symptom is swelling in the legs. There was also malaria. There were clinics and health care workers who provided people with medicines but the medicines were just to make you feel better, not cure what you were sick from. A lot of people never felt better and never made it. We lost a lot of people to lowland sickness. So many, so many died. . . . There were parasites that went in through your feet, you would worry that they would enter you at any moment. There was so much wildlife that could attack you so you were always saying, "Oh! I'll be eaten by a wild animal! Or I'll get one of these sicknesses!" You were always worried. . . . Of course, there were food shortages at resettlement! How could you eat sorghum? It was hard to eat it even with salt. . . . We had no access to a car or even a mule. We felt stuck. Even if you wanted to escape or go somewhere we couldn't. We felt trapped in this place where we were forced to live with wild animals. . . . Despite threats that I would be arrested and punished, I escaped. In fact, I was arrested once. I tried to escape once and I was arrested. That time I was arrested for a month and ten days. I was caught in Dembidollo awaraja of Wellega. Then I was released and I was certain that I would die if I didn't go back home so I decided to continue to try to escape and I succeeded. I did take my kids home. My kids are well now, thank God, and I attribute all that to them making it back to their country.*

*[His wife speaks.] We paid 100 birr each [currently \$12 USD], two days of walking in the bush and on the third day we got a car. I was carrying one baby on my back, one on my front. Only two [of their three children] were walking at the time. There were so many border controls we passed at different places and they were specifically looking for resettlers who were escaping back to their homeland. They would have been very dangerous if they had caught us, but thank God we weren't caught by them or anything else. There were so many escapees who were caught by controls between provinces. So many were caught and beaten and returned back to the resettlement areas. Some died in prisons. I thought I would rather drink the pure water of my homeland and die than remain in that situation, so I came. . . .*

*[Her husband continues.] Without a permit I escaped. I escaped and crossed deserts with my children without any permit from anyone and made it back here. On the way we were confronted with buffalo all the time. I didn't fear that though I just escaped with my kids. We passed through forests. Once we got here, they weren't very receptive and I felt so much resistance from people who kept saying, "Why did you come back?" and administration that kept saying, "Why did you come back?" I always had (local government) guards on me. They made it impossible for me to stay at the place where I lived [in the countryside] so I just got up and moved to the town of Kutaber . . .*

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[His wife continues.] *At the time when we arrived we were much stronger. I could work carrying things for people and for farmers when the harvests were ready and my husband would work in town and somehow we managed to provide for our kids and pass those days. After the government changed [in 1991] they started looking at the special case of returnees and as a result of that we received some assistance of wheat for a couple months from the government but beyond that we just managed by scraping . . .*

[Her husband continues.] *. . . following the food assistance, we were told we would get some land. For the moment they gave us very little and they said there would be more in the future but there has been no more so to this day we have very little land. . . . Once in Kutaber, I became a labourer. I did anything I could to get by. I ground Gesho [the leaf that local beer is fermented with] for people, I cut wood, I did digging for people, and as I was doing that and trying to send my kids to school. My wife drew and carried water for people and in that way we were supporting our kids. Then the government changed and Yihadig [EPRDF] came in. The new government gave me this small place where I constructed this house soon after. So we had a new place but we had to continue to work at the same kinds of daily labour jobs. I continued to cut wood and my wife continued to carry water. I hadn't given up on our land in the countryside so after the new government came I still went back to the farmers' association and tried my luck with the land. They kept telling me, "You have to wait for land redistribution, the policy is coming out any time now" from year to year but nothing really happened to make up for the amount of land that I lost; but I was given this very little bit of land for crops and that I use, but nevertheless my existence was mainly in the town doing the daily labour jobs. At this time I was employed in the church for about 40 birr a month [\$5 USD]. I did services as well as guarding the church half days. So that's what my life looks like. I'm just trading, living day to day. My daughter who is now studying at Addis Ababa University, she made it there all by herself. She really struggled to achieve that but I am in such poverty that I don't even make enough to be able to go and visit her. No one supports my daughter really; I don't visit her or support her. It's just the government and her own efforts. Given that my life is in such hardship I don't even get the government relief. The government considers my earnings from the church something, so they refuse to give me relief that could have helped. Yes, the government keeps saying, "There are people worse off than him. He has something and therefore he doesn't deserve relief" but I think, "Who else is worse off than me? My kids are going hungry. They sleep with empty stomachs. Who else do you consider poor?"*

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The narrator of the case, Mr. H, tells how his family was wealthy enough at the time of resettlement to have survived the drought and so he resents that he was chosen to be resettled. Many returnees echoed that recruitment for resettlement

was faulty, even though many felt that the idea of resettlement was reasonable considering the unavailability of land in the highlands. According to government policy, only the poorest should have been recruited, but instead those with conflicts with local leaders were selected. Others were simply taken randomly. The highly resented patterns of recruitment indicated strongly that resettlement was forced and not voluntary.

Mr. H continues that he was forced to sell assets like livestock, probably for much less than they were worth, and he had to leave other assets like crops and household items for anyone to claim. This was repeated by other returnees. It was a major contributing factor to the impoverishment of many households that resettled. Many returnees reported that they went through such an impoverishing experience twice: first when they went to resettlement, and again when they returned. Mr. H reported that because he was wealthy pre-resettlement, he was further impoverished in resettlement because he was believed to be wealthy and in less need of government assistance in the form of food and household goods than other resettlers.

The story of Household H relates the pain that the family felt, being separated forcefully from family and neighbours and homeland and belongings by government soldiers, who were depicted as ruthless. Certainly this sentiment was related repeatedly by returnees to explain how they were forced to resettle against their will and desire.

A major theme in this narrative is horror at the disease and illness that was reportedly all-pervasive in the resettlement areas and a constant threat to all resettlers. Poor health and sickness was the most often-cited reason for why returnees left resettlement. Linked to disease in the above case study was disgust for the general unfamiliarity of the area, including strange and undesirable food, wild animals, and poor farming implements.

Mr. H described his fear of the government controls that kept the resettlers trapped in the resettlement areas. The effective imprisonment of resettlers severely limited their ability to choose their movement and behaviour. This further indicates that resettlement was forced.

When this family returned to Kutaber, the Derg was still in power and the controls in the resettlement areas were still enforced. Mr. H describes how he and his family were resented upon their return. Other escapees also reported that they were resented in Kutaber because they were perceived by residents to have been provided for by the government in the resettlement areas. Those who never left Kutaber, themselves struggling against the insecurity of the time, were happy to see their friends return, but were loath to give them back the assets they had left behind when government propaganda told them that resettlers were receiving government protection and assistance and harvesting abundant crops.

