Stable Jobs, Precarious Lives: Rural Public Servants in Ethiopia

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the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Declaration of Authorship

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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This thesis consists of 91,980 words.

Sarah Howard, Addis Ababa, December 2019

Abstract

This thesis explores the functioning of the Ethiopian state through the lives of rural public servants in a peripheral area of Amhara Region. Narratives about the strong, authoritarian and innately hierarchical nature of Ethiopia's developmental state emphasise the coercive nature of policies and structures that reach down to ever smaller units of the population. However, scrutiny of those charged with carrying out this work, as individuals and social actors, has been neglected. Based on long term ethnographic fieldwork in North Shewa, this thesis provides an account of the lowest level of the state through close attention to the everyday social worlds and professional responsibilities of teachers, extension workers and administrators. In chapters that concentrate on child nutrition, latrine promotion and the idea of education, and through an individual life history, I show the physical, affective, emotional and relational consequences of state work on state employees themselves. I also look at the role of substances - including breastmilk, shit and coffee - in constituting the state, as part of its continual construction through everyday practices and performances, rather than existing as an abstraction.

This thesis challenges the notion of the universal desirability of state employment in Africa. Despite their success in education and achievement of stable, formal work in a context where such jobs are scarce, these public servants feel themselves to be marginalised, socially isolated and dependent on local people. Furthermore, the prospect offered by government work is slow, unheralded and stretches into a rural future. Government workers bounce between villages in a quest to get closer to the urban, or exit from state employment for the 'struggle economy' of petty trade or the siren lure of illegal migration. Their precarious mobility stands in contrast to narratives about youth, uncertainty and aspiration, which assume formal employment to be a means of social and economic progress.

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Amharic Transliteration

Amharic transliteration is adopted from Tom Boylston's monograph (2018) and Diego Malara's PhD thesis (2017), which are in turn based on the system used by Alula Pankhurst (1992). This system minimises diacritics, and is therefore more approachable to non-specialists than those used for linguistic work.

The vowels are represented as follows:

1st order: e (pronounced as in d**e**mocracy)
2nd order: u (as in l**u**nar)
3rd order: í (as in F**iji**)
4th order: a (as in m**a**n)
5th order: é (as in fianc**é**)
6th order: i (shortened sound, as in med**i**cine or wound**e**d)
7th order: o (as in v**o**te)

Explosive consonants are represented by q, t', s', ch', and p'.

There are some exceptions, where words in common usage are usually spelled otherwise; most notably here, *kebele* instead of *qebellé*. Proper names are also spelled in their most commonly accepted format, e.g. Kewet rather than Qewet or alternatives; Haile Selassie rather than Hayle Silasse or alternatives.

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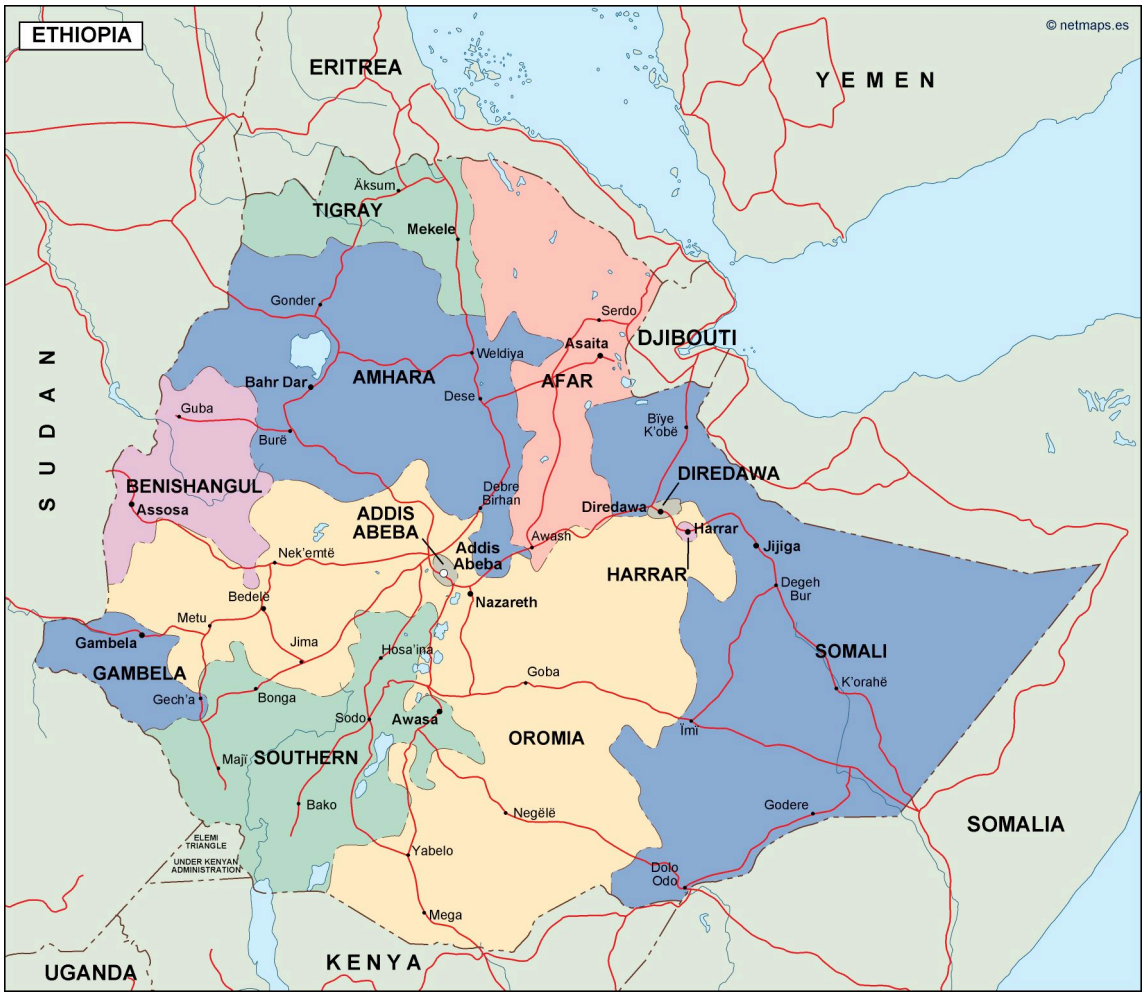
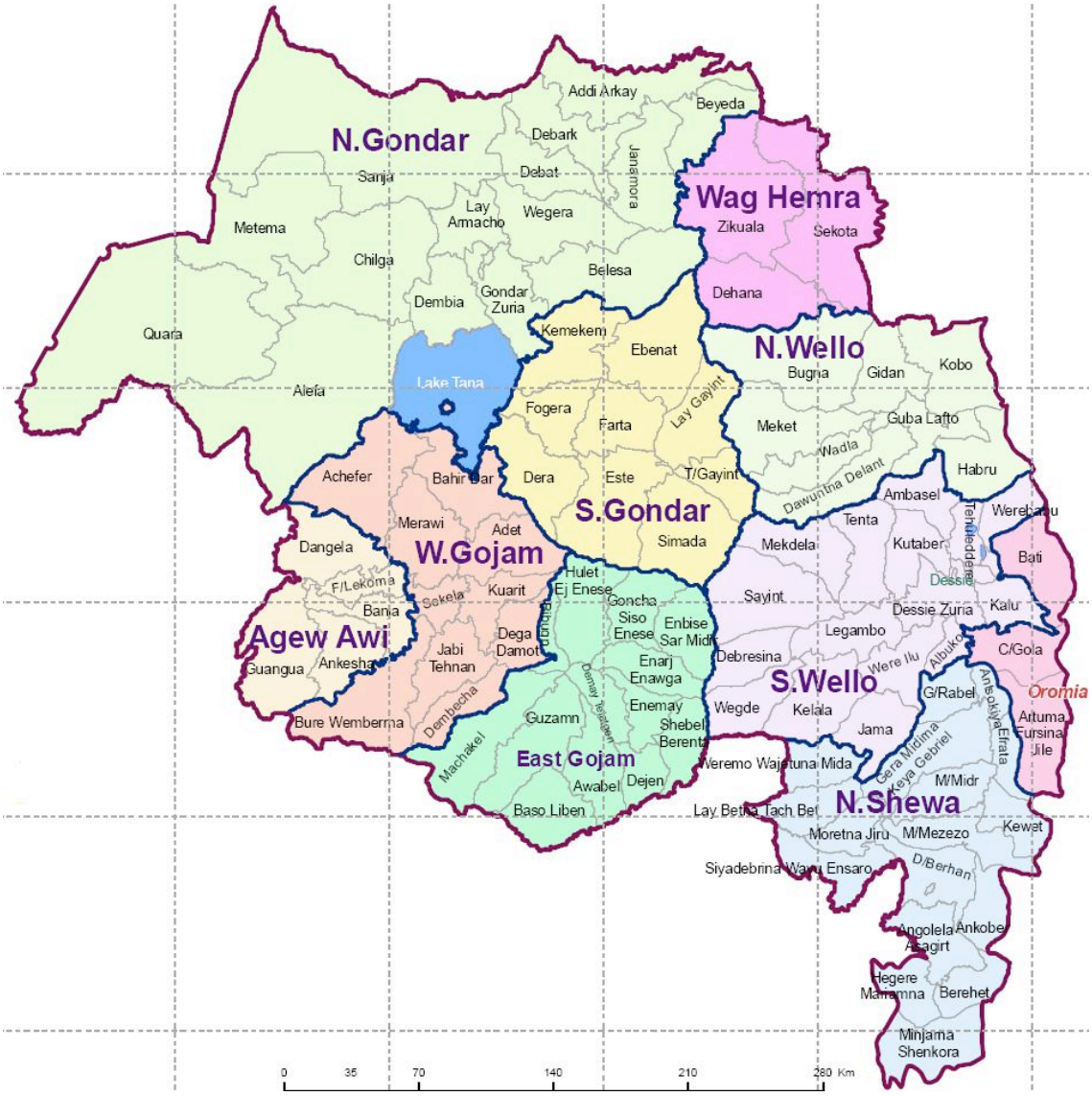
Dedicated to my darlings, Henok and Elsa.

In loving memory of my dad, Terry Howard, 1948 - 2018.

Maps



Map of Ethiopia's Regional States



Zones in Amhara Region: Kewet *wereda* is in North Shewa Zone at bottom left.

Prologue

The village of Werq Amba (literally meaning 'golden mountain-top') is a steep walk of many hours uphill from the larger village of Kuré Beret, in Kewet *wereda*[1] in north-eastern Amhara Region, where I conducted most of the research for this thesis. How many hours obviously depends on the walker's level of fitness. For local farmers, a trip to Kuré Beret village is not a particularly arduous or unusual event. When I accompanied two government workers in January 2011 on a working visit to audit the progress of latrine building, this was an out of the ordinary work duty, linked to the *shintabet gizé* (time of the toilets).[2] The journey took us five hours and was tough, for me in particular, especially after mid-morning when the blazing sun sent sweat pouring down our backs. For the government employees, however - Miheret,[3] a health extension worker based in Kuré Beret, covering the whole *kebele*,[4] and Woldeab, a *wereda*[5] health official based in the town of Shewa Robit - the journey was not primarily notable for the physical exertion it involved or for their belief that it would serve a useful purpose, but as symbolic of the difficulty of their lives as rural public servants.

