



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### Moved by modernity

*How development shapes migration in rural Ethiopia*

Schewel, K.D.

#### Publication date

2019

#### Document Version

Other version

#### License

Other

[Link to publication](#)

#### Citation for published version (APA):

Schewel, K. D. (2019). *Moved by modernity: How development shapes migration in rural Ethiopia*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

#### General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

#### Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

## INTRODUCTION

This is the story of a village that may not exist in ten years. It lies in the central lowlands of the Ethiopian Rift Valley, three hours south of Addis Ababa by bus. There is nothing immediately remarkable about the place. It is flat and semi-arid, with sandy soils and erratic rainfall that suited pastoral livelihoods for generations. Until, less than a century ago, three families began to settle in three different areas of what came to be called Wayisso village. Small clusters of households grew, around which pastoral movements continued as new livelihoods took root. Pastoralists eventually became farmers, and through their settlement, a new kind of movement emerged: ‘migration’ to neighboring towns or further afield. Today, many remain in Wayisso as farmers, but many others are leaving for education and new forms of work elsewhere. The reason Wayisso may not exist in ten years is because the Ethiopian government is planning a new railroad and highway system right through it – introducing a new kind of migration, typically called development-induced displacement. But whether ‘displacement’ is the right term is questionable when so many aspire to leave anyway. They say the good life left Wayisso a long time ago.

One afternoon in London in October 2016, I met Ademtuu, who at that time was the only person to have left Wayisso for Europe. Ademtuu is short and soft-spoken, in her early thirties – a quietly strong woman who could easily go unnoticed as she moves through the bustling crowds of London to her job at a cosmetics store. I lived with Ademtuu’s sister while doing fieldwork in Ethiopia, and I called Ademtuu one day to ask if we could meet. She warmly invited me to visit. Ademtuu rented a small room in a housing complex with a shared kitchen and bathroom. When I arrived, several Ethiopian dishes were arranged on the small desk by her bed. She quickly apologized that she had not prepared the injera, the traditional Ethiopian flatbread, herself. “It’s not real injera, but it’s the only option we have. I got it from a restaurant.” Life in London is difficult, she admitted, yet the money Ademtuu sends home is changing the lives of her parents, siblings, and cousins. “Do you think you will ever return?” I asked. “No, I don’t think so,” she said. “I am not happy here, but I know I couldn’t be happy there anymore, either.”

Ademtuu’s story is worth an entire dissertation in itself, but her family history is even richer. I asked Ademtuu to tell me about Tuffaa, her great-grandfather. “Tuffaa!” she laughed. “How do you know about him?” She paused, and then her eyes grew wide: “Tuffaa lived like an animal! Tuffaa didn’t have a house. There were no houses! He just hunted and lived from

what he found.” Ademtuu never met her great grandfather, Tuffaa, but she grew up hearing stories about him from her father.

Tuffaa was born to Bariso, son of Waqoo, near Lake Langano in the late 1800s. His life was one of hunting, foraging, and moving with the seasons through the forested lowlands of the Rift Valley. Although pastoralism, and even farming, was already practiced by many Oromo<sup>1</sup> peoples, Tuffaa was an exception, or so his family says. His life belonged to another time — “he fought tigers and lions!” But things changed when Tuffaa married. He marked the moment by killing an elephant and trading the ivory for a bull at the nearest market in Sodo. Tuffaa had five sons and two daughters live to adulthood. By the time his son, Bedane, was grown, Tuffaa and his family had fully embraced semi-nomadic pastoralism. They moved and settled seasonally, traveling with their livestock between regular grazing pastures.