Mr. H implies that the unwillingness of residents of Kutaber to assist the escapees contributed to their difficulties and their continued impoverishment upon their return in 1988. Other returnees did not emphasize this sentiment. Some even praised their neighbours highly for caring for them on their return. Mr. H continues that they received no assistance from the Derg government on their return. Only after 1991, when more returnees returned legally to Kutaber, was more attention paid to their case and some attempts by the new government were made to assist them with land, which in the end never materialized. He admits that they received very little food assistance. He gives the family credit for surviving by their own means. They were very proud and hopeful of the potential of their daughter in the university.<sup>4</sup>

### *Policy Changes during the Late Derg Era, 1987 to 1991*

Environments changed over the course of the resettlement period for two main reasons. First, as facilities developed, harvests became plentiful and resettlers became accustomed to resettlement. The initial shocks of few services and unfamiliarity decreased. Second there were major changes in the centrally planned Derg policies over time. By the late 1980s, support for Communist

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<sup>4</sup> A tiny percentage of high school students who receive a GPA above a certain point are automatically admitted to the University. There are no tuition or residence fees for Ethiopian students. To be admitted to the University is an extremely unusual accomplishment for a poor rural woman. Unfortunately, like many in her situation, Mr. H's daughter was overwhelmed by the challenges of university life. She dropped out after her first year and returned to Kutaber where she works as a clerk in a government office. Her brother graduated from high school and was accepted to the police college in Dessie, where he is now training.



governance worldwide was severely declining. Ethiopia, which had received the bulk of its ideological, financial, and in-kind support from the Soviet Union and other Communist countries, was under increasing pressure as this support decreased. Criticisms from the West and from rebels within the country were difficult for the government to resist. Domestically, it was also apparent that co-operative farming practiced in the resettlement sites and elsewhere in the country were less efficient than small-holder methods of production. As a result, from 1987 on, major changes began to occur in the structure of the resettlement areas. The economy was liberalized to some extent. Control over the PA was handed over from Derg party cadres to the Ministry of Agriculture. Small plots of personal land were allotted to individual farmers with usufruct rights on the edges of the communal land. Every year the size of these plots increased. In 1990 fixed prices for commodities controlled by the Agricultural Marketing Corporation and collectivization were abandoned and farmers were informally free to sell their surplus produce in local markets.

These changes had several impacts on resettlers. First, it allowed for industrious farmers to produce and sell for extra income that helped them to adapt comfortably. Second, these changes re-instated the pre-Derg ways of farming:

The changes from collectivisation to small-holder agriculture and from dependence on tractors to ploughing with oxen meant a return to a mode of production with which the settlers were familiar and competent, resulting in an increase in their confidence, independence and self-reliance (Pankhurst 1997, 6).

These changes relieved the resentments of farmers who felt cheated by the co-operative system. For those who were not active producers, however, like the elderly, the sick, and the injured, the loss of the co-operative system meant the loss of the security of at least a meagre ration from the government. In the pre-resettlement period, poorer members of the peasantry could depend on loans or gifts from their better-off neighbours whenever they were in need. This practice was abandoned during Derg resettlement as work points and rations

were determined and distributed by the government. When the Derg fell, the loss of rations was extremely impoverishing for the poorest people until pre-Derg informal social mechanisms of transferring wealth could be re-instated (Wolde-Selassie 1997).

*The Right to Return: Post-1991*

The majority of resettlers who returned home came following the fall of the Derg government in 1991. The Derg was overthrown by a coalition of rebel forces led by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and supported by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). Together, they are referred to as Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF or *Yihadig* by its Amharic acronym). EPRDF took power first in the Northern Tigray region, the base of their support, and took control of the capital, Addis Ababa, in May 1991.

The new EPRDF government did not sustain government support of the resettlement areas for both financial and political reasons. First, EPRDF members had always been among critics of resettlement that charged that the resettlement sites had been set up as small colonies of highlanders serving the Derg's political agendas of dispersing the support base of Tigrayan rebels, and limiting the control of Oromos in OLF areas. Such communities were an affront to the EPRDF's new national vision of sovereignty for every major ethnic group in Ethiopia within their own territory. The new government entered on a platform advocating the right of coherent ethnic groups within Ethiopia to self-determination as nations. Former administrative provinces were re-formed into nine regions, reflecting the territories of major ethnic groups in Ethiopia. The political system was decentralized, maintaining a central government but endowing the greatest administrative powers to the regional governments.

The new government's decentralized view of ethnic nationalism conflicted with the structure of the resettlement sites as enclaves of ethnic groups not indigenous to the territory in which they lived and used natural resources.

Resettlers, framed as representatives of the national agenda for development by the Derg, were officially re-framed as outsiders who should return home, as they had always been considered by many locals, by the arrival of EPRDF. Moreover, the resettlement areas were simply too extensive for the new government to afford to maintain.

The Derg had officially viewed the resettlers as permanent settlers engaged in the development of the nation. While the Derg was in power, resettlers were obliged to remain in the resettlement areas unless officially granted a travel pass, and were guarded by government soldiers. This control was abandoned by the new government. The new regime officially allowed resettlers to choose to remain in the resettlement areas, or to return to their places of origin, where, in the official view of the new government, they belonged. There was no material government assistance for return and no official records of returnees were kept. Virtually overnight, a political environment was created where resettlers were at once liberated and abandoned. The new federal government announced that they were free to return to their places of origin. At the same time, the protection from local people's resentment and aggression they had been afforded by the Derg disappeared.

### *Conflict in the New Political Environment*

When the right of return was granted in 1991, resettlers weighed the hardships and homesickness of resettlement against the benefits of life in resettlement to which they had adapted. Many were ready to go, having stayed without attempting to escape only out of fear of the authorities. Others were less willing. They were comfortable with the livelihoods they had constructed in resettlement and were doubtful that a more comfortable life awaited them "at home" in their places of origin. However, regardless of their personal interests, conflict with local people was a motivation for many to return.

Each of the nine new regions of the EPRDF government is politically dominated by a majority ethnic group designated as the majority population in the

region, with the exception of the southwestern regions where several distinct tribal groups share power. Within regions where political organization had been active historically, for example, among opposition groups in Tigray and Oromiya, the transition to the new system was smooth in comparison to the border areas. The southwestern regions where many resettlement sites were located had until 1991 been ruled by representatives of the Amhara dominated Imperial and Derg regimes. In these peripheral regions, historically there had been less attention to social services like education. Political identity and unity among the local ethnic groups were weak, and the fall of the Derg left a power vacuum.

Resettlers had always been ethnic minorities in the resettlement areas. The new ethnicity-based system of government made them political minorities. This heightened the desire of many resettlers to return home.

The 1991 political change has dramatically changed the socio-economic living conditions of the relocated population. In the period following the Derg government, repeated ethnic conflicts occurred between the Gumz [local people] and resettlers that resulted in the loss of many lives from both parts. These incidents, coupled with the physiological, psychological, social, economic, and environmental sufferings they had been encountering since the commencement of the scheme, forced part of the resettlers to evacuate the area spontaneously to return to the original homelands (Wolde-Selassie Abbute 1997, 3).

For many groups of local people who had also resented the perceived privileged position of the resettlers to whom the Derg had granted land, services, and protection, the policy of the new government was political affirmation of their resentment. They felt justified to attack the resettlers that they perceived to have stolen their resources for years. Without government protection, resettlers were disarmed literally and figuratively and in many resettlement areas were attacked and killed, and their settlements burned by local people.

In light of the violent consequences of government abandonment of resettlement, the concept of the “right to return” is dubious. The “choice” of many returnees was limited by the political circumstances. For many resettlers, the

threat of violence and death forced them to return, even if they would have preferred to have stayed in the resettlement areas. Many of our research participants suggested that although they were initially forced to resettle, by 1991 they had adapted and were comfortable with life in resettlement, as the following comments given in answer to the interview question “When did you return to Kutaber?” reflect:

**Household B:** *Derg fell, EPRDF came in. He [the new government] said, “Go to your birthplace. If you would like to go you are free to go. We gave our word to the [local administration] that we have no house, land, or assets to return to.” We said, “What are we going back to?” The new government administration said, “You will get your land back. It’s better for you to go to your place of origin.” So we decided to do whatever the government tells us. The last government told us to get up and leave. This one tells us to go back.*

**Household D:** *We never considered returning to our homeland until the government changed and they informed us that we could return. They told us that everyone was supposed to return to their country. We were happy to go back so we just went back. We’re happy to be back. . . . If the local population hadn’t informed us that the government had changed and that we should go home, we wouldn’t have known. Because we were on their land, we settled in their country, they told us, “The government has changed, you should go back to where you came from.” . . . They started coming and marking our houses with chalk. They said, “Leave or we’ll kill you. . . . We want to use these houses, you should leave.” . . . So we said, “Why not?” we didn’t have an order to go before. Now that we have an order to go, we’ll go.*

**Household E:** *The thing is, they [local people in resettlement areas] were scared of Derg. They would start to pressure us about leaving and then they would become scared of Derg. Derg was very present, not at a distance. As you have come to our homes, Derg used to come to our homes and find out if there were any security problems. Since it was Derg that told them to move over in order to settle us, they were scared to say we should leave. So, as soon as the government left, they started shooting. They brought their guns and said, “What are you doing here? You should leave. Your father [the Derg] has left; the government has left.” When they did that we started getting really scared.*

*Household Q: I came from the place where I was resettled because I preferred to die where I was born. Additionally the weather was too hot in Gojjam. After living there for nine years, I came back home. There is also another reason. While I was there I lost my eye and my husband died and also the local people set my house on fire. . . . The place where we were was not suitable to live.*

These passages reflect mixed feelings in return. Returnees were happy to return to their beloved homeland but worried about their economic prospects there. They were afraid of the threats of local people but reluctant to leave the livelihoods that they had built for themselves. Overall, these passages reflect a sense of resignation to circumstances beyond their control pervasive in the narratives of most returnees.