Our visit to Werq Amba was galvanised by the fact that the *wereda* intended a ceremony to declare the achievement of 100 percent latrine coverage in the *kebele* to take place ten days after the visit, part of a target for the whole of Amhara Region to achieve total coverage - a toilet for each household - by 2012. There were in fact only three latrines in Werq Amba when we arrived, but after conducting household visits with Miheret for what remained of the day, Woldeab was confident that the rest of the village would follow suit. He characterised the people as 'obedient because they are highlanders - unlike Kuré

[1] Formal state structures are organised at the following levels: federal; region; zone; *wereda*; *kebele*.
[2] A sanitation campaign that I will discuss in more detail in chapter 5.
[3] All personal names, except for public figures, are pseudonyms.
[4] Kuré Beret was the name of the *kebele* (population c. 4,500), and of the largest settlement in the *kebele* (c. 300 households); unless otherwise specified, in what follows Kuré Beret refers to the village rather than the *kebele*.
[5] The population of Kewet *wereda* was 118,381 in the 2007 census (FDRE 2007).

Beret, where they don't listen to the government.' Although some put up objections - one woman complained 'why don't the government give us land instead of going on about latrines?' - in the face of direct instruction, most people did agree to dig a latrine. Some even performed a parody of willingness by wielding a spade to a patch of earth in the compound before we had even finished our visit, although whether a functioning latrine would ever result was a moot point. Whatever the reality, on our return, the ceremony in Kuré Beret to celebrate 100 percent latrine coverage for the whole *kebele* went ahead as planned.

Werq Amba and other hamlets, some consisting of a single extended family in a handful of compounds, were where many of the current occupants of Kuré Beret and its surrounding lowland villages traced their origins. Highland residents had started to move down the mountain over the course of the nineteenth and especially twentieth centuries, during the rule of Emperor Haile Selassie and then the military Derg regime. They cleared land and planted crops in an area that was also inhabited by Afar pastoralists, alongside long-established settlements of Argobba farmers, such as the village of Wesiso. On his move from around Werq Amba to a lowland area in the early 1970s, Tibebe, my landlord in Kuré Beret, told me that 'there was nothing here; it was just forest.'[6] The process of Amhara settlement of the lowlands was accelerated by the 'villageisation' policy of the Derg in the late 1970s and 1980s: a process in which state intervention relocated people from scattered locations into centrally planned villages, often forcefully. Although provincial borders existed under imperial and Derg rule, it was the policy of decentralisation from the early 1990s under the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) that led to the establishment of regional states, defined by the ethnic identity of inhabitants. This led to a border between Afar and Amhara that resulted in an actual change in the way the state functions. Among local Amhara, the most significant

[6] Echoing the 'empty space' imaginary crucial to state expansion and appropriation of land by colonising powers across Africa, in which 'more civilised groups gain the right to appropriate land in territories occupied by less civilised societies' (Korf, Hagmann and Doevenspeck 2013:31).

outcome of the post-EPRDF regional border was what they saw as the impunity of Afar for crimes committed against Amhara. People told me, 'their government [in Afar Region] will never punish those who attack us; they just melt away and disappear. But we Amhara - we are taken to jail if we act against them!'

The attacks they referred to were not merely theoretical, or at all uncommon. Although journeys such as the one from Werq Amba to Kuré Beret may not have been especially challenging for most local people whose legs and lungs were well-accustomed to the tough labour of ox-plough farming in mountainous terrain,[7] such journeys did expose them to the risk of serious danger. Violent attacks led to frequent fatalities of both Amhara farmers and Afar pastoralists, especially in sparsely inhabited areas near where the Afar lived just over the border of their own regional state. One farmer in whose house we stopped for a rest during our journey told us that he often stayed up late at night with a gun, watching for an Afar attack on his family or an attempt to steal his livestock: on one previous occasion two Afar men had stolen eight of his camels. In fact, he told us, he himself had killed an Afar attempted thief, and buried the man in the yard in which we were sitting.

The government workers felt themselves to be visibly recognisable as different from the farmers amongst whom they lived by their clothing - trousers instead of shorts for the men; for the women, a skirt and top rather than a dress - and general demeanour of 'town' rather than 'country' style. This visual difference, they thought, ought to protect them from the retaliatory violence that was so common by marking them out as coming from elsewhere; as being a modern individual who should not primarily be defined by local ethnic forms of inclusion and exclusion. This thin protection[8] however - unlike nearly all farmers, government workers (except police) were unarmed - left them concerned that

[7] This was obviously not the case for the old, sick or disabled, or, as I witnessed, women undergoing difficult childbirth, who had to be carried long distances on a stretcher, sometimes resulting in the death of the mother, infant or both.
[8] Especially as clothing distinctions are weakening among the younger generation (see introduction).

their identity could be mistaken, with violent or even deadly consequences. On infrequent visits to the more remote villages, such as the one I joined to Werq Amba, there was a frisson of tension among the government workers the night before leaving. For the teachers who made similar journeys right along the border between Amhara and Afar regions (some weekly, some daily, as I will describe in chapter 3), the perception of danger was another part of the omnipresent narrative about the undesirability of their work.

One of the few exceptions to the general opinion about rural government work as a hardship was in the person of the only permanent state employee in Werq Amba, who taught grades one and two in an unequipped wooden hut. Aklilu, a shy and ungainly young man who sported an unusually large wooden cross round his neck, was an object of curiosity and to some extent scorn among all the other government employees in Kuré Beret *kebele*. He not only accepted his posting in the most remote school in the *kebele*, but appeared to embrace it by willingly renewing his position instead of transferring, and rarely coming even to Kuré Beret. As of 2016, Aklilu was still Werq Amba's teacher; now married to a local woman, he had access to land through his wife and a thriving side-business as a merchant. Other government workers told me he walks down the mountain every weekend to the rural town of Abayat'ir in the neighbouring *kebele*, where he buys goods to carry back and sell. The anomaly that was Aklilu brings into focus more sharply the position of the other government employees: that working in a remote *kebele* like Kuré Beret[9] was barely tolerable and involved suffering physical privation, social isolation and a foreclosing of possibilities and aspirations.

[9] And working in a village like Werq Amba, was absolutely intolerable, as fellow teacher Tomas showed by refusing to work there under any circumstances (see chapter 6).

Introduction

The ways in which Ethiopian public servants such as Woldeab and Miheret traverse the rural settings to which they have, mostly unwillingly, been posted are one way in which to examine understandings of the state at local level. Despite its centrality to the discipline of anthropology, 'the state' is elusive as an object of study. Ethnographic studies of bureaucrats and other state employees; of materials and substances connected with the state, especially paper; of places and spaces, frontiers and margins; of affectivity, imagination and the 'make-believe'; of representations and cultural forms; of planning and development policy; and of conflict and violence, have attempted to both locate the state and unsettle it as a homogenous or pre-existent entity.[10] In this thesis, I am going to use a variety of these lenses, all focused on the lives of a group of young government workers resident in a peripheral area of north-eastern Amhara Region, to consider how the everyday state is manifested in rural Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian state provides a contrast to other countries in post-structural adjustment sub-Saharan Africa, where the retreat of the state has been exhaustively documented (e.g. Piot 2010; Ferguson 2006; Mbembe 2000). In Ethiopia, an overwhelmingly rural country, where agriculture employs 82 per cent of the working population (Lefort 2015:371), historian and sociologist Dessalegn Rahmato writes that the state 'has narrowed the gap between the public and private sphere, and succeeded in becoming virtually the only active force in rural society' (2009:309). During the course of my research, I was struck by the disconnect between the reach and control that the Ethiopian government is popularly acknowledged to hold over its citizens, and the lived reality of the low-level state workers, the 'marginal officials who constitute the bureaucratic frontier' (Singh 2012:120-1), who are charged with exerting this control. The academic record on Ethiopia commonly portrays the state as strong and expanding, with a long history of hierarchical state-society relations that

[10] For references to anthropological work on the state, see the following section.

correspond with weak horizontal forms of solidarity and a prevalent respect for authority. In this reading, government employees are supposed to be at the apex of a hierarchy, to be locally powerful over subservient rural citizens, and to have achieved, via their success in education, coveted stable and high status positions.

It is counter-intuitive, then, that I found the young rural public servants in my research area to be shadowy and ambiguous figures who were largely unsatisfied with their lives. In their own estimation, despite the local power and status assumed to inhere in state work, government workers were socially isolated and vulnerable to exploitation, hardship and danger. They struggled to negotiate access to basic goods, such as food, accommodation and transport, away from established kin and friendship support networks, and complained of low salaries, poor conditions and diminishing societal respect. Government workers felt themselves to be 'hopeless,' 'stuck' and as 'having no care for the future,' like their unemployed peers. In a quest to move towards the urban (where they could not be posted without at least five to ten years of government service), they changed positions very frequently, bouncing around rural areas sometimes annually. Many made seemingly economically irrational and risky decisions to exit state employment for the 'struggle economy,' as Gbemisola Animawasun calls it (2017), or to follow the siren lure of illegal migration. My aim in this thesis is to look at why they did feel and act in these ways, challenging received wisdom about the aspirational status of state employment in a context where rates of formal employment are low. I will suggest that one key way in which government work in rural areas no longer fulfils aspirations for progress is in its inhibiting effect on the forming and maintaining of social relationships, which in turn was both cause of and contributor to their precarious mobility.

Attitudes about state employment, employees, and the work they carry out are central to the concerns of this thesis, and to showing how the decentralised state is embodied and made real for and in the figures of these young, low-level state workers. I want to show government workers as both representatives of the state and the 'ordinary people' through whose 'lives and practices the idea of the state

takes shape' (Navaro-Yashin 2002:122). My aim is not to analyse whether they were effective or ineffective in their implementation of government policy; instead I show how they made often 'illegible' policies legible through their labour (Mathur 2016; Das 2004). Neither do I view state employees as the means by which actual or structural violence in enacted on the population. Rather, paying heed to public servants as both individuals and as a social group with particular concerns, aspirations and experiences is a way of countering narratives about the encompassing expansion of state power (Ferguson and Gupta 2002), in showing how the state is performed and produced in mundane everyday interactions that happen during and alongside the delivery of government services.

The prologue about the journey to Werq Amba is intended to give one example of how government workers' labour - in this case, the physical labour of climbing up mountains to chide people pointlessly about latrines - is not only a way of making the state tangible in the lives of local people, but one that above all has material, emotional and affective consequences for the state employees, and for perceptions of the state as embodied in them. As Yael Navaro-Yashin writes, any reading of the nature of state power in particular spaces and circumstances cannot ignore the interplay between humans and the materialities of rule. Rather than 'ascribing political agency to the singular authoritarian will of a ruler,' she writes that 'sovereignty is worked on in a given territory through time and is a long-term process of negotiation, contestation, and mediation between various actors within a terrain of materialities and physical properties' (2012:43). Considering the terrain of materialities and their affective properties is important in understanding the state as continually constructed through everyday practices and performances, rather than existing as an a priori entity.

Woldeab and Miheret could be painted as figures of surveillance; as the contemporary incarnations in a long history of state intercession in the name of modernity and development, in which 'the peasant household has long been a site and testing ground for local-level state interventions' (Emmenegger

2016:264). In their ordering of people to implement an action, however laudable the public health intentions, that did not accord with local priorities, they could be seen as examples of 'the intimate connection between care and repression' (Gupta 2012:7). They could be seen as bringing a neoliberal, individualised form of 'governance of the self' - a form of 'sanitary citizenship' (Briggs and Mantini-Briggs 2003) - to the people of Werq Amba. The mechanisms of upward accountability that were a driver of their need to count (and invent) the number of latrines in Werq Amba could be an example of the entanglement of local political formations with global norms of 'audit culture' (Kipnis 2008; Strathern 2000). The brandishing of spades by local people can be seen as a performative instance of how state power is resisted and subverted by local people (Scott 1985). However, these readings need to be complemented by an understanding of the 'materialities of rule'; of how, for example, their experience of walking up the mountain and exposing themselves to the potential danger of a frontier space, cannot be separated from how state power is understood and enacted in a particular context.