Bedane was, to the end of his days, a pastoralist.<sup>2</sup> His herd had some eighty cattle. His semi-nomadic movement mirrored his father’s: towards the lakes in the dry season and away from them in the wet, when malaria became a threat. There were boundaries to this movement, of course, borders that marked the domains of other ethnic groups. But, still, within the Arsi Oromo territory, movement was relatively free. They would linger in places for weeks or months. Eventually, one location, near a small mountain named Macho, became a home base. Temporary shelters gradually became simple homes. When some left with the cattle, others began to stay behind, in what came to be called *ganda Bedane* (roughly, Bedane village). Bedane had three wives, seven sons, and fifteen daughters. All his daughters married and moved to other *gandas* elsewhere. Of Bedane’s seven sons, six settled in *ganda Bedane* to form large families of their own. His youngest son moved to Ziway, a town some fifteen kilometers away. Bedane lived to an old age, 125 they say. He is buried in a small graveyard surrounded by acacia trees and the family compounds of his sons in an area that is now known as Wayisso.

Bedane’s sons grew up shepherding cattle, but as they entered adulthood, they began to consider another livelihood prospect: growing crops. They made claims on what had been communal grazing land, began farming larger portions of it, and eventually settled down into agricultural lives. As they settled, their lifestyles changed. One of Bedane’s sons, Hassan, built three homes for his three wives, each with multiple rooms. His wives bore him twenty-nine children. Most of his children grew up assisting with their family’s cattle and crops, but almost

---

<sup>1</sup> The Oromo are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, constituting over one-third of the national population.

<sup>2</sup> When I speak of ‘pastoralism’ in my research area, I refer to semi-nomadic pastoralism, also known as transhumance: the seasonal movement of livestock between grazing pastures. This is in contrast to ‘fully’ nomadic pastoralists, who, strictly speaking, would follow a more irregular pattern of movement in search of grazing lands.

all of them turned their gaze to the city as they entered adolescence. No one wanted to be a farmer anymore.

Hassan's children were the generation to move from agriculture towards urban lives. Of Hassan's twenty-nine children, each one older than thirteen has now left Wayisso. None of them have children of their own yet — including his eldest daughter, Ademtuu. Ademtuu, like her great-grandfather before her, is exceptional. She was one of the first girls in the region to go to school, eventually leaving Ethiopia for a master's degree in the Netherlands and then staying in Europe to work. Her brothers and sisters, while not making it as far in their social or spatial mobility, are nevertheless urban dwellers. Most live in the neighboring boomtown Ziway, studying, working odd jobs, or building their own businesses.

How did this come to be, that within four generations, a single family moved through four livelihood patterns: Tuffaa, a hunter-gatherer until he adopted pastoralism; Bedane, a semi-nomadic pastoralist; Hassan, a farmer; and his children, urbanites? Each generation brought new ways of living and moving – from nomadism to settlement, and then from settlement to rural-urban and international migration. This study examines the social forces that drove these migration transitions. The primary research question is: How have patterns of migration (i.e. the nature, volume, composition, and direction of movement) changed in Wayisso, and what forces of social change drove these shifts?

Wayisso's history is unique, but understanding the social forces that shaped its migration patterns contributes to a broader debate about the relationship between migration and development in the modern period. Standard economic theory, common-sense, and policy discourse suggest that economic development in poorer countries should lead to less migration (de Haas 2007; Clemens 2014). If migration is driven by wage and opportunity gaps between origin and destination areas, as neoclassical migration and push-pull theories suggest (Harris and Todaro 1970), then development in origin areas should reduce the need to leave. Justified by this way of thinking, rich countries have allocated billions in development aid to tackle the 'root causes' of migration in poorer countries (De Haas 2007; Clemens and Postel 2018; European Commission 2019).

Empirical evidence, however, suggests development may actually lead to *more* migration within and from poorer countries (de Haas 2007). What researchers can confidently claim is two-fold: that rural-urban migration intensifies as economic growth occurs, and that international migration increases as low-income countries move towards middle- and upper-income status (see Massey 1988; Skeldon 1997; de Haas 2010c; Clemens 2014). Although there are variations in the timing, nature, and degree of movement within these overarching