#### *Land Policies and Returnees in Kutaber*

Those who returned before 1991 and after found that, unless they had close relatives who had remained in the areas of origin retaining land for them, their land had been redistributed to other farmers in the community. The lack of available land for returnees became significant when the numbers of returnees increased dramatically during and after 1991. Access to land is the most crucial factor in securing and sustaining a livelihood in an agrarian economy like Kutaber. Since 1976, all land in Ethiopia is entirely state-owned. Government policy on land holdings is the key determinant in access to land.

The EPRDF government has continued the Derg policy of state ownership of land, in the interests of egalitarian access to land. Therefore, ultimate control of the land is still held by the government. When returnees came back, most returned directly to claim the homesteads they had occupied pre-resettlement. If they encountered conflicts with new inhabitants, they appealed to the local government. Responses were not uniform as there was no official policy in place for granting them land. As the number of conflicts increased, the returnees protested to the local government saying, "Our land is in the hands of others,

return it to us, or give us new land.”<sup>5</sup> In response, a committee was established in each PA to consider returnee cases and to decide whether returnees should be granted the land they had previously held. The outcome depended on how the land was currently in use, who was using it, and what connections the returnee had in the PA. Generally, returnees were granted a part of the land they had previously held, usually the poorer quality portion. There were some returnees who did not receive any land.

In November 1996, the Amhara Regional Government proclaimed a rural land distribution law. Land redistribution was carried out in the region in early 1997 in areas where demographic changes, including the influx of returnees from resettlement, had created great inequalities between landholders. This land distribution is related to returnees in two ways: first, because the influx of returnees after 1991 was one of several factors increasing the population pressure on land that encouraged the redistribution; second, because returnees were among those who received, and in some cases lost, land in the redistribution.

The aim of the land distribution was to provide every farming household with four *timads* of land (4 timads equals approximately 1 hectare and is 50 m by 50 m). However, the redistribution was carried out in a secretive and ad hoc fashion. The details of implementation were left to the discretion of the lower levels of administration, the woredas, and the PAs. In Kutaber, the amount of available land differed in each PA. Land distribution was carried out in only 8 of the 16 PAs in Kutaber Woreda. In the others, land holdings were relatively equal and it was expected that there would be little benefit to redistribution. In the PAs where redistribution was carried out, land was taken away from farmers holding between 4 and 8 timads. Those who were targeted to have land taken away were those who had been wealthy landowners before the 1975 redistribution (called “feudal remnants”). The others targeted were former members of the Derg government who were said to have acquired land “unlawfully” in that they acquired a disproportionate amount of nationalized land. They were punished

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<sup>5</sup> As recounted by the Council Secretary of Kutaber Woreda.

regardless of the coercion through which many were forced to join the former government, and regardless of whether the farmer was middle aged and still supporting a large household, or retired and no longer farming. Embedded in this policy is resentment of both the former feudal landlords and the Derg government that replaced them, encouraged by the tension of current land shortage and food insecurity blamed on short-sighted policies of the past.

As there was insufficient land to accommodate 4 timads per family in Kutaber, it was decided within the woreda government that the smallest amount of land held by any household should be 0.5 timad. The aim was to allow 2 timads to every married man over eighteen years old, and to provide 0.5 to 1 timad for every single man over eighteen. Priority for new land was given, in order of priority, to married men with children, married men without children, single men from poor families, single men from rich families.<sup>6</sup>

The government policy priorities for land distribution are based on, and are dependent on, gendered social customs of land distribution. For example, if there is an adult male in a household, he is considered the household head and land is allocated in his name. Single men require some land in order to attract a wife (whose productive and reproductive labour is a household necessity), but the state can justify granting single men less land than married men with the expectation that married men will be granted some of their fathers' land as a wedding present.

It is expected that women will marry and have access to land through their husbands. In some special cases, married women can hold land granted by their parents or by the state in their own names.<sup>7</sup> However, the priority in any state or family land distribution is to first ensure that men are entitled to the best quality land. If they don't marry, women are expected to be provided for by their parents' land. Due to customary land distributions reinforced by state policy, therefore, women's entitlement to land, which guarantees income and security, continues to

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<sup>6</sup> Personal communication with the Council Secretary of Kutaber Woreda, April 17, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> The rule is unclear to me. There were some deliberate measures included in the 1996 land reform to earmark land for poor unmarried women.



be restricted. Attempts to break the pattern are resented as “privileges” for women.

Some returnees that had been landless for several years did receive land in this process. Others that had managed to obtain some land before 1997 were unaffected. It was difficult to determine exactly how much land each research participant was using because different measurements were used to describe land, for example, timads, and the number days it takes to plough with two oxen. Most households use parcels of land that are uneven in size and located in different areas. In general, research participants reported that they have far less, approximately one-half to one-eighth of what they held pre-resettlement. They also reported that the land they have is poor quality: it is not fertile, it is rocky, and it is located far from their home. Moreover, because of the failure of the January to March *Belg* rains for the past five consecutive years, whatever land they have remains unproductive during that season.

In terms of other assets, returnees reported that they have very little livestock. Most receive the food they consume through food-for-work assistance from the government. They supplement this with minimal subsistence production of grains, pulses, and vegetables; they collect wild foods; they sell products such as eggs and baskets for women and eucalyptus wood for men; they engage in some petty trading; and they migrate to find work in neighbouring areas or as far away as Addis Ababa.

## Chapter 4: The Ecohealth of Returnees

In Chapters 2 and 3, the social, political, economic, and ecological environments of the three periods have been described. In this chapter, the impact of the environments on the health of returnees is analyzed. Using the ecohealth approach, I consider environmental factors that impact positively (to protect) and negatively (to threaten) on the health of returnees based on research participants' descriptions of health and disease detailed in Chapter 2 in comparison with wider literature on traditional health in Ethiopia.

The concept of ecohealth, described in Chapter 1, is filtered through a lens of gender and development theory and modelled on a political ecology approach, as described in the literature review in Chapter 1.

As stated in Chapter 1, the ecohealth concept is based on the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) Ecosystems Approach to Human Health definition of health:

Good health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Health is the extent to which an individual or group is able, on the one hand, to realize aspirations and satisfy needs; and, on the other hand, to change or cope with the environment. It is not an objective for living, but a resource for everyday life. Health includes the notions of the balance or harmony, as well as the capacity to respond and adapt to changing constraints and opportunities (Kay and Waltner-Toews 1999, 2).

Health thus defined depends on an individual's ability to cope with changing social, political, economic, and ecological environments. Thus, it is imperative that an analysis of ecohealth clearly describes the context of the environments around any given case, as I have done, and considers the impacts of these on different individuals, as I do in this chapter.