What has been missed in accounts of the Ethiopian state to date is grounded ethnographic attention to how the lives and activities of government workers shape discourses about the state and the identities and aspirations of its rural employees. Following recent calls to use ethnography to investigate the contextual and specific effects of bureaucrats and bureaucracy (Mathur 2016; Bear and Mathur 2015; Navaro-Yashin 2012; Stoler 2004; Graham 2002), I aim to show how an examination of the social positions and working lives of government workers in Ethiopia can productively illuminate the actual, everyday functioning of the state, and go beyond the paradigm of a hierarchically-arranged relationship of dominance, and a state-society divide that, as George Steinmetz writes 'objectifies what is in fact a mobile demarcation, subject to continual construction and deconstruction' (1999:12). Instead I aim to show how the often irrelevant, unnecessary or illegible nature of the work that public servants carry out, intertwined with urban and global imaginaries that shape

aspirations for progress and with the social isolation of their precariously mobile lives, is contributing to weakening the state at its lowest level.

This introduction will begin with an overview of the anthropology of the state, especially concerning low-level bureaucrats and public servants, situating this thesis as interested in both the quotidian functioning of the 'core' of the state, and its affective imaginaries. I will then discuss the particularities of the Ethiopian state, and some of the characteristics that distinguish Ethiopian forms of governance from elsewhere in Africa, including its over-determined characterisation as operating within a strictly vertical hierarchy. In the next section, I will set out some of the characteristics of the rural, low-level public servants who will be the focus of what follows in this thesis, and the lenses through which I will examine their social, personal and professional lives.

The following two sections of the introduction will examine paired assumptions underlying the literature on aspiration and mobility in Africa: that lack of formal work is the main barrier to achieving social mobility and progressing from 'youth' to 'adulthood'; and that precarity is an experience allied to insecurity. Instead, in my research area, while their work was not structurally precarious, state employment engendered a social precarity. Stable jobs led to precariously mobile lives, as public servants sought greater opportunity within and outside government employment. In an inversion of the modernist imaginary that supposedly extracts the socially mobile from the burden of kinship and reciprocity into a self-supporting individualism, I will suggest that government public service in rural areas places state employees in a situation where they experience neither 'rural' solidarity nor 'urban' modernity.

Anthropology of the Low-Level State

This thesis is about the Ethiopian state through the lens of the most numerous of its employees: public servants resident in rural areas, the majority of whom are

primary school teachers, as well as health, agriculture, and administrative workers. Attention to their everyday work practices, their life courses, their social ties (or lack of them), and their affective and emotional lives complicates the picture of the Ethiopian state as an all-powerful agent of repression, and of an immutable divide between state and society. It offers the possibility of re-thinking state power from a different perspective than as often conceptualised: that of the state as a monolithic, external force with which local people have to negotiate. This is in keeping with approaches in the anthropology of the state that have moved away from a concentration on the Weberian legal-rational basis of bureaucracies to examining their material, emotional and affective aspects; rejecting 'machine metaphors to show… contextualised and specific effects' (Mathur 2017:4).

As anthropologists and other theorists have long noted, the distinction between 'the state' and 'ordinary people' is one which is central to 'the careful maintenance of the illusion of state as reality' (Navaro-Yashin 2002:155). Following Abrams' ([1977] 1988) seminal article questioning the existence of the state as an unambiguous empirical fact, anthropological writing about the state has emphasised its constructed and contingent nature, showing how the state is reified as separate and as encompassing the local (Ferguson and Gupta 2002); how 'state effects' can be associated with globalised entities such as NGOs (Trouillot 2003); and the futility of trying to distinguish mundane material practices from an abstracted notion of an ideal state (Mitchell 1991). The process of maintaining the state as a tangible and coherent reality involves placing it 'above' the people - individuals, families and citizens - with a middle ground of 'civil society' acting as a mediator between them (Abrams [1977] 1988). Whether the location of the state as 'on top' of a vertical scale denotes a superior position in a political hierarchy or is matter of abstraction is a question that does not belie the constructed nature of the scale itself (Ferguson and Gupta 2002). Despite their varied nature, anthropological accounts of the state share a view of state formation as a process of continual and improvised construction by a heterogeneity of actors, in and outside state administrations and bureaucracies,

rather than as a purposive and coherent process in which a unified entity - 'the state' - makes its bid for legitimacy among 'the people.'

Max Weber's two great contributions to theories of the state are firstly, his concern with the instrumental rationality of bureaucracies, and secondly, his definition of the state as holding 'the monopoly of violence within a given territory' (quoted in Sharma and Gupta 2006:22). For David Graeber, bureaucracy is ultimately predicated on the basis of (the threat of) physical violence and, however well-intentioned, cannot be separated from 'the kinds of wilful blindness we normally associate with bureaucratic procedures' (2015:57). In this reading, bureaucracy is a 'dead zone of the imagination' (cf. Weber's iron cage): founded on structural violence that force the powerless not only to 'do most of the actual, physical labour required to keep society running' but 'to do most of the interpretive labour too' (2015:81); to deal with the simplicities and assumptions inherent in bureaucratic forms of power that result in a 'stifling of the human spirit, of creativity, conviviality, imagination' (2015:82). In his quest to inspire a leftist critique of bureaucracy, he demonises the 'total bureaucratisation' of society without paying any ethnographic attention to the 'cadres of paper-pushing corporate bureaucrats' (2015:42) who actually perform and enact bureaucracy in specific circumstances. He does not take into account anthropological literature on the state that has in recent years been supplemented by a valuable body of ethnographic work on low level state workers (e.g. Mathur 2016; Gupta 2012; Navaro-Yashin 2012; Hetherington 2011; Singh 2011).

In his exploration of government administration in India, Akhil Gupta (2012) also highlights the structural violence that results from the practice of bureaucratic actors. This violence is unlike the episodic and disruptive state violence experienced, for example, during riots (Das 2004), in that it is 'constant rather than episodic, and, far from disrupting actors' understandings of their social worlds, it provides them with a particular kind of situated knowledge with its own epistemic certainties' (Gupta 2012:20); namely, the inability to absorb risk

while being forced to take risks. According to Gupta, structural violence, unlike physical violence, is a 'crime without a criminal' (2012:21); the bureaucrats may be callous or indifferent (Herzfeld 1992) to the arbitrary nature and distribution of suffering caused by the bureaucratic procedures they enact, but they are not culpable in the same way as someone who commits a violent act. And they are frequently neither heartless nor disinterested, as he shows though ethnographic engagement with low-level state employees. Nor are they merely incompetent or inefficient, explanations often put forward to explain the failure of (state) development programmes. In his reading, it is the procedures not the people who are to blame for 'perpetuating the violence of poverty,' and in this vein, attention to the 'local state' should not be linked to an analytical separation of different levels of the state, because 'the state at the local level is complexly mediated by regional, national, and transnational discourses and practices' (Gupta 2012:29).

Another important strand in recent anthropology of the state has emphasised how public servants and the bureaucracies in which they work are not merely instruments of power, straightforwardly enacting governance by putting ideals into practice, making the state legible as James Scott (1998) famously put it, but entangled with materiality and affect. As Nayanika Mathur writes about a massive state welfare programme in India, it 'never reached a legibility of the sort its framers anticipated; rather, aspects of it were made more or less officially real through the daily labour expended on it' (2016:3). Mathur's concern is with the 'papery' aspect of how bureaucrats made state policy real, taking further Gupta's point that 'writing is constitutive of the state; it is not a substitute for action but is itself a form of action' (2012:36). She shows the way 'transparent-making' documents, despite the labour that bureaucrats expend on producing them, in fact make laws and policies difficult or impossible to implement (Mathur 2016). In the same vein, Elizabeth Hull (2017) shows how bureaucratic documents aimed at increasing accountability create and mediate relationships between state and citizen, despite moral unease about the import of this work. This strand of anthropological writing on the low level state draws on Bruno Latour (2007) to highlight objects as 'actants' in their own right; for example, in urban Pakistan,

Matthew Hull traces how documents 'translate and displace social relations within government… not simply reproduce them in another media' (2012:19).

In her work on the unrecognised state of Northern Cyprus, Navaro-Yashin takes a 'both-and approach' to object-centred and human-centred interpretation (2012:18). She uses the trope of the 'make-believe' to bring together 'the new materialism' that focuses on the agency of non-human objects, and the 'social constructionists' who privilege images and representations of the state (2012:5). Navaro-Yashin's conception of the political imagination as inseparable from its material and tangible basis moves beyond characterisations of bureaucracy as fundamentally thwarting human interpretative potential (cf. Graeber) to focusing on the work of simultaneously 'making' and 'believing' the state in specific contexts. The affect that arises from this process, which can be discerned through ethnographic 'sense' of environment, energy and resonance, is a 'charge that has a part to play in the sociality of the human beings who inhabit a space. Consequently, it must also play a part in the analysis produced by the anthropologist' (2012:20). Her exploration of the mixture of apathy and attachment to the state by Turkish Cypriot civil servants is informed by the idea that, far from being primarily a site for neutral rationality or 'a practice that counters or extinguishes affect,' bureaucracy instead 'produces and incites specific modes of affect in its own right' (2012:82).

The little that was written about African bureaucracies until the last fifteen years or so led Jean Copans (2001) to ask in a succinct rhetorical question: 'does the African state work without bureaucrats?' (*Afrique noire: un État sans fonctionnaires*?). Since then Gupta's call for anthropologists to pay attention to 'the broad base of the bureaucratic pyramid' (1995:376) has been answered by a corpus of recent ethnographic work by primarily European researchers that illustrates the nature of the quotidian mundane practices carried out by state officials in Africa (e.g. Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2014; Körling 2011; Anders 2009; Blundo and Le Meur 2008). Thomas Bierschenk and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan have also pointed out how 'little empirical attention has been

paid devoted to actual "state apparatuses" in Africa' (2014:4), as opposed to ideas about the state and activities at the margins of the state.[11] Their critique of the anthropology of the state lies in what they see as its focus on seeing and imagining the state, rather than 'doing the state' (2014:14). This body of ethnographic work on African states intends to provide grounded, empirical detail about the contingent, improvised and incomplete process of bricolage through which the state comes into existence. Its authors are not interested in 'expectations, representations and fantasies' associated with the state, and believe that, as Giorgio Blundo writes, 'the inquiry "around the state" must be complemented by an inquiry into the "core of the state" that focuses on the daily functioning of state apparatuses and describes the mundane practices of state-making' (2014:70). It also aims to counter the prevailing image of African states that centre on corruption (e.g. Blundo et al. 2006; Chabal and Daloz 1999) and other personalised, privatised (Hibou 2004) or dysfunctional mechanisms of rule that lead to the 'politics of the belly' (Bayart 1993), and which are constructed in opposition to an idealised (and imaginary) Western state.

In this thesis - and although my research took place in what could be termed a frontier space - I follow this body of work on African states in its call for attention to the 'centre of the state' and to the quotidian practices that happen there. Unlike those authors, however, I am also interested in imaginaries of the state (Hansen and Stepputat 2001), which are inseparably intertwined with the tangible materialities of a particular space. It is in both of these (the 'making' and 'believing') that I locate the government workers affective attitudes to the state, and people's attitudes towards them as the embodiment of the state; after all, as Bear and Mathur write, 'when bureaucrats and citizens encounter each other, they pursue their aims as part of a broader conduct of life' (2015:20).

[11] Referring to an edited volume by Das and Poole (2004).

