Moved by modernity

How development shapes migration in rural Ethiopia

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This dissertation examines how the social transformations associated with ‘development’ over the last century impacted the migration and settlement behavior of a traditionally semi-nomadic people in the central lowlands of the Ethiopian Rift Valley. Utilizing original survey data, in-depth interviews, and ethnographic methods, it examines two (im)mobility transitions: 1) from semi-nomadic pastoralism into settled agriculture, and 2) from rural agriculture into more mobile, urban-centric lives. To explain these transitions, the dissertation evaluates the impacts of different dimensions of social change – the political, economic, demographic, cultural and technological – on migration aspirations and behavior over time.

This research finds that, first, the sedentarization of semi-nomadic lifestyles was an integral part of modern nation-state building in Ethiopia. This settlement set the foundation upon which new forms of rural-urban and international migration would later emerge. Second, it finds that rural out-migration among younger generations – whether to neighboring towns or to the Middle East – is driven by rising access to formal education, growing rural-urban connectivity, and the expansion of market forces. It shows why ‘development’ tends to stimulate a widening aspiration-opportunity gap for rural youth; aspirations are increasingly oriented towards urban futures, which cannot be realized in rural areas and thus require migration to achieve. Nevertheless, many still remain in rural areas, lacking the capability to leave. These findings challenge popular ideas that development aid can reduce the ‘root causes’ of migration by showing why development, in its current practice, is the root cause of much contemporary migration.
MOVED BY MODERNITY

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ATJK</strong></td>
<td>Adami Tulu Jido Kombolcha. The <em>woreda</em> within which is Wayisso village. The ATJK used to encompass the towns Adami Tulu and Ziway, until Ziway came under direct jurisdiction of the Oromiya state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>bajaj</strong></td>
<td>A three-wheeled vehicle, imported from India, used as taxis for short-distances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>balabat</strong></td>
<td>An administrative position under the Imperial regime. The <em>balabat</em> oversaw tax collection, was charged with maintaining peace and order, and administered new forms of land tenure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>balbaala</strong></td>
<td>Literally ‘door’; sub-groups of a <em>gosi</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Derg</strong></td>
<td>Officially the Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, a military junta led by Mengistu Haile Mariam that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1987. In 1987, Mengistu abolished the Derg and formed the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia led by the Workers' Party of Ethiopia, but by 1991, the government fell. I often refer to the period from 1974-1991 as the ‘Derg.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EPRDF</strong></td>
<td>The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, a political coalition that has ruled Ethiopia’s federal government since 1994.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>gada</strong></td>
<td>The <em>gada</em> system (sirna gadaa) is the traditional system of governance and social stratification of the Oromo people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>gosi</strong></td>
<td>Roughly translates to ‘tribe,’ a division within a larger ethnic group. The people living in Wayisso constitute different ‘gosi’ of the Arsi Oromo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>kebele</strong></td>
<td>‘Peasant Association’; the smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia first established by the Derg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SNNPR</strong></td>
<td>Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region. One of nine ethnically-based regional states in Ethiopia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>woreda</strong></td>
<td>‘District’; the administrative unit above the <em>kebele</em>.</td>
</tr>
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