Ecohealth must consider the impact of the environments on different individuals. Individuals interact differently with their environments depending on

their physical, social, and economic characteristics. For example, characteristics such as male or female, young or old, rich or poor, healthy or sick, rural or urban, lead to different environmental interactions, largely because of “lifeworlds,” a concept described in Chapter 1. The characteristics of a given individual will, at least in part, determine his or her lifeworld, and this in turn determines the elements of different environments with which he or she will interact more closely. For example, a poor rural Ethiopian woman is expected to collect firewood and water for her household and to engage in horticultural and agricultural activities. In carrying out these expected activities, she interacts closely with her immediate ecological environment. A wealthy urban Ethiopian man is expected to work in the management of a private business. In so doing, he is unlikely to interact closely with his immediate ecological environment, but very likely to closely follow political events throughout the country and the world through media and discussion with colleagues. Different individuals sharing the same environments live in different lifeworlds. Therefore, individuals interact differently with the same environments. Thus, an ecohealth approach must consider not only a given environment as a whole, but also how the environment impacts differently on individuals.

Factors that protect and threaten health each include physical factors and perceived factors. Physical threats to health, that is, physical factors in the environment that negatively impact health, include disease vectors, such as infected water, and activities with a high risk of injury, such as hard physical labour.

Physical protection of health, i.e., physical factors in the environment that impact positively on health, is categorized into preventative and curative measures. In recent years, professional agencies involved in practical health care among displaced people have shifted their approach to emphasize preventative, rather than curative, health care measures. This is indicated in the following excerpt from a practical guide written by the international NGO Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF):

The public consequences of armed conflict and population displacements have been well documented during the past 20 years. The major determinants of high death rates among affected populations and the major priorities for action have also been identified. The provision of adequate food, clean water, sanitation, and shelter have been demonstrated to be more effective interventions than most medical programs. The focus of emergency health programs has shifted to community-based disease prevention, health promotion, nutritional rehabilitation, and epidemic preparedness, surveillance and control (MSF 1997, 7).

Protection of health requires adequate provision of basic necessities like clean water, comfortable shelter, sanitation, sufficient nutritious food, clothing, and equipment, such as cooking utensils. If these are available, they protect health by preventing physical threats to health like food shortage, unclean water, and conditions for the spread of disease. I would add to the above excerpt from MSF, that it is equally important that displaced people starting life in unfamiliar environments are assisted in acquiring knowledge and awareness of where to find and how to use basic necessities. For example, if available food is unfamiliar, in order to consume it, displaced people have to learn how to prepare it safely and nutritiously.

Even if preventative health care should be emphasized to minimize ill health, curative health care is also necessary for protection of health. Kleinman (cited in Kortmann 1987) describes a three-tiered model of curative health care in popular, traditional, and professional sectors found in Ethiopia:

According to Kleinman (1980), health care systems are generally composed of three sectors which partially overlap: the popular; the traditional; and the professional. The *popular sector* provides by far the greatest share of the care of the sick. . . . Self-help and the help of the patients' own family circle and acquaintances form the basis of popular sector care. It is in this sector that decisions are made about whether or not a condition should be labelled as "sickness," and what initial steps toward healing should be undertaken. A solution is often found using expertise within the family, including the use of home remedies. Family members or close friends often decide whether or not supplementary help must be sought. The *traditional sector* employs illness concepts and healing methods

which often combine elements of the popular sector with a few from the professional sector . . . such practitioners often belong to the same community as their clients and therefore have a good understanding of how best to approach their clients' problems. Western medicine usually dominates in the *professional sector*. . . . The professional sector is characterized by a long-standing, literate tradition, official sanctioning, and high levels of institutionalization (Kortmann 1987, 255–56). [Emphasis not added]

This model is very close to the way that research participants described their methods of health care. At home, returnees emphasize preventative health care, for example, through cleanliness, personal hygiene, and an attempt to eat well. They practise traditional methods of preventing ill health through group prayer sessions (“duah”) and also occasionally visit traditional healers for cures. Currently, returnees report that they use professional health care rather than traditional health practitioners when they are sick.

Using this model, three levels of curative health care contribute to the physical protection of health. The first level, referred to above as the popular sector, requires a familiar social environment of trusted family and neighbours. Health protection at this level includes the ability of household members designated as responsible — primarily women — to provide adequate water, food, and sanitation to the household. The use of home remedies also requires some household experience and familiarity with locally available items used for healing. The traditional sector requires experienced practitioners and knowledge about how to obtain and prepare traditional healing products. The professional sector also requires qualified and experienced practitioners, as well as access to medical equipment and medicines.

In terms of ecohealth, an individual's perception of his or her capacity to cope with environments has a major impact on his or her perceived health. Perceived good health may be described as a qualitative lack of anxiety, or sense of well-being, derived from confidence that threats to health can be overcome with protection from strong popular, traditional, and professional health care.

Although there is some overlap between the types of ailments treated by the traditional and professional health sectors, each addresses some that the other does not. The availability of professional curative health care provides more effective protection against physical threats to health such as disease, injuries, and malnutrition than does traditional curative health care. However, the availability of traditional health care provides protection against perceived threats to health, including some cited by research participants, which fall beyond the scope of professional health care. For example, professional healers commonly focus on treating physical symptoms to the neglect of the environmental context.

By contrast, traditional healers often refer to the environment to explain causes of a sick person's illness. A traditional explanation for disease could be "because the sick person passed a river during the night" (Rappaport and Rappaport cited in Kortmann 1987, 269). This is relevant to the case of returnees who reported their perceptions of how change in environment affected their health. In the new resettlement environment, physical threats to health such as disease vectors were different. Moreover, perceived threats to health were different or unfamiliar, for example, the means by which traditional illnesses such as evil eye, "*buda*," were communicated. Kortmann explains the concept of *buda*:

*Buda* . . . covers a variety of syndromes which are believed to be caused by the "evil eye," such as fits, delirious or dissociative states — as well as somatic disturbances such as gastroenteritis (particularly in children) and migraine headaches (Kortmann 1987, 261).

Generally, the source of *buda* is particular, not easily identifiable people. *Buda*-carriers are usually artisans who inherit the power to infect others. Thus, in an environment where there are many unfamiliar and possibly dangerous people, one may perceive a heightened vulnerability to illnesses such as those caused by *buda*. Some research participants complained that they or their family members were affected by *buda* in the resettlement areas and that they continued to be affected by the symptoms of *buda* after return.

Although professional Ethiopian health care providers are generally familiar with the cultural concept of *buda*, health care in the professional sector focuses on treating the physical symptoms of the condition, rather than addressing the perceived environmental causes. The availability of traditional health care is therefore useful for addressing perceived health problems. Perceived threats to health include fear and discomfort caused by unfamiliar or not-preferred elements of lifeworlds such as foods, living, and working quarters, neighbours and co-workers. These may be particular to groups based on culture, gender, age, social position, or political opinion, and they may vary according to individual tastes. Such perceived threats interact with physical threats and affect individuals' ability to cope in new environments.

In summary, ecohealth is composed of both physical and perceived health. As physical and perceived health vary in different environments, ecohealth changes as environments change.