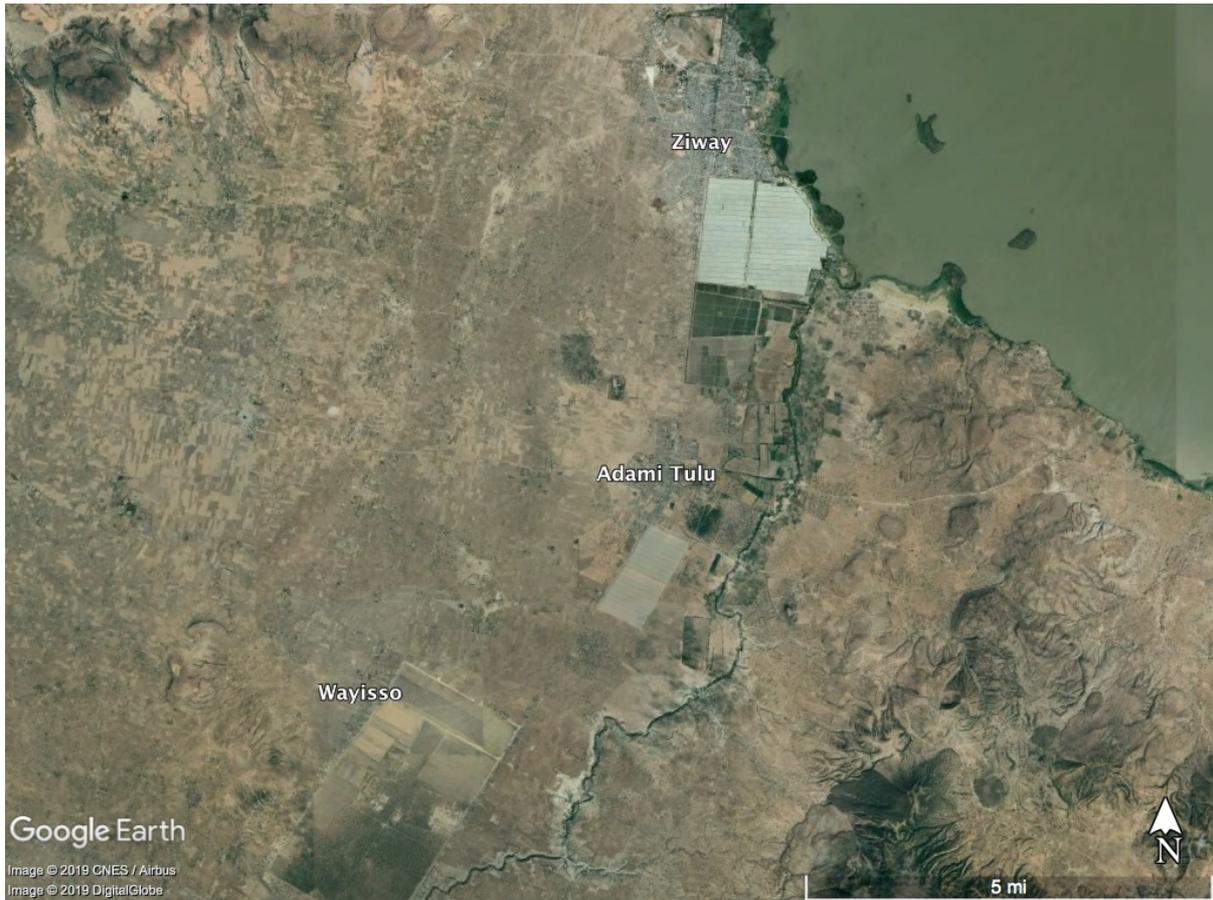
trends, this general two-fold mobility transition appears to be a remarkably common experience in ‘developing’ countries worldwide (see de Haas 2010c; Skeldon 2012; Clemens 2014). Many puzzles remain, however, about the relationship between migration and development. For example, what explains significant variation in migration patterns across countries and regions within these overarching trends? And more fundamentally, *why* as poorer places develop, do more people decide to leave?