The Ethiopian State

Among the so-called 'ghosts' (Graeber 2007) and 'whispers' (Piot 2010) of post-Cold War African states, Ethiopia is anomalous. African states are often portrayed as eviscerated by forces, variously and combined.[12] They are assumed to be host to 'a plurality of power centres within and adjacent to, and partially intertwined with the state' (Bierschenk and Olivier De Sardan 2014:16). In Charles Piot's account

> Africa has been the site of a range of creative adaptations and experiments in state sovereignty, causing scholars to generate a dizzying array of terms to describe its mutations: it has "shadow" and "minimalist" states, "quasi-" states, "para-" states, "rhizome" states, "patrimonial" and "criminal" states, states that are "invisible," states that are "privatised"' (1999:11).

Ethiopia, on the other hand, has prioritised state-led development, and explicitly challenged what Michel-Rolph Trouillot has called the 'North Atlantic universals' that include democracy, liberalism and human rights (2003:26), in part by restricting the activities of civil society.[13] It has been defined as a security state with the proven ability to discipline private capital towards its own developmental ends (Carmody 2018), and, especially since 2005,[14] has had an expanding apparatus of governance at both state and sub-state level. Its decentralisation policy has had complex and often paradoxical effects, devolving responsibilities to regional states and districts while consolidating the power of the federal state (Vaughan 2015). Explicitly drawing inspiration from the developmental achievements of the 'Asian tiger' nations (Clapham 2018; Meles

[12] These include: structural adjustment policies (Ferguson 1999), leading to neo-patrimonialism (Chabal and Daloz 1999); the retreat of the state from the social and development fields (Piot 1999; although see Ferguson 2015); crumbling gerontocratic and customary forms of rule (Lund 2006); concentration on 'islands of development' (Jones 2009); and governance failures in 'petro-states' (Watts 2017; Ferguson 2005).

[13] In 2009 government passed the Charities and Societies Proclamation to regulate civil society and specifically ban any form of human rights advocacy except by 'national' organisations, defined as raising at least 90 percent of their funding from within the country and 'all of whose members are Ethiopians' (FDRE 2009:3).

[14] The disputed and violent 2005 elections, in which the EPRDF suffered an unexpected defeat in some areas of the country, are widely acknowledged to be a turning point in contemporary Ethiopian politics (Lefort 2007; Abbink 2006; Lyons 2006).

2011), according to government statistics, Ethiopia has seen exceptionally high rates of economic growth: 'one of the highest growth rates in the world during 1994 - 2013' (Monga, Abebe and Andinet 2019:106), with 'the percentage of the population living below the poverty line ($0.6 per day) decreased from 44 per cent ten years ago to 30 per cent' (Lefort 2015:368).[15] With its political philosophy of *abyotawi* (revolutionary) democracy, the political bargain that the ruling Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolutionary Front (EPRDF) has sought to make with both its citizens and its international aid donors prioritises (state-directed and -distributed) economic growth over liberal democratic freedoms; a 'vanguard' party-state over unfettered markets; state control of rural land over potential mass urbanisation. Ethiopia has the third highest ratio of public investment to GDP in the world, and its economic extraversion strategies, increasingly important since the turn of the twenty-first century, are largely mediated by and through state or para-state enterprises (Planel and Bridonneau 2015). State control of rents - from domestic sources, from external aid, and from other sources (primarily Chinese) of loans, trade and direct investment - has been 'critical in preventing surplus funds from being wasted in excess private consumption or the appeasement of social or political interests' (Clapham 2018:1156). This is in contrast to elsewhere in Africa, especially where rents come from hydrocarbon or mineral extraction (the 'resource curse'), when states have 'entirely failed to provide any remotely equivalent benefits [to Ethiopia] in the form of public welfare or long-term development goals' (Clapham 2018:1156).

After approximately halving in size during structural adjustment programmes in the 1990s, following a common trajectory in Africa and beyond, public employment swiftly increased from the 2000s onwards. As part of decentralisation, the EPRDF government hired a huge swathe of rural public servants (see chapter 1). Swerving away from the general trajectory in Africa,[16] state employment is now up to half of waged employment (World Bank 2016:31)

[15] However, as Lefort cautions, these 'statistics are questionable and controversial… economic progress is undeniable, but it is often difficult to give an accurate quantitative measurement of it' (2015:358-9).
[16] Ethiopia is in the top five in Africa in both of the following categories.

and nearly a quarter of total employment (Mo Ibrahim Foundation 2018:51). The expansion of the state to ever lower levels of the population, through the myriad state and sub-state structures that I will also describe in chapter 1, shows the hybridity of governance under *abyotawi* democracy; a palimpsest of previous forms, from modernising imperial and Marxist-Leninist eras, intertwined with currents of liberalism, neoliberalism and developmentalism.

The national expansion of government services, especially through massive education, health and agricultural extension programmes, has been widely admired for its effects on social and health indicators. To give just two examples of impressive figures: the net primary school enrolment rate has risen from 21 to 93 per cent over the twenty years (Schewel and Fransen 2018:556), and infant mortality has halved in the same time period (Lefort 2015:370). However, even the most developmentally successful interventions are subject to an element of criticism by analysts in which public goods provided by the state are linked to political quiescence (Abbink 2017; Chinigò and Fantini 2015; Di Nunzio 2014). It is in this context that much analysis of the Ethiopian state, from analysis of national and transnational policy to ethnographies of local state effects, emphasises its coercive nature and its ability to surveil and control the population (e.g. Fantini, Tesfaye and Smit 2018; de Waal 2018; Lefort 2012; Human Rights Watch 2010). According to Sarah Vaughan, since the 2000s there has been 'a dramatic expansion of the numbers of Ethiopians who are now involved in one or another governmental, political, economic or developmental association, structure or bureaucracy which can in some sense be regarded as a part of EPRDF's "coalition with the people"' (2011:634); what Emanuele Fantini calls 'an ambitious and revolutionary project of social engineering' (2013:6).

Here I should note that, writing in 2019, it is hard to keep a stable grasp of what the Ethiopian state is and does at the level of national ideology and policy. Since coming to power in April 2018 Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed appears to be shifting from the EPRDF statist developmental model first elaborated by late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, in which state-directed economic growth was the

precursor to democracy. Abiy endorses a more pro-market position that 'prioritises democratisation, favours the private sector, and works hand-in-glove with the World Bank' (Davison 2019). There have been some significant policy shifts, such as the introduction of public-private partnerships and large-scale sale of shares in national assets (Fassil 2018), including the extremely successful state-controlled Ethiopian Air (Verjee 2019). Abiy's philosophy of *medemer* (adding up, coming together, synergy) promotes national inclusivity in a context where, starting under his predecessor Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn and continuing to date, extremely high levels of ethnic conflict have led to the internal displacement of 2.9 million people, the highest number in the world (Hagmann and Tronvoll 2019). However, there is as yet not enough concrete evidence about the balance of change and continuity that will unfold in Ethiopia to characterise the state's current ideological position with any degree of certainty, or to judge whether the moral and social project established by the EPRDF can retain its legitimacy.[17]

The Hierarchical State?

As I will explore in more detail in chapter 1, intertwined with the EPRDF's state-centric political system, there is a strong presumption in the academic record of the cultural and social importance of hierarchy and patron-client relations among highland Ethiopians (e.g. Teferi 2004; Poluha 2004; Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003; Levine [1974] 2000; Hoben 1973). The outcome of these dynamics is a generalised picture of Ethiopian state employees as fundamentally on the 'other side' of state-society relations. This is a Weberian picture of bureaucracy as a 'well-functioning, effective machinery of domination' (Bierschenk and Olivier De Sardan 2014:10), concerned with exercising political power, even to the point of violence or harm, from their position 'up there' in an unassailable hierarchy. This widespread position is exemplified by the following quote by René Lefort, based on ethnographic research in a rural highland area of North Shewa:

[17] As this thesis is submitted (in November 2019), Abiy is in the process of formulating a new political party, to be called the Prosperity Party, to supplant the EPRDF.

> On one side, there is 'it': the *mengist*, a term that signifies simultaneously the authorities as such and the various bodies through which they exert their power - the government, the ruling party, the *kebele* Cabinet, the state apparatus - and also 'them,' all of its members and civil servants. On the other side is 'us': the *gebäre*, the peasants. But relations between *mengist* and *gebäre* are, in essence and concretely, deeply unequal relations of power - relations of command and subordination between dominators and dominated (2012:699).

In this thesis I aim to contribute to a small number of more recent publications that consider whether the salience of hierarchical forms of domination and submission in Ethiopia, as typified above, has been overstated, even in areas that formed part of the 'cultural core' of the Orthodox highlands. Anthropological work on Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity (Malara and Boylston 2016) and on health and medicine (Hannig 2018) has considered the ethical dimensions of love, care and protection as challenging to predominant narratives that concentrate only on top-down power. My contention is that hierarchical relations are also declining in the arena of the state, supposedly the foremost nexus of vertical power in a secularised society. This process, that started in the mid-twentieth century as governing relationships based on tribute and personal reciprocity were replaced with state functionaries, is being accelerated by the frequent mobility and rootlessness of current public servants, caused and reinforced by the inability of state work to fulfil aspirations for progress. It is compounded by intersection with other forms of hierarchy - their youth, (often) gender and low salary - and the material conditions in which they live, work and travel around. Despite a new social contract between state and citizen in Ethiopia that places increasing importance on the role of low level state workers in delivering the developmental state (Weis 2016), they are given 'responsibility without power,' as John Young described government workers in the imperial Ethiopia of the 1940s. Development programmes that are under-resourced, ill-prioritised and based on widening the sphere of accountability for action to the wider population mean that public servants are not seen as delivering 'the public good,' 'those desirable ideals that are considered universally beneficial' (Bear and Mathur 2015:21). In fact, in some ways, they embody the failure of education - the

most axiomatic of all means of progress - to result in social or economic mobility. In a fluctuating (Messay 1999) or egalitarian (Haynes and Hickel 2018) hierarchy, where the practice of power takes primacy over ontological differences, rural government workers' inability to exemplify an aspirational life or to provide desirable public goods are resulting in a loss of status.

'Like Donkeys': Government Employees and Public Services

In Haile Selassie's Ethiopia, René Lefort (2019) writes that as long as rural people 'paid taxes, maintained order through militia and sustained imperial forces when they visited, they could rule themselves with minimal interference from higher authorities.' Although some may not agree with this characterisation of the detached nature of imperial rule (e.g. Dessalegn 2009; Teferi 2004; see chapter 1), it is position no one would claim for the EPRDF. Current government programmes are involved in the most intimate of domains, as I will describe in chapters 4 and 5. Low-level government workers are the figures charged with carrying out this developmental programme from their position at 'the broad base of the bureaucratic pyramid,' where, as Gupta writes, they 'problematise the relationship between the translocality of "the state" and the necessarily localised offices, institutions, and practices in which it is instantiated' (1995:375-6). These public servants, variously described as street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky 1980), interface bureaucrats (Bierschenk and Olivier De Sardan 2014), and marginal bureaucrats (Singh 2012), are the main or even only means by which much of the rural majority of Ethiopians will encounter the state. The group of public servants who were my interlocutors over around sixteen months of fieldwork on the whole worked hard to carry out the duties for which they were responsible. These included, among many other responsibilities: teaching children, advising on agricultural practices, vaccinating babies, pressuring households to build latrines, overseeing land disputes, holding meetings; providing identity cards, and - critically - documenting, auditing and accounting for their work through the production of vast amounts of paperwork, the 'graphic artifacts' (M. Hull

2012) that shape bureaucratic forms of governance. Despite their efforts and their variably sincere belief in the efficacy of the development interventions for which they were responsible, they often encountered the 'illegibility' (Das 2004) of such programmes and had to resolve competing and contradictory demands (see chapter 5).