### *Ecohealth in Pre-resettlement*

Pre-resettlement refers to the period when returnees lived in Kutaber before the Derg resettlement programs were implemented (the first phase in 1977/78; the second phase in 1984/85). The perceptions of those recruited for resettlement of the health conditions pre-resettlement vary. Returnees' narratives often expressed multiple and contradictory perceptions within one household, or even from one person. For some, especially those who volunteered to resettle in the second phase of resettlement programs, severe threats to health in their places of origin in the form of shortage of food, and resulting conditions of disease were very real. For others, there was no unusual threat to health perceived in the place of origin at the time of resettlement, particularly during the first phase of resettlement. Returnees who at that time had never moved far from their place of origin were familiar with common physical threats to health in Kutaber (such as periods of insufficient food and a lack of professional health care) and they

perceived the environment to be healthy. The majority of the research participants fall into this category. Among them, some acknowledged that there was good reason, in general, for the government to cite threats to health (food shortage) as a motivation for resettlement, even if the reasoning did not apply to their particular case because they had been wealthy enough to withstand the drought. These people recognized at least some good intentions of the programs in terms of protecting health through relocation to more food secure areas and the provision of social services like health care. Others refused to accept that there were any threats to health in the place of origin and therefore rejected any argument that resettlement had any positive impact on health.

For the government, threats to the health of rural populations motivated the implementation of resettlement programs, at least in part. The combination of ecological factors (degradation of agricultural land, minimal rainfall) and socioeconomic factors (high population dependent on agriculture) were expected, in the late 1970s, to produce food insecure conditions; and in the mid-1980s they contributed to widespread famine in the highlands. The notion that both preventative and professional curative facilities for the protection of health were inadequately available to rural Ethiopians was one of the platforms on which socialists overthrew the Imperial Regime in 1974, giving rise to the Derg government. The Derg government predicted that the sociopolitical structure of the resettlement areas as model socialist communities would greatly enhance the health protection facilities accessible to rural people through the production of bountiful harvests that would provide good nutrition, and through the construction of social services such as professional health clinics.

### *Ecohealth in Resettlement*

Resettlement refers to the two phases, beginning in 1977/78 and 1984/85. Overall, in comparison to the pre-resettlement period, resettlement in the initial period had a negative impact on ecohealth. The length of this initial period was perhaps two to three years, until resettlers were comfortably producing an



adequate harvest. Initially, the physical threats to health, such as water-borne and insect-borne diseases, were very high because resettlers had little protection against them. The perceived threats to health were also very high because resettlers were unfamiliar with the new environments and because highlanders were generally fearful of lowland climates rumoured to be full of disease. Moreover, resettlers generally felt that much of the nutritious food they were accustomed to was unavailable, and many reported that the available water was unclean. This was severely compounded by a sense of loss of the healthy environment of home, especially for those who felt they had no problems at home.

Initially, resettlers' ability to protect their health was extremely limited. They were unfamiliar with the environment and had little knowledge about how to prevent illness. Many households were disrupted, so that the social system of family and friends required for the administration of popular health care was also disrupted. This was compounded by the unfamiliarity of the surroundings that made healing products difficult to find. In the traditional sector, there were some traditional healers among the resettlers. However, initially resettlers would have had difficulty trusting those healers from different places of origin. Moreover, healers would have had difficulty initially finding the required healing products. The professional health care services that were supposed to be provided by the state were insufficient. Many research participants reported that there were some health care professionals with minimal medicines sent with them to resettlement; however, initially health care centres were not fully functioning. Moreover, the lack of planning and overwhelming logistical requirements of the resettlement programs, particularly the later ones, meant that food, water, and shelter were inadequately provided so that resettlers were weak and uncomfortable, and crowded in situations where disease spread easily.

Men, particularly those resettled in the earlier programs, were negatively affected by the hard physical labour of clearing land, by the disease vectors and threats of animal attack and injury they faced working in the forest, and by the

lack of basic food, water, shelter, and health care. These factors both threatened and failed to protect health.

Women who remained in the places of origin when their husbands and fathers left to resettlement areas lost direct access to adult male labour, and a male political voice in an environment where men's voices were louder than women's. Thus they lost some degree of security in their access to food and income, which made them more vulnerable to impoverishment and its resulting negative health effects. In theory, farming was cooperative, and women were intended to have access to the male agricultural labour of the PA. In practice, however, implementation varied according to local politics, and women were dependent on the generosity of the PA leadership, and on the strength of their social and kinship ties in the community. Women who were present in the resettlement areas during the initial stages, especially for those resettled in the later programs were threatened first by unclean water and inadequate or non-preferred food. Women were faced with exploring the new and unfamiliar environment for the requirements of the household in terms of food, water, and health care products. Without the protection of knowledge of environment, they were vulnerable to many threats to health. Moreover, women spent more time caring for the many resettlers who fell sick, exposing them to the threat of disease in the inadequate shelter of the initial period.

Initially, before resettlers' perceptions had time to adapt to their new environment, many were overwhelmingly disappointed by the conditions in which they were expected to build a new life. This was especially true if they had been convinced by government propaganda used in recruiting resettlers that depicted the resettlement sites as ideal farming communities. Disappointment and homesickness reduced the capacity of many resettlers, especially the elderly, to resist physical threats to health, and rates of death and escape were very high in the initial stages.

Over time, ecohealth improved in the resettlement areas. Physical threats to health lessened as resettlers became aware of their environment. As they felt more comfortable over time, the fear and perceived threats of the environment

decreased for many (although for some this fear never decreased). Resettlers became more able to protect their health when moved from temporary housing into more permanent homes. They began to produce a harvest and many became accustomed to the new foods and products available, which were at least plentiful if not always preferred. Professional health care became established in the forms of health clinics, and some resettlers began to practise the traditional health care techniques of their places of origin. The longing for home was balanced for some by the minimal security of good agricultural production in resettlement. Resettlers became acquainted with their neighbours, at least among the resettlement communities, and to establish new kinship ties through marriage that in part replaced those social bonds that were lost.

Although the levels of death and escape declined overtime, as protection against physical and perceived threats to health increased, disease and the sense of a diseased environment continued to affect many resettlers. Ill health was the primary reason for returning cited by returnees who came before the change of government. Some returnees even reported that they were granted permission from the authorities to leave the resettlement area permanently on account of illness vaguely defined as “lowland diseases.”

Several coping factors influenced resettlers’ ability to adapt quickly to the new environments. Individuals were more or less inclined to adapt partly based on their social characteristics and lifeworlds, and partly based on their own personalities. Based on their characteristics, returnees had different environmental factors to cope with. The elderly had longer roots in the place of origin, were less physically fit, and wished to die in their homelands. Women were often forced to choose between their fathers and their husbands if one or the other decided to go to resettlement (A. Pankhurst 1992), or to return. Possessing some money, for example, from the sale of assets immediately before leaving for resettlement, may have provided a level of security for some resettlers. However, in cases where it was well known that someone had some resources, the overall effect may have been negative, as they were informally excluded from other entitlements, such as government provision of household

utensils, on the assumption that they were better-off and had fewer needs than others. Education was an asset as those who were literate (men more often than women) often held positions of relative power in the PA administration, or were able to work for service providers.

In general, it was easier for individuals who moved with their pre-resettlement household intact to adapt in resettlement. Moreover, the degree to which the choice to resettle was voluntary affected an individual's willingness to adapt. Those who looked forward to better opportunities in resettlement were less likely to want to go home (if they weren't overwhelmed by disappointment upon arrival) than those who felt that they had left a better life behind. Adaptation was easier in the cases where households had a greater degree of freedom to resettle (as opposed to cases where people were simply assigned to resettlement by the PA).

Individual personality differences also affected individuals and their families' abilities to adapt. Some people were fiercely homesick, like those in household H, and refused to adapt in resettlement. Others were more resigned to starting a new life whether they had chosen it or not. Others were eager to make the best of a new situation.