This dissertation explains why, far from alleviating the root causes of migration from Wayisso, development *is* the root cause of migration from Wayisso. It finds that widening access to formal education, growing connectivity between rural and urban areas, and the expansion of market-forces drive an ‘urbanization’ of the good life. It argues that development generates an ‘aspiration-opportunity gap’ for rural youth, that is, young people’s aspirations are now oriented towards urban futures, which cannot be realized in rural areas and thus require migration to achieve.

The findings thus challenge common ‘push factor’ narratives that tend to describe migration from poor, rural settings as more or less ‘forced.’ Indeed, in research on Ethiopia, scholars often suggest that ‘push’ factors drive rural out-migration (Miheretu 2011: 31; Bezu and Holden 2014). Ezra and Kiros (2001) summarize the state of research well:

Earlier research indicates that landlessness, agricultural policy, land fragmentation, absence of farm oxen, introduction of commercial farms, environmental degradation, population pressure, recurrent drought and famine, war, and political crisis were major factors responsible for rural outmigration (2001: 750 citing Rahmato 1984; Cohen et al 1988; Ezra 1997, 2000; Berhanu and White 1998).

Such ‘push factor narratives,’ however, perpetuate the idea that development will stop this migration. Furthermore, as this dissertation shows, they fail to capture how ‘development’ tends to stimulate profound transformations in the social imaginary, which mean that even were structural constraints on rural livelihoods to be alleviated, people would continue to leave, because they now believe a better life is elsewhere.



**Figure 1. Wayisso Village and Neighboring Towns, Adami Tulu and Ziway**

*Source:* Satellite Image from Google, Digital Globe

## Theoretical Contributions

This dissertation makes a two-fold contribution to research on the relation between migration and development processes. First, it advances a multi-dimensional approach to understanding the ‘root causes’ of migration that gives due attention to the psychological dimensions of social change. To do so, it advances a ‘social transformation perspective’ for migration studies (Castles 2010; de Haas 2010a; Van Hear 2010; de Haas et al, forthcoming). This theoretical approach starts from the idea that migration is an intrinsic part of development processes. In other words, migration is not just a cause or consequence of development; migration is a process that inevitably transforms as the political, economic, technological, cultural, and demographic transformations that constitute ‘development’ proceed (see de Haas 2010b: 228). Although this is not necessarily a new idea for migration researchers (see, for example, Byerlee 1974; Massey 1988; Hatton and Williamson 1994), it responds to the stubbornly persistent perception that migration is a problem, or at least a symptom of underlying problems, that may be remedied through development assistance (Castles 2010).

Further, it provides the conceptual tools to explain *why* development tends to lead to more migration.

The social transformation approach, as applied in this dissertation, builds upon the hypothesis of the ‘mobility transition,’ first elaborated by Wilbur Zelinsky, who suggested “there are definite patterned regularities in the growth of personal mobility through space-time during recent history, and these regularities comprise an essential component of the modernization process” (1971: 221-222; see de Haas et al, forthcoming). Indeed, existing research seems to confirm the idea of a mobility transition by showing how emigration levels correlate with one or another development indicator, such as the demographic transition (Zelinsky 1971), real income per capita (Clemens 2014), or human development indicators (de Haas 2010c). Yet, as Skeldon (2012: 160) argues, *explaining* the migration transition requires looking beyond its correlation with only demographic or economic variables. Much work remains to understand how other social, political, and policy variables impact migration transitions.

The value of a social transformation framework thus lies in its multidimensional approach. It examines how different dimensions of development or social transformation – more specifically, the demographic, political, economic, cultural, and technological (see de Haas et al, forthcoming) – impact internal and international migration patterns over time, and thus benefits from a cross-fertilization of insights from different vantage points and disciplines. Disciplinary and methodological fragmentation remains a persistent challenge to migration theory-building and research (Massey et al 1993; de Haas 2014; Brettel and Hollifield 2014). Advancing a conceptual framework that is attentive to the intersectionality of various dimensions of social change can help overcome this impasse. It can complement more focused studies on, for example, migration and labor-markets, migration and climate-change, migration and demographic transitions, or anthropological research into shifting values, norms and migration aspirations – showing the influence of other social forces that these more focused studies might ‘bracket.’