The chapters that unfold here will follow the government workers as a group in their daily lives in Kuré Beret in and outside of their spaces of work (chapters 2 and 3), in two specific areas of their work:[18] breastfeeding and child nutrition (chapter 4), and latrine promotion (chapter 5), and finally through the life history of one individual (chapter 6). I chose these specific areas of work because I wanted to illuminate programmes that are less overtly repressive and political than those dealing with land, elections or other obviously political topics, as they involve government workers' attempts to regulate personal conduct in feminised domestic spaces as well as in the public sphere. Concentrating on how substances - in these cases, breastmilk and shit (as well as coffee in chapter 2) - shape and constitute the state follows anthropological calls for attention both to the mundane and quotidian elements of governance, and to the ways in which materiality and affect enter into the life of the state. The areas of work that I cover - encompassing latrines people (mostly) did not want and breastfeeding advice they did not need, as well as education that did not appear to have brought any benefit to those imparting it - were also factors in the diminishing status of government work. These areas are also very common points of state intervention,[19] but yet are not often covered in the body of historically and ethnographically-informed social science literature on rural state governance in Ethiopia.[20]

[18] Chapter 3 is about teachers and education, but not directly about the work of teaching.
[19] Elsewhere in North Shewa, people reported that 'we have three main tasks: to develop our plots; to send the children above the age of six to school; to dig toilets' (Lefort 2010:457).
[20] Instead this work covers agricultural extension (Chinigò and Fantini 2015; Planel 2014; Lefort 2012; Segers et al. 2008; Kassa 2003); land administration (Labzaé forthcoming, 2019; Dessalegn 2009; Ege 2002); *kebele* administration (Emmenegger 2016; Emmenegger, Sibilo and Hagmann 2011; Lefort 2010, 2007; Teferi 2004); and large-scale infrastructure projects (Fantini et al. 2018; Abbink 2012).

I have also only tangentially touched on government workers' attitudes to party politics and to the EPRDF, in large part because I wanted to tread lightly when it came to sensitive issues during my research. The entangling of state and party so prominent in the Ethiopian political model was obvious and had consequences; for example, in the way certain elected positions were reserved for party members, or in the huge amount of quasi-tax that government workers were expected to pay for bonds to support the Renaissance Dam project.[21] However, while there were a handful of public servants who had engaged in opposition activism (see chapter 6), for the most part, they seemed to find the topic pretty dull and did not often engage in either critique or overt support of EPRDF. This reaction of political indifference is, I think, often overlooked in the social science literature in favour of narratives that identify government workers only as enthusiastic enforcers of the coercive aspects of the party-state (e.g. Lefort 2010).

Unlike in so many other ethnographic contexts (e.g. Gupta 2012; Olivier de Sardan 1999; Bayart 1993), the public servants I am discussing here were not characterised by their propensity for corruption. As Mathur writes 'empirically it remains unclear what is and what is not a "corrupt" practice' (2016:17). There are also inherent difficulties in ethnographically grasping the extent of corrupt practices, which are by nature secretive and hidden. Acknowledging the difficulties in defining and discovering corruption, nevertheless, government workers in Kuré Beret were not, to the best of my knowledge, using their positions for their private advantage. Even their opportunity to engage in the 'side hustles' of teachers in Cameroon (Niger-Thomas 2001) or public sector steel workers in India (Parry 1999) was limited to non-existent. Unlike the Togolese teachers who used their students as farm labour on their own land (or even hired them out as daily labourers for others) (Piot 1999:35), they were prohibited from access to land. The remote location and stringent regulations about charitable organisations put in place by the 2009 NGO law (FDRE 2009) put paid to any

[21] Projected to be the fifth largest hydroelectric plant in the world, with a cost of c. US$5 billion (Weis 2016:4). Public servants (and to a lesser extent party members) were told to commit a month's salary, deducted over a year, annually until the dam was finished.

idea of setting up a 'briefcase NGO' (Hibou 1999), and as I will show in chapter 3, their ability to profit from existing NGOs was very limited. Nor was the word for government worker a 'metaphor for comfort and idleness' or their work 'associated with benefit without labour' (Navaro-Yashin 2012:84): in fact, quite the opposite.

This does not mean I did not hear some level of 'corruption talk' (Lazar 2008) by friends and acquaintances, and read much more in the online sphere of Ethiopian news and comment. As Toni Weis writes 'seen from the patrimonial perspective, which informs much of the discourse of the Ethiopian opposition (particularly in the American diaspora), Ethiopia's highly interventionist economy is… a machine for the extraction of resources by a small, often ethnically defined, political elite' (2016:20). The level of extraction is often subject to evidence-free and sometimes absurd claims.[22] Weis argues that the ethnic overtones of this perspective bleed into the assumption that a concentration of economic and political power in state hands - the nature of 'vanguard capitalism' - necessarily leads to corrupt forms of clientelistic politics. In his judgement, national level corruption is limited, especially in comparison to elsewhere in Africa or the world; he says that 'Asian investors in particular regularly state that, in Ethiopia, paying bribes is much less of a concern to them than at home' (2016:16). Ultimately, I am not in a position to make truth claims about the nature or extent of corruption at local or certainly national levels. However, I will state that the 'failure' in Kuré Beret of the programmes I describe below was unrelated to corruption, if defined as diversion of rents for personal or political benefit of individuals. Overall, I concur with Sarah Muir and Akhil Gupta that 'perceptions of corruption can map all too easily onto longstanding racialised socio-geographic distinctions of development and modernity' (2018:s11), whether through the politics of diasporas or through NGOs, whose starting premise is often that African states are characterised by dysfunction.

[22] 'In 2005, for example, opposition media claimed that late prime minister Meles Zenawi had embezzled US$41 million from public accounts; this figure quickly rose to US$1.2 billion, then US$ 3 billion, and finally US$5 billion' (Weis 2016:66).

Despite the expansion of the state down to ever lower units of the population and the ambivalent relationship of the government with civil society organisations, the provision of public services in Ethiopia, as elsewhere, is not the sole province of the state. Globally, total state control of all aspects of public services is seen as 'undesirable, unfeasible and old fashioned' (Joshi and Moore 2004:31), and a variety of service providers work alongside, in the gaps left by, instead of, or sub-contracted by the state. As Gabriella Körling describes, in urban Niger the configuration of providers included 'a multiplicity of actors in different constellations, which illustrates the blurring of conventional dichotomies such as the local and the external, state and society, the formal and the informal, and the public and the private' (2011:15). In my research area, it would be an exaggeration to describe the actors involved in service provision as a 'multiplicity.' Nevertheless, in Kuré Beret, interventions by a local Pentecostal church, longterm and largely in the sphere of education, and by international development bodies, which were more fleeting presences, were intertwined with state programmes (themselves entwined with global development modalities) that government workers were responsible for delivering. Although there were no nearby commercial providers, for example, of private schools, in some cases (such the local buses that took on the role of ambulances), small-scale private actors did fill in where state or philanthropic providers fell short. I will explore the implications of non-state involvement in development for the power and legitimacy of the state and state workers in chapters 3, 4 and 5.

Following Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan, I am adopting a 'broad definition of public service that covers the totality of public sector employment, e.g. persons employed by state administrations or state agencies to provide a public service' (2012:5), rather than a narrower focus on civil servants, specifically bureaucrats and administrators. This is a position that accords with local perceptions of *yemengist seratenyoch* (government workers) as a wide rather than exclusive category of anyone associated with the state. The word *mengist* in Amharic can be used to designate 'the government, the party, the state, and all their agents

(local officials, *kebele* leaders, development agents, the executives of the ruling party, etc.)' (Lefort 2007:256). It can also be translated more generally as 'power' or 'control' (Prunier 2015:421) (see also Lefort 2012 above; Mains 2012b). Discussing the equivalent term in India, Mathur writes 'the fact that the Hindustani word *sarkar* does not make the government/ state distinction that exists in English is to be noted, for it indicates an expansive notion of state power and government… *sarkar* is best understood as an intimate repository of state power' (2016:22). In the Ethiopian context, this broad usage is in keeping with the subtleties of the Amharic language, which 'thrives on polysemy' according to Dagmawi Woubshet (2009:629); or as Donald Levine (1965) writes, utilises a 'cult of ambiguity.' This ambiguity is used to convey an undifferentiated and diffuse notion of power: 'the holistic approach to governmental authority embodied in the Ethiopian concept of *mengist* has contributed to the blurring of institutional distinctions between state, regime, party and government' (Vaughan 2011:623). This in turn is linked to portrayals of the hierarchical nature of political culture among the Amhara and other highland Ethiopians that I will explore (and challenge) in chapter 1.

Youth, Education and Aspiration

The government workers in my research area were young by most age-based definitions: with the majority in their early or mid-twenties, to some in their early thirties (although, as I will show in chapter 6, official and actual ages did not always align). Their youth was the reason they were posted in an 'undesirable' location such as Kuré Beret: government workers are assigned to rural areas according to their length of their employment, with the fresh graduates most likely to be in the remotest and least desirable *kebeles* like Kuré Beret (apart from some unusual individuals, such as Aklilu). Aside from special circumstances (see chapter 2), no one could hope to achieve a non-rural posting until at least five to ten years into their careers. Those who do stay for up to ten years of rural service before moving to a town are likely to remain government

workers in one place until retirement; however, as I will show, there is significant mobility involved within government service, even for those who do not leave.

Anthropological studies in Africa have shown the category of 'youth' to be fluid, and historically and contextually contingent (Christiansen, Utas and Vigh 2006; Honwana and De Boeck 2005). It can be defined by age range or relationally, as a generation. People can act and be treated as youth in specific situations, while in other contexts be seen as mature adults. This is often heavily gendered: while pre-pubescent girls can enter the category of 'woman' through marriage in some societies, men can retain their status as 'youth' for much longer. Pre-twentieth century in most parts of the world, and currently in some, anyone past their mid-twenties would statistically have lived more than half their life already,[23] while Philippe Ariès (1962) famously questioned the existence of the very concept of childhood and youth throughout most of European history. At the other extreme, the African Youth Charter (AU Commission 2006) expands the definition of youth up to the age of thirty-five, and in rural Tigray, Kaatje Segers et al. found that (male) members of the youth association were aged up to thirty-seven (2008:99).

The scholarly body of work on youth employment in Africa often concentrate on the informal sector (Hart 1973; Mains 2012a); the neoliberal turn in the late twentieth century that restructured economies and shrank prospects for state or formal unionised employment (Ferguson 2006; Comaroff and Comaroff 2001); and the concept of diploma inflation (Bourdieu 1984), in which job prospects do not keep pace with increased access to education. Such studies often highlight that the means to advance from the category of 'youth' to that of 'maturity' through the setting up and maintaining of a household is denied to un- or under-employed youth, who 'feel increasingly unable to attain the promises of the new economy and society' (Durham 2000:113). In this context, government workers are most often included in considerations of the problematic issue of youth

[23] Life expectancy in Ethiopia in 2015 was 65; in Japan (the highest) it was 84, and in Sierra Leone (the lowest) it was 50 (WHO 2019).

employment as a comparative category to which others (do or should) aspire: as success stories in wider 'geographies of exclusion and inclusion' (Honwana and De Boeck 2005:1).