### *Ecohealth in Return*

The political events of 1991 disrupted the natural process of adaptation that had taken place over time in the resettlement areas. Resettlers were both bystanders caught in the crossfire between supporters of the old and new governments, and targets of attack as symbols of Derg power, depending on the particular ethnic make-up and political climates of different resettlement areas. For most resettlers, however, there was great pressure to flee the resettlement areas. In the decision to return, resettlers weighed perceived threats to the lives and livelihoods of their households from attack by locals, with their perceived options in places of origin and other locations. Many fled attacks in resettlement areas only to return again months later when they found poor economic alternatives in

their homelands. The willingness of those who decided to return from resettlement following the change in government was balanced between joy over freedom to return “home,” and disappointment to leave the economic and social ties they had created and nurtured in resettlement. As the ability to communicate with home depended greatly on the facilities and conditions of particular resettlement areas, returnees had different levels of expectation about the environmental realities that they would face in their places of origin. Many had high expectations and were shocked by the poor economic environment of the highlands. Many returnees have moved back and forth between the resettlement areas and areas of origin multiple times, seeking the best balance of opportunities.

Such migration continues, especially since the economic situation in the highlands has worsened with consecutive years of poor rains from 1997–2002. Movement, however, is not entirely free of constraints. At least one research participant in Household O, a widow with four children, said she would return to the resettlement area where much of her family remains, but she cannot afford the cost of the bus fare to travel. Another cost of migration is the loss of control over immobile assets like land and houses. As many returnees have been repeatedly impoverished by such losses, they are reluctant to move again. At least two research participants in Household D and Household B reported that they might consider moving back to the resettlement areas, if they were as young and strong as they were when they were first resettled, but that now they feel too weak to cope with the change. The political climate of regionalization may also affect the decisions of some returnees who might otherwise want to return to the resettlement areas, but who are unwilling to feel like unwelcome outsiders, and possible targets of local aggression, in an area dominated by another ethnic group.

It is significant that for those returnees who are now settled in Kutaber, their ecohealth is generally poorer now than in pre-resettlement and resettlement. Like all residents of Kutaber dependent on farming, their livelihood is severely restricted by a vicious circle of shortage and degradation of

agricultural resources, compounded by the insecurity of frequent land redistributions. Wealth has been decreasing in the area over recent years (Chapman et al. 2000). The negative impacts of poverty on health (food shortage, inaccessibility of professional health care, spread of communicable disease) affect increasing numbers of people in Kutaber. Threats to health in Kutaber are primarily the result of a reduced capacity to protect health. Key protective elements lacking include adequate and nutritious food, adequate shelter and clothing to withstand the cold highland climate, and the need to work at exhaustive labour to earn a meagre income and to complete basic household tasks like collecting water and cooking. A lack of disposable income for labour-saving conveniences such as pack animals and grinding mills also increases the physical stress on health. The gender division of labour dictates which activities are most stressful for men and which for women. Men and women are both prone to exhaustion and injury as a result of their activities. For example, the burden of carrying water and collecting firewood for home use and for sale severely taxes the health of women. Men's health is weakened when they migrate long distances with insufficient food to find work in towns or other farming areas.

Households with fewer members to contribute labour to household work and earning income have more work to do and often have no choice but to cross gender lines in labour activities. For example, in Households J and R where the adult woman is ill, her husband carries out much of the labour usually assigned to women. Likewise, in households like Households I, M, and P where an adult male is sick or absent, women carry out many of the tasks usually assigned to men. The double load of labour reduces the ability of individuals to protect their own health and the health of household members.

In terms of curative health care, returnee households often left many members of their family in resettlement, so that social networks, disrupted once by resettlement and partially healed over time, remain geographically dispersed. Even if resident household members are knowledgeable about popular health, the general resources of the household are reduced and this is reflected in the

level of care that can be provided. Praying for health in groups of family and communities members (*duah*) remains an important popular (quasi-religious) form of perceived protection of health for all residents of Kutaber. Presumably traditional medicine is available. However, at least one returnee in Household U, a former health assistant in resettlement, reported that there have been campaigns initiated by the Ethiopian Red Cross Society and community health groups to spread awareness of the dangers of traditional medicine. The greatest concern is the spread of HIV/AIDS, a severe threat to health in Kutaber that is not considered in this paper.

Kutaber is relatively privileged to have a hospital, as well as a regional hospital close by in Dessie, several government clinics, and at least one NGO family planning and maternal and child health outreach program. Most research participants reported that they use such facilities as required, and those with more serious health problems use them more frequently than others. A lack of disposal income for the direct and indirect costs of professional health care undoubtedly restricts access of many Kutaber residents to available health services.

Within this overall context of poverty, returnees are generally among the poorest. They are disadvantaged in comparison to their neighbours because they were not able to maintain a claim on good quality land, the key element in any household's capacity to access food and income, while they were in resettlement. Their more or less unexpected return created a burden on overtaxed resources, thus it is unquestionably difficult for the community to give back to returnees all assets to which they once had a claim. This loss has severely restricted returnees' ability to rebuild the assets they once had, as they can barely make ends meet even in good years. Now most research participants report that, like thousands of other poor residents of Kutaber (and more than 11 million Ethiopians in 2002), it would be impossible for them to survive the current situation of food shortage if they were not receiving relief food from the government and international donors.

Returnee households headed by women without the support of an adult male are especially challenged as women have fewer options than men in Kutaber for earning income. Men are more able to find daily labour jobs in nearby towns than women. Women's access to agricultural labour usually performed by men is also limited. Such is the case for all, not only returnee, households without an adult male. However, as in the case of research participants in Households F, D, and Q, many women lost their husbands to malaria and other diseases contracted directly as a result of their resettlement experience. Presumably, many men returnees were also widowed in resettlement. At least two of the women research participants in Households M and P reported that their husbands were sick, and unable to contribute to the household. One man in Household R also reported that his wife was sick and unable to contribute to the household, due to an illness contracted in resettlement. This impact of resettlement has created major challenges to the health of those returnees who survived death of close family members. Not only have they suffered the emotional loss of a loved one, they also face greater physical health challenges due to the impoverishment of their households caused by the loss of a contributing member.

The ecohealth situation of returnees in Kutaber is discouraging. Many research participants feel that the challenges of the current situation are far greater than those faced at pre-resettlement. Many report that the only difference between the famine of 1984 and the emergencies of 2000 and 2002 is that relief food is available now to keep people alive. One member (male or female) in the household of all research participants participates in food for work activities, working several days a week at soil conservation activities such as terracing in exchange for 50kg of wheat per household of five and above per month.

Research participants had few suggestions for interventions beyond relief food that would improve their current condition. Some would return to resettlement areas if they had the means. A few informally interviewed residents who had not previously been resettled also suggested resettlement as a solution to the current problem. It seems that those returnees willing and able to move



back to their resettlement areas have already gone. Those who remain are resigned to life in Kutaber, either because of a visceral desire to be in their homeland, or because they feel comfortable, and don't perceive any other alternative. A few summed up their situation saying that they could get by, "if only nature would stop being cruel and grant them some rain." Many expressed the sentiment that they would continue to live "so long as God granted them something to eat. If not, they would simply die."

Some returnees suggested that the government should accept that the area is no longer fit for agricultural production and establish a manufacturing sector, and build a factory where people could have wage labour. Most returnees stressed that they would prefer to be self-sufficient, rather than dependent on food aid, and, if it is impossible to farm the land, they are ready to work at anything in order to cope.

There is no easy solution to the problems of returnees. Their case is not considered differently from the case of all poor residents of Kutaber by government, NGO, and UN agencies. Research participants stressed that they share their problems with their poor neighbours. Even if they feel that resettlement contributed to their current poverty, most are hesitant to separate themselves as a particularly needy category in the community. Rather, their wish is for the improvement of the food security and poverty of the community as a whole.