A second aim of this dissertation is to advance an aspirations-centered analysis of migration and development interactions. A key question for the social transformation perspective is clarifying how the ‘big’ social changes associated with development impact the migration decision-making of everyday people. To conceptualize the links between macro-level social change and micro-level aspirations and behavior, this dissertation links the social transformation approach described above with the ‘aspiration-capability framework,’ which conceptualizes migration as a function of aspirations and capabilities to migrate within a given

set of opportunity structures (see de Haas 2014; Schewel 2019; Carling and Schewel 2018). This dissertation applies this approach to show why, in Wayisso, the political, economic, and cultural processes associated with development shape local visions of the ‘good life’ in such a way that migration aspirations become increasingly common.

‘Aspirations’ refer to the subjective hopes and goals that guide decision-making processes, setting the horizons within which life choices are made (see Schewel and Fransen 2018a). The concept of aspirations is gaining traction in migration and development studies, primarily because the concept extends our understanding of decision-making beyond the limitations of rational choice assumptions (see, for example, Carling and Collins 2018; Carling and Schewel 2018; Ray 2006; Kuhn 2012; Bordonaro 2009; Creighton 2013; Czaika and Vothknecht 2014). Aspirations are not formed in isolation; they are fundamentally social, shaped by our experiences and observation of others within a cultural context (see Appadurai 2004; Bandura 1977; Sherwood 1989). A distinction can be made, then, between the broader life aspirations individuals hold, and more specific *migration* aspirations, which may be defined as the conviction that migration is preferable to non-migration (Carling and Schewel 2018: 946).

The Wayisso case study shows that aspirations are important to incorporate into migration and development research for at least three reasons. First, attention to the aspirations of young people can help avoid the common pitfall of framing migration out of poor, rural places as ‘forced.’ A focus on changing aspirations, and the social forces that shape these, affirms the agency of migrants (and non-migrants) by showing how people adapt to social change. Of course, aspirations are only relevant to explain behavior if they are analyzed in relation to the actual capabilities (Sen 1999) people have (or lack) to realize them. Advancing explanations for migration that are attentive to both aspirations and capabilities helps show why a decision to migrate can be reasonable and capabilities enhancing, even when it occurs under highly constrained conditions that might otherwise tempt a researcher to describe this migration as ‘forced.’ This dissertation illustrates the value of this approach when it analyzes the migration decision-making of female domestic workers in the Middle East.

Second, a focus on aspirations reveals different kinds of staying behavior. In migration research, immobility outcomes and processes are often ignored. As I have argued elsewhere, there is a mobility bias in migration research (Schewel 2019). Migration theory and research focus primarily on migration’s ‘drivers,’ that is, the forces that lead to the initiation and perpetuation of migration flows. As a result, migration theories often neglect the countervailing structural and personal forces that restrict or resist these drivers and lead to different immobility

outcomes. When Jørgen Carling (2002) first introduced the category of ‘involuntary immobility’ into migration research, the term captured something a mobility bias had blinded researchers from seeing: the widespread experience of aspiring to migrate but being unable to do so. Carling made this observation in the context of international migration and immobility in Cape Verde, but the point applies just as forcefully to immobility dynamics in Wayisso. When researchers frame migration from poor, rural places as ‘forced,’ or primarily driven by ‘push factors,’ they miss an important ‘modern’ phenomenon: the feeling of being ‘trapped’ where one is, aspiring to leave but unable to do so.<sup>3</sup>

Third, appreciating how and why aspirations change can help explain why expanding employment in origin areas will not necessarily act as a substitute to internal or international migration. Efforts to reduce the ‘root causes’ of migration in low-income countries often focus on generating local employment opportunities. The rationale is that providing local employment should reduce the need to seek employment elsewhere. But such policies fail to account for the social devaluation of certain forms of work, such as farming. This dissertation shows that it is not simply “jobs” that young people want; they aspire for work that will enable them to change their socioeconomic circumstances. Many of the jobs being created in Ethiopia, on foreign-owned flower farms, garment factories, or construction sites, offer barely a living wage (see Meles 2014; Barrett and Baumann-Pauly 2019). This leads to high rates of worker turn-over and can even stimulate a desire to migrate. For example, many women working on foreign-owned flower farms in Ziway feel their incomes are not enough to bring meaningful change to their life circumstances, and thus shift their aspirations away from Ziway to Dubai (Schewel 2018a).