In Ethiopia, as elsewhere in Africa, success in education is seen as critical to a favourable outcome in life: it is 'widely perceived as a pathway to success through which rural and urban families alike must pass to achieve a better future' (Schewel and Fransen 2018:561). In a situation where from every thousand children who begin school only a fifth will complete Grade Eight (Gardner 2017) and where un- and under-employment, especially among youth, is flagged as a serious issue (Tesfamichael and Seife 2018; World Bank 2016), government workers have undoubtedly been successful in their educational and professional careers. The vast majority who work in rural areas have also grown up in a rural area, and so have managed to overcome barriers of access and financial constraints to continue their schooling beyond primary level. The lack of schools past Grade Eight in rural areas of Ethiopia, although increasing rapidly, means that many of them will have left their immediate family at a young age - often early adolescence - to rent a house with other students or board with kin or family friends in the nearest town. The potential perils of this situation are lamented by parents, and many will not allow their daughters to be placed in such a vulnerable situation. Others will have travelled long distances by foot - or canoe (Boylston 2018:146) or hand-hauled raft (Dom 2017a:5) - to reach their school. Future government workers, then, have managed to proceed into and through high school, pass preparatory examinations in grade 12, and progress to college or university for a diploma, certificate, or a degree. They have succeeded in gaining that qualification too, and then moved into a steady formal job, unlike a huge percentage of the two to three million annual entrants onto the job market (Carter and Rohwerder 2016:7). Unemployment rates are contested, but estimated '(unofficially) to have reached 20 per cent in 2010' and [to be] as high as 50 per cent among the young urban population' (Lefort 2015:373), although the World Bank says that average urban unemployment is 17 percent, rising to 24 percent in Addis Ababa (2016:30).

The assumption that Ethiopian government workers have achieved a rare prize - formal, stable, salaried and respected public sector positions - is axiomatic in the policy literature of global institutions (e.g. ILO 2017) and states (e.g. Sande Lie and Berouk 2018); and in academic work looking at youth employment policy (Eyob 2018), the link between education and migration (Schewel and Fransen 2018), and ethnically determined civil service positions (Dereje 2018). Those who work for the state are seen as those who have 'made it': the lucky minority[24], whose work provides the ability to progress in life.

What they have not succeeded in doing, however, is escaping the rural and therefore experiencing transformative change. The framing of education as a 'way up, not a way out' recasts teleological ideas about modernity and progress to which education is central, as I will describe in chapter 3. The almost universal attitude among the twenty-five to thirty public servants based in the *kebele* at any one time (Aklilu in Werq Amba aside) was that rural government work was a tough, precarious and ultimately undesirable existence: they sometimes used the word *mískin* (wretched)[25] to refer to themselves. For government workers elsewhere, such as those in Mathur's ethnography of Himalayan India, 'being government' carries an 'aspirational and deeply desirable… meaning for agents of the state' (2016:137). In Kuré Beret, while many had a level of pride in their professional identity as teachers, health workers, agriculturalists or administrators, the constraints facing them in their work and in their daily lives meant that ideals of sacrifice and service were insufficient motivations. As Hull writes about South African nurses, 'professionalism itself has become a fraught identity, highly sought after yet failing to live up to or contain the aspirational desires of its members' (2017:3).

[24] Public sector employment in Ethiopia is a high percentage of paid employment (around 45 percent), but a low percentage compared to total population (1.3 percent) (Mo Ibrahim Foundation 2018:50): see chapter 1 for more detailed statistics.
[25] ምስኪን: poor (miserable), indigent, poor devil, destitute, wretch, wretched, hapless, miserable (Leslau [1976] 2002:24).

The ethnographic work of Daniel Mains (2012a; 2012b) among young men in the southern town of Jimma is often marshalled in support of the position that Ethiopian government employment combines a decent salary with high prestige; it 'not only brings a steady income but also immediately inserts one into a complex and qualitatively desirable web of relationships' (2012b:20). Contrary to Pieter Serneels (2007), who asserts that unemployed young men in urban areas are practising a form of economic maximisation by waiting for a well-paid job in the public sector, Mains argues that social relations and avoidance of the shame associated with low status work are instead crucial to employment decisions. In his portrait of state employment as so highly aspirational that young men prefer to stay unemployed and rely on gift income from family and friends or migrate elsewhere than to take on better paid but lower status work, Mains describes how government work provides a balance of material gain and prestige mediated through the social relationships it enables. He contends that the retention of aspects of patron-client relationships that characterised power relations in the imperial era contribute to 'the importance of the symbolic dimensions of work for positioning one within relationships and the formation of young people's identities' (2012a:13), rather than employment primarily providing the means for greater consumption. Mains asserts that the prestige of state employment - its higher class position - is linked to the growth of the civil service over the course of the twentieth century, which provided new opportunities for occupying an occupational position that was not linked to production. The reduction in state employment post-1991,[26] while access to education was increasing, he sees as cutting short an avenue for forming socially advantageous relationships.

Unlike elsewhere in Africa, it is not evident that public sector workers in Ethiopia - at least in rural areas - can be characterised as forming a middle class or even a lower middle class; a 'bureaucratic bourgeoisie' (Werbner 2018:10), as African state employees are often considered. In South Africa, Deborah James writes that 'the public service remained an important site where this wider middle class

[26] Which I think Mains overstates, by not taking into account the huge re-growth of the civil service, especially post-2005.

consolidated itself, later to expand after the mid-1970s and even more after 1994: upward mobility, then, was especially pronounced in the public sector' (2015:19). Class-based analysis of Ethiopian society and politics has a long history starting in the 1960s (e.g. Markakis and Nega 1986, who attribute an important role to the petty bourgeoisie in the revolution of 1974; although this view has also been contested: see chapter 1). However, current usage is limited; the term 'middle class' does not appear in official national discourse (Bach and Nallet 2018) and there is no equivalent word in Amharic or other Ethiopian languages, according to Gebru (1991:22). Contrary to a liberal narrative that links the growth of a middle class with increased support for democracy (e.g. Cheeseman 2014), Lefort (2012) characterises the rural 'emerging middle class' as supportive of the authoritarian EPRDF project in order to maintain their privileges. However, Jean-Nicolas Bach and Clélie Nallet (2018) in their examination of the use of the label of middle class in Ethiopia, especially in urban areas, suggest that its extreme instability as a category makes its analytical purchase limited except to illuminate the political positions of those who use it.

Leaving aside issues with the utility of the label, by any measure claiming the government workers in my research area as middle class is difficult. In an econometric measurement of class position, one factor is that their salaries are extremely low: in 2019, primary teachers (grades 1 to 4) at the beginning of their career start at 2,400 Birr (gross) monthly, or nearly 2,000 Birr net (c. £50). The 'emerging of a relatively wealthy rural elite' (Fantini 2013:7) and - a factor particular to social stratification in my research area - the availability of land and relative wealth of farmers and merchants to those in highland areas, meant there was no appreciable economic difference between many local people and government workers, and in fact the latter were often worse off, as I will show. In a the sense of class as 'distinction' (Bourdieu 1984), despite their higher level of education, differences between the lifestyles, tastes and consumption habits of rural farmers and rural government workers was limited to a few areas, such as marriage age (see chapter 2), clothing (although that was also converging among young people, through large-scale migration and the local availability of Chinese

imports), and 'respectability' (not getting drunk and dancing; although many farmers also avoided that behaviour). Collective action by government workers - historically critical during the last days of the imperial regime (see chapter 1) - has mainly been subsumed into party structures or diverted by ethnicity-based concerns, although recent protests and strikes by medical professionals show some collective resistance (Mahlet 2019).

Formal employment in the private sector was not a feasible alternative for the rural government workers in my research area (and beyond), as it was neither well-paid nor easily available. Foreign NGOs are the exception in terms of salary: one study reports a higher salary level for a driver for a US bilateral agency in Addis Ababa than for a professor in the medical faculty of a government university (McCoy et al. 2008:679). However, these positions are few and far between outside Addis Ababa and other larger urban areas. Furthermore, entry into this world has many requirements - contacts, fluency, confidence in English and more generally in mode of self-presentation - that the government workers in my research area lacked. Wage employment in private industry is concentrated in pockets around the country; for example, the commercial production of flowers, vegetables and herbs for export to Europe found around Ziway and in other clusters, or the manufacturing companies generally concentrated on main routes to Addis. Apart from its distance from my research site (and the ethnic dimensions of its location, if in another regional state), such work is also unattractive in other ways. As a recent study found 'wages were no better than in other low-paid sectors, jobs were unpleasant and seemingly hazardous, and (most worryingly) those that spent more months in factory work reported more serious health problems after one year' (Blattman, Dercon and Franklin 2019:23-4). When potential private sector work opportunities arose in and around the nearest large town of Shewa Robit, with the arrival of a Turkish engineering company contracted to build a railway, the wages for graduates turned out to be below the level earned by *yeqen seratenyoch* (daily labourers) (see chapter 6 for more details).

Other possibilities were practically or structurally closed off: aside from the *abel* (per diems) paid to health workers for attending NGO training sessions, or the small extra payment for tutoring by the resident evangelical church NGO, 'side hustles' were unknown among the government workers. State employment precluded other ways of 'getting on,' such as economic support for entrepreneurial activities. Ex-teachers Tomas and Yeshi (see chapter 6) were granted a loan to set up a small business, which prevented them from returning to government work when they suspected exit may have been a mistake, as the lending terms depended on them not being government employees. Access to land is also prohibited for government workers, whether in their place of origin or in the place to which they were posted. People told me that this policy created much controversy when it was first enacted in 2003, and it caused many government workers at the time to exit state employment, especially those with the lowest salaries. One way round the rule is to marry a woman not employed by the state, and access land in her name; another is to make an agreement with family members in a home village. Involvement in farming, following in their parents footsteps, was not an attractive prospect for most public servants. However, having no access to land placed them in the same category, as Tom Boylston writes, as merchants, slave-descendants and 'numerous other caste-like groups that experience forms of social exclusion in Ethiopia' (2018:92). I am not suggesting a direct correlation between these social groups and government workers here - for one thing, I don't think government workers, unlike the aforementioned groups, were 'thought of as avaricious' (Boylston 2018:100) - but where hierarchies are in flux, I suspect that the historical association of landlessness with exclusion and marginalisation may retain some purchase on questions of status. The land prohibition thus intersected with the multiple material and affective factors I have already mentioned, as its destabilising effects pushed them even more towards frequent movement both in and outside of state employment.

The Precarious State?

Public servants' aspirations towards the urban led to their frequent mobility between villages; these aspirations were in part both because of and a contribution to their inability to form stable social relationships. In a rural inversion of Mains' urban findings that I discussed above, many were prepared to exchange their stable and supposedly prestigious positions for truly precarious, sometimes dangerous, and often economically disastrous alternatives. The resulting inability of government workers to put down geographical roots and therefore to forge or maintain stable and enduring kin and friendship ties makes them precarious, in Judith Butler's definition of precarity, as a 'politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social economic networks of support more than others' (2015:33). Can, then, ideas about precarity be extended to the domain of the state, and steady state employment?

Precarity is a slippery term. Recently popularised by theorists who study the rise of new 'casual' or 'flexible' forms of work practices, from zero hours contracts and unpaid internships to the 'gig economy,' Guy Standing (2011) has introduced 'the precariat' as a category of people whose livelihoods are characterised above all by their insecurity and the withdrawal of the social democratic contract of the industrial era. In Nigeria, Michael Watts has written about the 'radical precarity' of young men 'caught between the crumbling social and political orders of gerontocratic customary rule… and the disorder of failing forms of secular post-colonial state authority' (2017:486), and who can be categorised as a 'surplus population' in Marxist terms. Other analysts extend the material and economic effects of insecurity to the 'psychological, emotional and social vulnerability' it engenders (Bolt and Rajak 2016:806). Lauren Berlant extends the association of precarity with quantifiable socio-economic indicators to defining it as 'the dominant structure and experience of the present moment' under neoliberal capitalism (2011:192). In this and other readings (e.g. Butler 2015; Vigh 2006), precarity is an affective condition that presupposes and engenders a generalised

uncertainty about the future, casting doubt on the link between action, aspiration and reality. Some have critiqued the idea that precarity is a new phenomenon arising from the logics and practices of neoliberalism (and the concomitant looming environmental catastrophe of the anthropocene age) (e.g. Cooper and Pratten 2015), reminding us that inability to predict the future is an existential component of humanity (Whyte 1997), and that precarity is inherent to the capitalist labour practices that preceded the neoliberal age (van der Linden 2014).