Research participants generally agreed that, in theory, resettlement of farmers from areas with poor farming conditions to areas with better farming conditions could help alleviate chronic poverty and food insecurity in times of drought. However, resettlement should be implemented in a socially responsible manner that selects resettlers on the basis of need and choice and takes into consideration the needs of resettlers beyond the availability of land. This view confirms the approach of authors such as Michael Cernea (Cernea and Guggenheim 1993; Cernea 1995) who argue that careful participatory planning is absolutely necessary to consider how social variables interact with resettlement. Within this perspective, the situation of the returnees from Derg resettlement

programs is a case of the negative outcomes of poorly planned, unsustainable resettlement.

Documenting the experiences of returnees serves three purposes. First, it provides a more profound description of the residents of Kutaber than is generally considered by agencies providing assistance. This is potentially useful to those that aim to meet the needs of the poorest in that area. Second, it provides a record of a case of a little documented effect of a poorly planned resettlement that should be considered as an example to any future plans for resettlement in Ethiopia or elsewhere. Third, the experiences of returnees provide valuable information on how the ecohealth of groups and individuals is affected by changes in environment as a result of resettlement. Ecohealth analysis of the narratives of returnees in this case reveals key environmental factors that should have been considered by planners of the resettlement programs. Planners and evaluators of resettlement and displacement in other situations could use an ecohealth approach to indicate major environmental factors that should be addressed with regard to specific populations in planning protection and assistance interventions.

#### *Future Plans for Resettlement in Ethiopia*

Resettlement as an intervention for development in Ethiopia carries the stigma of the failure of the Derg programs. From the time that the EPRDF government was a rebel force against the Derg, it has been a strong opponent of resettlement. However, as the cycle of food shortage and relief continues year to year, the government is under pressure from the international aid community to search for lasting solutions to the food security crisis. Ways to improve productivity of the agricultural sector as it has been exhaustively studied with negligible results. Given current economic, political, and ecological environments, there is virtually nothing that can be done to change the cycle.

Thus, the concept of resettlement has cautiously re-emerged in discussions between government and donors recently.

## **Chapter 5: Application of the Major Paper to the Plan of Study**

This chapter explores how the research for this major paper has contributed to fulfilling the objectives of my plan of study. In so doing, I consider the case of returnees in terms of forced migration theory.

The learning objectives of my plan of study, outlined below, have been achieved through various learning activities throughout the course of my MES program. Within the scope of the major paper, the relationship between my plan of study and the research may be clearer for some components than others. In this chapter, therefore, I describe broadly how the research developed my understanding of all components, and how the research contributed to achieving my learning objectives.

### **Area of Concentration**

The area of concentration of my Plan of Study is “Refugee Protection and Assistance: Agency and Identity.” The learning quadrant I identified for my plan of study is Quadrant A, intervention in practice, that is, the influencing of practices of intervention (overlap with Quadrant C, intervention in theory). I planned the subject of the major paper to encompass several of the components within the area of concentration of my Plan of Study. The research for my Major Paper was appropriate to my learning quadrant in that it gave me the experience to continue working in the field outlined in my plan of study upon completion of my MES work.

### **Component One: Definitions and Causes of Refugees**

Component one of my plan of study is “definitions and causes of refugees.” The learning objectives of this component are: to be familiar with various definitions of “refugee” employed in Canada and in other countries and how definitions affect refugee claimants; to understand various interpretations of the political,

economic, ecological, and other causes of forced migration; and, to determine how changing interpretations of causes of forced migration lead to changing definitions of refugees.

The case of returnees examined in this major paper offers an opportunity to explore the meanings of definitions and causes of refugees. The strict international definition of refugee is derived from the 1951 Refugee Convention. The Convention defines a refugee as anyone outside of his or her country of nationality because he or she has been persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. The Convention is based upon a state-centred notion that people who are outside of their state, and therefore unable to access its protection, should be entitled to protection by another state or international body. Refugees who meet this definition are considered “Convention refugees.”

In recent years, the field of refugee studies has expanded into the broader field of forced migration studies. This expansion represents a shift in focus from a narrow study of forced migrants who leave their country, to an investigation of the experience of different forms of forced migration in locations within and without the country of origin. Forced migrants are subdivided into categories such as Convention refugees, internally displaced people, economic refugees, environmental refugees, and development-induced displacees. I will consider the validity of each of these categories as applied to the case of returnees. Returnees, except perhaps in some rare cases, have never been refugees according to the Refugee Convention definition. Returnees are not Convention refugees, because they are not outside their country of origin. However, their experiences of displacement are very similar to the experiences of many Convention refugees. In fact, many highlanders recruited for the same resettlement programs as returnees became Convention refugees in the Sudan as a result of the resettlement experience:

The . . . resettlement program which the Dergue has carried out since 1979 is also found to be a contributory factor to refugee flows from Ethiopia. Among the refugee groups covered by this study

more than 10 percent of the respondents fled Ethiopia because of such a program (Mekuria Bulcha 1987, 33).

In terms of the causes of forced migration, the reasons cited by refugees in Sudan for their flight from the resettlement areas are very similar to the reports of returnees:

According to our respondents who . . . fled from settlements in Wollo and [were] taken to Assosa, [hundreds of] km away, without even saying good bye to their families. . . . Those who were taken to the settlements, particularly in 1979, were not the poorest or those threatened by famine. The respondents said they had food and oxen and were planting their fields at the time of their “deportation.” Similar reports have been given by those who stayed in the settlements. What causes flight from the settlements is however the difficulties these relocated people meet in the new environment (Mekuria Bulcha 1987, 33).

Research participants also cited that they were taken far from their families without adequate notification and against their will. Like those resettlers who became refugees, returnees (see Household H’s story in Chapter 3) also reported to us that, in their opinions, they were not too poor to survive at the time they were taken to resettlement. Several households of returnees reported that they left assets and crops to be harvested behind when they left. Thus, the displacement experiences of refugees and returnees are very similar in this case. Those resettlers who left Ethiopia are Convention refugees while those who did not, including returnees, are not. Therefore, in this case, the first determinant of refugee status is crossing the border rather than any experiential determinant such as their willingness to resettle, the severity of their suffering in resettlement, or even their willingness to leave the resettlement areas to become refugees or returnees.

I argue that the first determinant in categorizing a forced migrant should be the degree to which they were forced to move, in this case to resettle. In practice, it is difficult in many cases to accurately separate forced migrants from voluntary migrants. Determination should be based upon the perceptions of the

migrants themselves. However, the line between forced and voluntary movement is often extremely fine, especially if migrants have limited options in their place of origin. Moreover, migrants may be unwilling to move but may appreciate the migration later on. Their perceptions, as well as the perceptions of outside researchers, of a forced migration, may change over time depending on the outcome of the situation.

Within the field of forced migration studies, returnees can be categorized in several ways, depending upon how the causes are framed. The views presented by harsh critics of the Ethiopian resettlement, such as MSF (1985) and Clay and Holborne (1986) emphasize that manipulative political objectives motivated the Derg's resettlement. Thus framed, the case of resettlement appears to be a case of internal displacement in complex circumstances of civil conflict. The underlying assumption regarding internal displacement is that, similar to Convention refugees, internally displaced persons, (IDPs) are forced to move into adverse conditions against their will, due to conflict, human rights violations, or natural and human-made disasters (Deng 1998, 1).

Other accounts of the resettlement recognize varying degrees of developmental intentions in resettlement. The development aspects of resettlement are a combination of development-induced displacement, and resettlement as sustainable development. Removing resettlers from the highland ecological environment was intended to reduce population pressure and allow for regeneration of resources such as farmland and forest. This aspect of resettlement is development-induced displacement, as resettlers were displaced from an area to allow for ecological development. The aspect that resettlers were placed in resettlement sites and intended to develop the economic potential of the local natural resources is slightly different from development-induced displacement, because resettlers were displaced into, rather than displaced out of, the area of a development project.