In sum, aspirations are crucial to bring into theoretical explanations for why people migrate. To date, there is not enough theoretical work on how aspirations shift as the social transformations of development proceed. One important illustration of what this could look like is Michael Piore’s *Birds of Passage* (1979), a groundbreaking work that explains why industrial societies experience a persistent demand for immigrant labor.<sup>4</sup> A major contribution of this work was to show how the status, prestige, and expectations people attach to work

---

<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the Wayisso case study illustrates that relative to international migration, ‘voluntary’ and ‘acquiescent’ immobility (see Carling 2002; Schewel 2019: 8) are remarkably common. Most people aspire and strive for an urban future within Ethiopia. Even women who leave rural areas for the Middle East do so temporarily in order to return and build a future in town. This is an important point for research on migration aspirations, to emphasize that in most people in low-income countries do not aspire or plan to migrate internationally. In fact, only five percent of people in low-income countries have plans to migrate internationally (Migali and Scipioni 2018).

<sup>4</sup> See Massey et al (1993) for a succinct summary and review of Piore’s Dual Labor Market Theory. For more on the enduring contribution of this work to research on labor migration today, see Fine et al (2016).

impact labor market dynamics. In short, Piore shows why in advanced industrial economies, labor markets are increasingly bifurcated between a capital-intensive primary sector with more stable, skilled, and better-paid jobs and a labor-intensive secondary sector where jobs are unstable, unskilled, and low-wage. He then shows why fewer natives are willing to work in jobs at the ‘bottom’ of the secondary sector. The status and wage expectations of the native work force contribute to the social devaluation of difficult and precarious forms of work, thereby generating a persistent demand for immigrants who are willing to take these jobs. Immigrants are willing to do so, because low-wage work in a wealthy country can be a significant source of income and prestige as they remit to their home communities. In this way, Piore shows that status aspirations and the social devaluation of certain kinds of work are crucial drivers of migrant labor markets. Migration theories, then, should take seriously this dimension of social reality.

One important limitation to Piore’s argument, however, is the suggestion that migration is fundamentally ‘demand-driven,’ without sufficient empirical attention to how aspirations and expectations also shift in the countries that ‘supply’ migrant workers. Equal attention needs to be given to changing aspirations, expectations, and the social devaluation of certain forms of work in the communities that international migrants leave. Towards this end, the Wayisso case study explains how and why aspirations are shifting in one Ethiopian village, and why this matters for migration behavior.

## **Chapter Outline**

The dissertation proceeds as follows: Chapter One elaborates a conceptual approach that investigates how macro-level social changes impact micro-level aspirations and capabilities in order to explain changing migration patterns. To do so, it integrates a social transformation perspective with the aspiration-capability framework described above. It argues that this novel theoretical approach overcomes the limitations of dominant and convenient migration frameworks like push-pull, neoclassical, and world-systems migration theories. It allows researchers to investigate more nuanced migration and immobility categories, moving beyond a false dichotomy in migration research between ‘forced’ and ‘voluntary’ migration.

Chapter Two sets the Ethiopian context for the Wayisso case study. This chapter reviews national migration trends in Ethiopia and serves as a reference for the more detailed and locally-focused empirical chapters that follow. It shows how ‘modernization’ in Ethiopia entailed the gradual sedentarization of nomadic and semi-nomadic groups, the urbanization of internal

migration trajectories, and increasing international migration, one notable form being labor migration to the Middle East. The Wayisso case study provides the opportunity to explore each of these processes from the perspective of a single village.