Is it possible or useful, then, to describe government employees, even at the lowest level of the state, as being precarious? After all, in normative terms, the state employees in my research area had successfully achieved at least one marker of a 'non-precarious' adult life; that of a stable job, while some had achieved another milestone of maturity by getting married, and a smaller number had children. Furthermore, despite largely unsuccessful attempts from the 1990s and early 2000s to introduce 'New Public Management' techniques as part of the 'good governance' paradigm (see chapter 1), in many ways their work fits within a Weberian impersonal and procedural bureaucratic paradigm.[27] This means that, aside from in exceptional cases, their jobs are stable; 'for life' and not likely to be terminated or subject to decrease of hours. Their salaries are low but do not fluctuate - although, like all wages, they are subject to inflationary pressure, especially on food prices (Scott-Villiers et al. 2016; World Bank 2016) - and periodically increased, theoretically according to known parameters. My point is that, according to the terms of their employment, the exposure of government workers in my research area to insecurity, risk or contingency was limited, even if elements of austerity politics and hybridised evaluation schemes engendered greater uncertainty than previously.[28] In this sense, they cannot be described as members of 'the precariat' of casual and flexible labour, or the

[27] Although in another important way it does not: 'it is a politicised civil service, not one that conforms to Weber's ration-legal ideal type' (Weis 2016:87).
[28] Whether Ethiopia can accurately be described as neoliberal is a point I will take up in chapter 1.

structurally excluded African youth experiencing a 'double marginalisation' (Argenti 2007) by both state and traditional authorities.

However, as I will show in the ethnographic chapters that follow, in their daily lives the young government workers in my research area struggled to get by away from kin and friendship networks, eliciting reactions of pity, scorn and occasionally threats of violence from local people, upon whom they relied upon to access basic goods and to whom they were often in (small amounts of) debt. Although they forged alliances with other government workers to offset their vulnerability, in particular through the coffee ceremonies they organised that excluded local people (see chapter 2), these relationships were short-lived among the fast turnover of government personnel. As both reason for and consequence of their social isolation, they moved very frequently between villages,[29] playing off factors such as comfort and distance from loved ones in order to move closer to the urban ideal. In the process, they experienced isolation and disconnection from stable social networks. Frederick Cooper writes that 'if "precarity" today has any meaning, it is as the reverse of "stabilisation"' (2017:148). Despite having stable jobs, then, many government workers in Kewet lived unstable lives.

Dependence on others - what Deborah James calls, the 'entangled sociability of long-term obligations' (2015:236) - is supposed to be a barrier to modernity and progress. As Webb Keane writes, progress is 'perhaps above all, about human emancipation and *self-mastery*. If in the past, humans were in thrall to illegitimate rulers, rigid traditions, and unreal fetishes, as they become modern they realise the true character of human agency' (2007:6, italics in original). Dependence is inimical to the achievement of liberal personhood, in which a person can be freed from obligations to kin, clan, tribe, or other troublesome manifestations of 'culture' that hold them back from flourishing as an individual. Government workers in Kuré Beret - and more widely - find themselves in a kind

[29] Although they have limited control over their placement, which is determined by the *wereda* office for their sector of work: education, health, agriculture etc. See chapter 2 for more about the process by which public servants manage their career path through movement.

of inversion of this modernist imaginary. As graduates in formal employment, they are supposed to be on a trajectory of upward social and economic mobility. However, public service in rural areas extracts them from the moral and economic interdependence of kin networks and is often a barrier to marriage and children (whether finding a spouse, or struggling to see their spouse and children). 'I thought I would have another child by my age,' one teacher wistfully told me. Her plan was to exit state employment, leaving her child (who she only saw on some weekends) with her mother, and migrate to the middle east to look after other people's children.

Trying to counter the 'intellectual imperialism' of 'unexamined assumptions' about the urban and its automatic opposition to the rural, Monika Krause suggests disaggregating the elements associated with these categories; namely, their physical properties, forms of social solidarity, and links between people and their livelihoods (2013:233). As an example of the utility of disaggregating these elements, she writes that 'the distinction between place and forms of solidarity is… thrown into relief by the case of the wandering city, such as Addis Ababa until 1892, where large groups of people moved together' (2013:237).[30] Like Ethiopia's pre-twentieth century wandering capital, rural government workers are located in the countryside, but do not share rural forms of solidarity. Attempts to bring about 'entangled sociabilities' in the villages where they are posted, such as through coffee drinking practices, are situational and often fleeting, as public servants move around so frequently within and outside of state work. Their social isolation is exacerbated by low pay and difficult material conditions, which make them dependent on local people for access to basic goods, and means their protection against the (real or perceived) dangers of remoteness is thin.

[30] Although the broader point is interesting, a small correction is needed here for historical accuracy: other permanent national capitals were established prior to Addis Ababa, punctuated by periods of roving and regional capitals (Horvath 1969), and nowhere, wandering or not, was referred to as Addis Ababa prior to the current city's establishment in 1886 and de facto status as capital in 1896 (Elleni 2010).

Many took or considered future-oriented decisions that would extend their precariousness beyond mobility between different rural locations. It was very common for government workers to resign from their jobs and take up work that seemed from an outside perspective objectively worse: more insecure, less well paid, and sometimes dangerous. Ex-government workers most often moved to Shewa Robit or a nearby town to their place of origin to start a small cafe or other business, such as petty trade in clothes, cosmetics or phone accessories; exactly the kind of work Mains's interlocutors in Jimma rejected as too stigmatising. Many of the men set up as *bajaj* (auto-rickshaw) drivers, using money given or lent by sisters, nieces or romantic partners who had migrated to the middle east for domestic work (see chapter 6). Others went farther afield: one teacher left on foot to South Africa, although he eventually ended up in Juba, the capital of the newly founded state of South Sudan, before the civil war there forced his return. Another health worker tried Dubai with fake papers. Some made a success of their new endeavours: an ex-teacher and extension worker couple worked from dawn to darkness in their laundry business in Shewa Robit and driving a *bajaj*, eating only *shiro* (a staple cheap food) cooked at home, laser-focused on saving enough money to build a house for their growing family. Most, however, saw their businesses struggle or fail. Customers failed to multiply, or consisted of friends and family who did not always pay. Too many *bajajs* crowded the streets. Savings from migration dwindled, sometimes through the medium of bad boyfriends.

The Malawian civil servants sent to urban areas in Gerhard Anders' work (2009) experienced their social and spatial distance from their place of origin as a relief from demands from support from rural kin (see also: Hull 2017; James 2015). This was not the case for the young public servants in Kuré Beret, but like their Malawian counterparts, they also did not (usually) want to return 'home.' Instead, they wanted to experience progress measured as social and economic mobility towards an urban area, and moving around was one way to avoid the slow rural future that government work offered. In Marco Di Nunzio's insightful work on urban hustlers in Addis Ababa (2017; 2015), he shows how his

interlocutors embrace the uncertainty and unpredictable trajectories of their lives as a means of keeping hope for a better future alive. Whatever precarious conditions they faced in their present lives, uncertainty about the future was an indication that their situation was 'neither final nor irreversible' but invoked 'a terrain of possibilities,' 'a terrain of action and hope' (2015:153). In showing how these young men did not evaluate the present against an imagined future but rather found a way to view the fundamentally unknowable and contingent nature of the future to be galvanising and productive, Di Nunzio wants to unsettle anthropological theorising about youth in Africa who experience a disjuncture between social expectations and their own possibilities for progress.

Drawing on these arguments about rethinking the productive potentialities of uncertainty, I want to make a case for the salience of such ideas to my interlocutors and extending ideas about uncertainty and precarity beyond the usual categories of un- or under-employed youth in Africa to those employed by the state. Despite their very different experiences and backgrounds, government workers used frequent movement in the same way as street hustlers in the city: they kept themselves busy by 'moving around (*inqisiqase*)' (Di Nunzio 2017). Although I argue that their status is lessening, rural public servants can hardly be described as 'marginal' to society. Despite low salaries and poor conditions, while in government employment they were not struggling to survive. Even more than the urban marginalised then, they were choosing uncertainty against the slow 'social death' (Vigh 2006b) of rural life. They were using hope as 'a way of re-adjusting one's action and social navigation in the present to open up for oneself the possibility of the unknown' (Di Nunzio 2015:153). While instability of employment is supposed to engender existential uncertainty about the future, stable employment that does not meet expectations for progress also does not provide a productive way of exposing oneself to chance.

Methodology

The research on which this thesis is based took place in the North Shewa Zone of Amhara Region over approximately sixteen months between 2010 and 2015: three months in 2010-2011 and thirteen months over the course of 2014 -2015 based mainly in Kuré Beret, as well as Shewa Robit and Debre Berhan. In preparation, I took Amharic lessons in London in 2012-2013, followed by classes in a language school in Addis Ababa in 2013, building on the Amharic I had learned when previously living in Ethiopia.

For the main part, my research consisted of participant observation of state employees, at work and at rest, although the boundaries were often not clear. I spent many long hours in various government offices; hanging out in government compounds; following health workers and teachers in their house-to-house visits; and attending very many meetings. I spent a lot of time in the three biggest schools in the *kebele*, observing lessons, break times, football games and other sports, and meetings and social life in the staff room and the head teacher's office. As I described in the prologue, I also paid a visit to the most remote of the satellite schools in the *kebele*, in Werq Amba. Equally important for this thesis was the time I spent with government workers outside work hours: preparing food and eating; drinking coffee and (occasionally) beer; shopping at the market; social visits to local people; travelling on buses, government cars, and by foot; attending church services, weddings, funerals, graduation ceremonies, and *aras bet*;[31] and simply hanging out in rented rooms, crowded compounds and on aimless strolls around the neighbourhood. I also spent a lot of time with government workers, both at work and with their families and friends in the nearest town of Shewa Robit, and in Debre Berhan, the zonal capital where the majority of the government workers had studied.

[31] This term 'can be glossed as "childbed" and connotes the forty- or eighty-day postpartum seclusion of the woman and her baby prior to its baptism' (Hannig 2014:297).

As well as observing the everyday lives of government employees, I conducted approximately forty-five semi-formal audio-recorded interviews, either alone or with translation assistance from government worker friends. I decided to interview a number of local residents (not only state employees) on specific topics - notably, sanitation and latrine promotion, and international migration - when I wanted to verify information that I felt was prone to exaggeration or distortion in a more systematic way, and to get a more rounded picture of a particular phenomenon. I also interviewed and taped key government workers, in order to record detailed data about the scope of their employment.