Derg government accounts of the resettlement program (RRC 1980) insisted that resettlers volunteered to move to the resettlement areas which offered improved ecological, economic, social and political environments for a

permanent and sustainable solution to the problems of life in the highlands. This view frames the resettlement program as a case of voluntary, not forced, migration. Within this view, returnees could be classified as economic migrants or environmental refugees who fled to resettlement in search of opportunities. The case of the returnees demonstrates the fluidity of definitions of migration. Definitions depend upon the description of the causes and the context.

### **Component Two: Refugee Rights, Protection, and Assistance**

An examination of the causes and definitions of experiences of forced migration, and an understanding of how they are framed, is important because of the entitlements to protection and assistance that are linked to particular definitions of forced migration. Component two of my plan of study is “refugee rights, protection and assistance.” The learning objectives of this component are: to be knowledgeable about the rights, protection, and assistance that refugees are entitled to, and about the realities of what refugees receive from various agencies in different countries; to be knowledgeable about the rights, protection, and assistance offered to refugees in Toronto through interaction with refugee protection agencies; and to develop my perspective on moral and legal obligations of refugee protection. The research for this major paper did not directly address these learning objectives. However, in the course of my research I have considered the types of protection and assistance resettlers, including returnees, have received as a category of forced migrants with similar experiences to refugees.

As migrants who have returned to their place of origin, the protection and assistance that returnees should be entitled to, in theory, depends on how their case is defined and framed. IDPs are in theory forced migrants similar to Convention refugees who are within their state of nationality. IDPs should, then, if possible, return to their place of origin. Therefore, IDPs should be entitled to temporary protection and assistance with little emphasis on local integration and development. According to the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*

(Deng 1998), IDPs are entitled to protection and humanitarian assistance, in a variety of forms that were not available to returnees, such as full information, freedom from violence, protection against losing assets, and material assistance with return.

Current theory on development-induced displacement (Cernea 1995; McDowell 1996) states that development-induced displacees should be entitled to compensation for what they are forced to leave behind. They should be included in the planning process and they should be given housing, social services, infrastructure, economic opportunities, and cultural conditions that are, in their opinion, at least as good as the ones they leave behind.

Even if some critics of resettlement labelled resettlers as refugees, internally displaced, or development-induced displaced in the international media (Vallely 1985 a-h), the Derg government was in full control of the protection and services offered in resettlement areas. At the time of resettlement, government propaganda insisted that the resettlers were provided with the better conditions that they were coming from. All assistance during resettlement, except for at the most initial stages when food aid was necessary before the first harvest, was intended to support long-term development towards permanent sustainable settlements. Thus support was in the form of permanent social services such as schools and health centres and there was support to economic development such as tractors and also the formation of local government bodies. Very few NGOs and international government agencies were allowed by the Derg government to provide support in the resettlement areas. Those agencies that did provide assistance were involved in development activities, supporting the government's framework of resettlement as development. The Irish NGO, CONCERN, for example, was very active in providing agricultural support and social services such as schools and health care in Wellega. The UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) carried out a land-use planning survey throughout several of the resettlement areas (Colaris 1985). The resettlement areas were also protected by cadres of the Derg party and government troops



who used force to keep the resettlers in and the local people excluded from the services offered within the resettlement areas.

In reality, apart from being excluded from the planning process, resettlers were not provided with adequate housing, services, infrastructure, or support for their agricultural and cultural activities. Considering the numbers of resettlers that died or left the resettlement areas (no accurate statistics are available but most researchers estimate that only 25 percent of the resettlers remain in resettlement areas), resettlement was hardly a successful endeavour as a sustainable development project. Certainly, the evidence of returnees indicates that the protection and assistance offered to resettlers was insufficient.

The current EPRDF government reframed the resettlement when they took power from the Derg in 1991. The Derg had officially viewed the resettlers as permanently settled and a symbol of national development. The new government, however, officially viewed the resettlers as unjustly displaced from their places of origin and serving the political agenda of their enemy, the Derg. In 1991 the new EPRDF government announced that the resettlers were finally free to return to their places of origin if they so chose. Because the new government officially denounced resettlement, reframing the situation as internal displacement, local resentment towards the resettlers that had been smothered and kept in check by the Derg's aggressive protection of the resettlement sites was released. In the severe violence that ensued, thousands of resettlers were forced to flee the resettlement sites whether they chose to or not. Within the framework of the current government, those resettlers that went home were in theory repatriated from a situation of internal displacement created by the Derg.

Returnees that returned to Kutaber since 1991 have not received any protection or assistance from the current government that is particular to them as displaced people as, in the government's view, they are no longer displaced. Returnees, as poor residents of Kutaber, participate in the government, UN, and NGO supported strategies of addressing the general situation of food insecurity in Kutaber through a combination of relief and development programs such as food for work.

The case of returnees demonstrates that actual protection and assistance to forced migrants depends first on how the migrants are categorized in theory, second on their theoretical entitlements, and third on the presence of a state or international agency willing and able to provide protection and assistance.

### **Component Three: Refugee Experience: Trauma and Resilience**

Component three of my plan of study is “refugee experience: trauma and resilience.” The learning objectives for this component are: to be familiar with the main currents of thought and practice of refugee psycho-social health; to understand psycho-social health practice; and to compare the services that refugees themselves want to the services that are offered in Toronto and elsewhere.

Concepts of “refugeeness” have gone beyond classification of types of forced migration described above in relation to component one. Within the field of forced migration studies where, “distinctions between concepts of refugeehood and concepts of migration remain lacking in precision” (Zetter 1991, 39–40), several authors (Malkki 1995; Hyndman 1997; Zarowsky 1999) have considered more deeply how the experience of exile affects behaviour, culture, and identity. This is often referred to as the “psycho-social” (Kleinman, Das, and Lock 1997; Bracken, Giller, and Summerfield 1997) context of refugeeness. Throughout the research process I considered how such literature reflected the experiences of returnees as forced migrants. The rich narratives of the experiences that resettlers shared with Gelila and I deeply enriched my understanding of this literature.

In our interviews, returnees described different stages of coping and adapting to new environments that they had experienced, similar to other displaced people. They described the physical conditions of “lifeworlds” that affected the physical and perceived health of returnees in different environments, as is detailed in Chapter 2. The complaints of returnees, similar to the complaints recorded by other researchers of resettlement, reveal the types of services and

living conditions that are important to provide for displaced people. For example, the importance of adequate housing, food, and water supplies, and basic health care for protecting physical as well as perceived health. The availability of such necessities allows for minimal anxiety, or peace of mind, required for health.

#### **Component Four: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Gender**

Component four of my plan of study is: “Ethnicity, Nationalism and Gender.” The learning objectives of this component are: to be familiar with main currents of thought in the area of ethnicity, nationalism and gender; to explore the application of the main currents of thought in ethnicity, nationalism and gender to the protection and assistance of refugees, particularly with regards to psycho-social health; and to prepare a conceptual framework for my major paper. Literature used in writing my term paper for a reading course on Ethnicity, Nationalism and Gender (including Alonso 1988 and Einhorn 1993) was very helpful in analyzing the research. Particularly in considering the various perspectives of different groups involved in, and analyzing, resettlement. For example, the Derg government’s position in support of socialist national development, purportedly egalitarian but entrenched in traditional gender roles and biased in favour of the ethnic Amhara group, influenced their perspective and accounts of resettlement.

In the chapters describing the three periods of pre-resettlement, resettlement, and return, I have attempted to highlight the ways in which ethnicity, nationality, and gender shape the experiences and overall ecohealth of individuals within the broader category of “returnees.” The case demonstrates that protection and assistance offered to any displaced population should consider and respond to the different needs of different categories within the population, for example children under five, women, students, minority ethnic groups etc. (MSF 1997).

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Note: Ethiopian names are listed first name first, as is customary.

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