Chapter Three articulates my methodological approach. It begins with reflections on the concept and definition of migration. Today, internal and international migration are often studied separately (King and Skeldon 2010). However, a more fruitful approach is to see the increasing mobility of populations – whether within state boundaries or across them – as manifestations of the same underlying social transformations. Borders are not arbitrary, but nor do they justify such a strict division in academic treatment of migration along internal and international lines (see also Skeldon 2018a). It then details the main aspects of this dissertation’s methods: my justification for the case study design, how I carried out the household survey and in-depth interviews, where I gathered regional and historical data, information about my local ‘gatekeepers’ and some of the challenges posed by the eruption of political protests during my fieldwork.

Chapter Four tells the migration history of Wayisso village. It describes how three semi-nomadic pastoral families initially settled in Wayisso, before analyzing household survey data to understand subsequent patterns of out-migration. It uses kinship diagrams to map the mobility trajectories of the descendants of these three family groups. This chapter shows where people go, how often they move, and the characteristics of those who stay, highlighting generational, gender, and household differences in (im)mobility<sup>5</sup> outcomes. The subsequent chapters then examine the social forces that help explain these (im)mobility patterns.

Chapter Five considers the extent to which population growth, land scarcity, and drought – common ‘push factors’ that locals, government workers, and academics often mention as driving a ‘rural exodus’ in Ethiopia – explain migration patterns from Wayisso. It finds that diminishing land-holding is indeed a significant issue for younger generations, yet land-holding in itself does not explain why migration from Wayisso looks the way it does — why some people go to neighboring towns, others to the Middle East, and still others with relatively little land do not move at all. Further, rainfall data shows that climate-related factors, such as the occurrence of droughts, fail to explain the timing of migration shifts. This chapter concludes that semi-nomadic pastoral livelihoods were well suited to the dry lowlands, but processes of

---

<sup>5</sup> When I use the term ‘(im)mobility,’ I do so to emphasize the *immobility* dimensions of mobility processes and outcomes. However, for simplicity’s sake, throughout many of the analyses that follow, I use the terms ‘mobility’ or ‘migration’ processes, outcomes, or transitions, with the presumption that these terms encompass both mobility and immobility dimensions.

settlement, and later migration, appear to be primarily driven by *social* forces, particularly the political, economic, and cultural changes associated with Ethiopia's 'development.'

Chapter Six examines the impact of political-economic change – particularly the incorporation of Wayisso into the Ethiopian nation-state. In Ethiopia, 'modernization' was vigorously pursued by three different regimes: an imperial state under Emperor Haile Selassie until 1974, a communist regime led by Mengistu Haile Mariam (1974-1991), and a federal government with a 'developmental state' vision, spearheaded by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi (1995-present). This chapter shows why settlement into agricultural livelihoods was directly related to the development policies of the communist regime, while the first major movements to urban areas and abroad occurred under the developmental state that took power in the 1990s. In brief, the communist government instituted land registration and service-allocation practices that effectively tied rural households to their lands and accelerated a process of sedentarization, while the current regime embraced a more market- and urban-oriented vision of development that concentrates educational and economic opportunity in urban areas.

Chapter Seven evaluated the cultural-economic consequences of these political transformations, particularly how the spread of capitalist 'market' forces impacts economic reasoning and migration behavior. The chapter begins by illustrating what the spread of the market practically entails. Ethnographic accounts illustrate the gradual commodification of two social practices – conflict mediation and marriage. Although material exchange has always been part of these practices, these examples show the increasingly central place of money within them, and suggest that this widens, and renders more visible, material inequalities between rural households. The chapter then shows why the migration of young women to the Middle East is intimately tied to this process of cultural-economic change. Because of the social and economic freedoms that money can now buy a woman in 'modern' society, migration to earn a higher income abroad begins to make more sense for more women.

Chapter Eight considers the impact of widening access to formal education. The survey data reveals a strong positive correlation between education levels, rates of mobility, and living in town. Education drives migration out of Wayisso for several reasons. First, access to secondary and higher education requires a move to town. For those whose family can afford it, education is often the first reason young people migrate. Students then experience life in town, including access to basic infrastructure like water and electricity, or new services like television and the internet, and do not want to return. At the same time, but more subtly, the content of formal schooling – its formal and 'hidden curriculum' – orients young people's aspirations towards urban, professional work. Thus, the spatial location of schooling initially drives rural-

outmigration, but the content and experience of formal education mean students develop aspirations and expectations for their lives that cannot be fulfilled in rural areas.

Finally, Chapter Nine explores changing notions of the ‘good life.’ In Wayisso, the good life used to be a rural and pastoral one, measured in cattle, milk and butter. Towns were widely regarded as places for the poor. Today, the opposite is true. Many people now regard the village as a place of poverty, stagnation and struggle, and the city as a place of material and social advancement. This chapter considers the crucial role of migration in accelerating this shift in the social imaginary: remittances deepen feelings of relative deprivation among households still living in Wayisso, and those who leave expand the ‘mental maps’ of those who stay behind – introducing new pathways into their imagined futures. It concludes by arguing that because the good life has left Wayisso, people will continue to leave, even if objective opportunities to better their rural livelihoods expand.

This case study design enables a detailed and intensive analysis of how one rural community adapted their aspirations, livelihood strategies, and migration behavior to the transformations of modernity. Although the Wayisso’s story is unique, the social forces that drove its migration transitions are not. This research shows why changing aspirations – in particular widening dissatisfaction with rural futures – need to be taken as seriously as structural constraints on rural livelihoods when analyzing why and how rural people migrate.

## **The Question of Terminology**

Before proceeding, it is worth offering a few clarifications regarding terminology and argument. First, when discussing how aspirations change over time, I deliberately use the verbs “changing” or “expanding” rather than “raising” or “increasing,” as it is often treated elsewhere (e.g. Ray 2006; de Haas 2014). Raising implies that new, or ‘modern,’ aspirations are somehow better than the ‘low’ aspirations that came before. However, in migration and development research, higher aspirations are often conflated with the desire for higher incomes (Schewel 2019). This ignores other aspirations that are non-economic and/or not self-interested, such as caring for family members or commitment to a local community, which can give rise to the aspiration to stay. ‘Expanding’ aspirations, alternatively, emphasizes the greater exposure people gain to different ways of living that inevitably accompanies development, or more specifically, the growing political, economic, and cultural connectivity of rural and urban areas that development promotes. The new aspirations this growing connectivity engenders are not

inherently better or worse, ‘higher’ or ‘lower’. But as the Wayisso case study will show, expanding aspirations tends to increase the desire to migrate from rural areas.

Second, I use the term ‘development’ in order to contribute to theory-building on the relationship between migration and development. This is a tricky endeavor, because development is an inherently normative concept. It is difficult to separate the idea of development from the idea of *progress* (see Arndt 1981). In practice, however, the social and economic transformations made in the name of development often disempower local populations at the same time that they enrich the national gross domestic product (see Sen 1999). Thus, when I speak about the consequences of development on migration patterns, I speak about development as it actually proceeds, not necessarily development as it *should be*. It is tempting to abandon the term altogether, to only use more neutral terms like social transformation or economic restructuring. But the term ‘development’ remains a strong political, social and cultural force, with discursive power that continues to animate and structure the flow of capital, goods, ideas and people around the world (Escobar 2011). In Ethiopia, the concepts of ‘development’ or ‘modernization’ shape the nature and substance of government policy; they also, as James Ferguson argues, give form to how everyday people understand the world, “providing a set of categories and premises that continue to shape people’s experiences and interpretations of their lives” (1999: 13). Thus, this dissertation not only contributes to understanding the relationship between migration and social change in the modern period, it also shows why migration reflects the nature, priorities and practice of ‘development.’