The funding for my PhD, from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), included a collaborative element with a British NGO called Development Media International (DMI). Their mission is to run 'evidence-based media campaigns to change behaviours and improve lives in low-income countries.'[32] As part of this collaboration, DMI asked me to advise them about the media environment in Ethiopia, and about local beliefs and practices of breastfeeding as part of a bid for funding (see chapter 4). In order to produce the report, I carried out a small-scale randomised survey of fifty-two households, again accompanied by government worker friends. This was partly to assist with my imperfect Amharic that was not always equal to understanding the strong rural accent and dialect of local people, but mostly from concern that I should not be left to wander around the village alone. Although my notes from the time reveal my frustrations with this method of research,[33] I found it a valuable social experience that sparked conversations about development with government workers, and allowed me to meet local residents who I would not necessarily have come across without the randomised list.[34]

[32] From DMI website: www.developmentmedia.net (accessed 12 October 2018).
[33] From my notes, 13 June 2014: 'I'm even less convinced about the stability of even the most basic questions. Age is a total write-off ... Marital status: H started talking about her complicated marital history - how is that 'real' research means squashing that out to tick one box and then statistically manipulate it? The objectifying gaze. How many children? Alive or dead? At home or not? Given birth to or looking after or employing? As for the financial situation, who knows the calculations + perspectives going into that?'
[34] The *kebele* administrator supplied me with lists of tax-paying households (approx. three hundred) divided by residential neighbourhood into thirteen *lemat budin* (development teams),

Perhaps equally useful was that conducting the household survey conformed to expectations of what I 'should' be doing as a foreigner in a village. While my main activities of following people around, hanging about here and there, and writing copious notes at night were viewed with suspicion, and occasionally led to me being labelled a spy by friends of friends, asking survey questions with an obvious developmental bent seemed to reassure both local people and government workers that I was not an oddity (or worse). Teachers were required to carry out short 'action research' projects into social issues - for example, school attendance - as part of their bid to upgrade from a diploma to a degree. They understood my survey as similar to their own research, in that it would - or at least, could potentially - have a 'real world' application. Some members of households that I surveyed also calculated this connection to the material benefits allied with the world of development, and during the survey was one of the only times I was directly asked for money by anyone. Conversely, my informal research assistants to whom I did offer payment - feeling that they should not contribute their labour for free to grease the extractive wheels of the development machine - refused to take any money. 'No problem, you are a student!' they responded, obviously more at ease with my position and intentions after I had demonstrated a straightforward interest in matters of fact.

*

Natural science proceeds by the Popperian idea of falsification, and the normative ideal that in the process of determining whether a fact is true or false, the scientist should remain objective, rational and detached, drawing a clear line between herself and the object of research. This empiricist approach to research 'is more concerned with studying "things themselves" than the relations between things... [and] treats subjectivity in both quantitative and qualitative research as

of which I interviewed a sixth. The list of households did not include young adults living in their parental home without access to land or in another household as a paid employee, or government workers, who are not registered as residents as they do not pay tax based on land.

something to be controlled and restrained' (William James quoted in Davies 2010:29). In contrast, during the reflexive 'postmodern turn' of the 1970s and 1980s, it became axiomatic in anthropology that objectivity is an illusion and that 'there is nothing to "discover" that it is not simultaneously defined' (Hastrup 1995:165). The ways in which ethnographers' various subjectivities (ethnicity, gender, identity, personality) interacted with the research process became part of the data. Writing the ethnographic self into the text is a way of recognising that, more than any other methodology, participant observation involves forming knowledge inter-subjectively through intimate relationships - or rather 'lopsided friendships' (Rapp 1986:35) in which intimacy is used as a instrument of research - and a means of bringing 'the anthropologist's own positioning into focus' (Amit 2000:6). Although the extremes of auto-ethnography, when the researcher becomes more of an object of analysis than those they are supposedly studying, have been accused of navel gazing, it is clear that the burden of evidence in anthropology rests in the person of the ethnographer: '"how we know" is deeply entrenched in "who we are"' (Chua, High and Lau 2008:17).

In that vein, I will supplement here the neat summary of my fieldwork period that I provided above, which does not encompass either the messy and contingent realities of my research, or include all the different identities I have assumed over many periods and years of living in Ethiopia. The first time I visited I was twenty. I had spent six months working in a supermarket and a box factory in Somerset with the aim of travelling somewhere, anywhere - or rather, not anywhere, as I had not saved enough money to go to a country with a high cost of living. Within this basic limitation, I picked Ethiopia almost at random. I had never knowingly met anyone from Ethiopia until I went to the Ethiopian Embassy in London to pick up my visa. My reference points were an extremely limited swirl of images: a barefoot marathon runner, mountains, ancient rock churches, Haile Selassie with a lion. Inescapably, Bob Geldof swearing at the camera 'just give us your fucking money' to a backdrop of hungry children was in there somewhere. My main aim was to have an adventure, and I succeeded.

Somehow - not through a concerted plan - three months of rattling around on buses as a foolhardy and naive young woman turned into my life to date.

Over the years since my first visit, I have been tourist and tour guide; volunteer, freelance consultant, and NGO worker on an international salary; student, event organiser, report writer, and evaluator; visa sponsor and visa supplicant (these two have probably involved the most tears shed); renter and landlord; host and guest. I have made and lost friends; lived comfortably and scraped by on little income; been cared for as a patient and provided care for young children. This last and most intimate identity is the one that provides the most difficulty in separating 'how I know' from 'who I am'; that of a mother of two half-Ethiopian children, partner of an Ethiopian man (and government worker; he is a doctor in a rural hospital, and was a medical student in a government university during most of the period this thesis describes), and daughter-in-law of a rural family in a different but nearby area of North Shewa to my research area. These kinship ties mean that since the end of my village-based research in 2015, I have lived on and off in Ethiopia, including on maternity leave in 2015-2016 in a condominium flat in Debre Berhan; and since June 2018 and for the foreseeable future, on the outskirts of Addis Ababa.

The part that my skin colour and British passport have played in my ability to travel is not lost on me. My motivations as a youth - to travel, to feel free, to have new experiences and see new places - were after all not very far removed from aspirations held by some of the government workers such as Wonde in chapter 6 (intertwined with economic and practical considerations), and from (young) people everywhere who want to 'expose themselves to chance' (Di Nunzio 2015). The difference lies in the ease by which I was able to achieve my aim: a few tedious months stacking boxes to earn some money, a tourist visa that was easily and cheaply granted, and a warm welcome in a country in which my pounds went a very long way; none of which apply to an Ethiopian who wants to come to Britain (although the quality of the welcome may vary).

Navaro-Yashin writes that 'against a colonial conceptualisation of research in which students of anthropology assume that the world is a laboratory from which they can pick and choose sites for fieldwork, I would argue that only certain spaces and themes make themselves available and accessible for study by certain people' (2012:xii). My first experience of Ethiopia could certainly be characterised thus: I 'picked and chose' a country based on no substantial reason, and my visit was only possible due to my privileged position. Since then, however, I have been lucky enough - and have also worked hard - to make part of my life in Ethiopia, and agree with Navaro-Yashin that

> anthropology is fruitful only insofar as the anthropologist is able to establish a relationality with the people whom she or he is studying. This is not possible just anywhere, for any one person or with any other person. The world does not wait for us out there to be the object of our science (2012:xii).

Overview of Chapters

In **chapter 1**, I will provide historical context for the Ethiopian state through three eras. Starting with a consideration of land tenure and associated social organisation, I will explore the characterisation of Ethiopian - specifically highland and Orthodox Christian - society as hierarchical, and how it intersects with a long history of Ethiopian exceptionalism. As background for the ethnographic chapters that follow, I will also provide a more detailed explanation of the political ideology of the EPRDF-led state in the twenty-first century, and examine how it functions at the level of the local state, the *kebele*, and below; the many and overlapping sub-state structures through which Ethiopian citizens participate in the developmental work of the state. Finally, I will reflect on the hierarchical state-society relations, as depicted in the literature on Ethiopia, and place my research in the context of recent re-thinking of hierarchy in anthropology and the anthropology of Ethiopia.

Chapter 2 will introduce the place and people at the heart of the thesis. I will write about the history and particularities of Kewet *wereda,* considered a remote

and undesirable frontier space by the government workers assigned to work there, before providing an account of the backgrounds, characteristics and everyday lives of the state employees. I will then look at how rural public servants use coffee ceremonies to form a (temporary and fluctuating) social group that asserts a form of government worker identity in the face of isolation, potential danger and vulnerability.

Chapter 3 will look at the intersection of different types of mobility and aspiration. Concentrating on teachers, I will explore the social mobility supposed to be engendered by success in education, especially for those from rural backgrounds who have graduated from university against the odds. Through close ethnographic attention to the journeys to, from and around the village, I will describe how lack of access to transport contrasts to the resources available to an evangelical NGO, allied to global sources of power and money.

In the next two chapters, I will look at how two different bodily substances become subject to state management and as such, play a role in constituting the state, and the nature of government work. Breastfeeding (**chapter 4**) is an important part of maternal identity in Ethiopia, where it is almost universally practiced, and is highly symbolic of selfless love and care. Infant feeding is also part of a long history of control over (African) women's bodies by colonial and postcolonial powers. Through analysis of a particular event, I will show how development interventions that focus on child nutrition in Ethiopia are partly predicated on assumptions about cultural pathologies, and how such interventions are not working to inculcate forms of biopolitical governance among the population, but in fact having unintended physical, emotional and affective consequences for female government workers.

Chapter 5 will concentrate on the polluting and fundamentally 'anti-social' matter of shit. It will look at how a latrine promotion programme that aimed to provoke disgust and shame among rural populations convened various contradictory governance techniques and ideologies. Government workers had

to perform various types of labour, from the physical and sensory realm to the production of statistics, in order to make the programme legible.

Chapter 6 will consist of the life history of Tomas, a teacher who left state employment in a rural school for a precarious existence in the town. Touching on themes of migration, development, transport and religious conversion, this chapter is intended to provide one individual's experience as a counter to narratives that treat the state and its employees as abstractions.

Chapter 1: State and Hierarchy in Ethiopia

Introduction: Hierarchy and The 'Grand Narrative' of Ethiopian Exceptionalism

Above my desk in Addis Ababa, acquired slightly randomly, I have a chart taped on the wall called 'World History Timeline.'[35] The most immediately noticeable historical eras, represented by giant blue and orange areas spreading across centuries and continents are the Roman, Holy Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman empires. Look more closely, however, and there is one slim line representing, according to this chart, by far the longest uninterrupted ruling system in world history. This line runs from the Kingdom of Meroe, starting in circa 500 BCE, shades into Axum (c. 250-900 AD), Mekura (c. 600 - 1100 AD) and the Kingdom of Ethiopia from around 1100 AD, before coming to an abrupt end with the revolution of 1974 that brought the military-communist Derg regime to power. As the ultimate in a 'grand narrative' mode of organising history, in many ways this chart conceals more than it reveals. It represents 'an essentialist vision of identity, a transcendental conception of history, a unicentric and teleological orientation and a strong emphasis on concepts of continuity, indigeneity and unity,' as Sara Marzagora writes about the Ethiopian 'grand narrative' of history (2016:71). The chart does, however, have the benefit of clearly showing the basis for the strand of exceptionalism that runs through Ethiopian historiography, in what Alessandro Triulzi (2002) calls variously 'Greater Ethiopia' (cf. Donald Levine), 'Church and State' (cf. Tadesse Tamrat) and 'Great Tradition' approaches. Central to this narrative of an unbroken line of Ethiopian Orthodox Christian state rule by those descending from the Biblical King Solomon and Queen of Sheba is the book of the *Kibre Negest* (Glory of the Kings) that, drawing on older written and oral sources, appeared in its current form in the fourteenth century (Demichelis 2016:224). Wendy Belcher (2012) makes the case for the agency of Ethiopians

[35] Published by Schofield & Sims (2017); unfortunately it is too detailed to reproduce satisfactorily at a smaller scale.

throughout history in shaping and appropriating discursive representations that placed them apart from (and above) other people, including the racialised hypothesis that sought to explain the presence of sophisticated and complex societies throughout sub-Saharan Africa by positing European or Middle Eastern ancestry (Jedrej 1996:16). Belcher writes that highland Ethiopians 'have consistently represented themselves as exceptional for their cultural qualities of antiquity, originality, and purity and have had considerable success in disseminating this view' (2012:41), but that their 'success in projecting themselves as exceptional has come at the tremendous cost of others' (2012:31), with a *'Habesha*[36] identity that was both oppressive and assimilative' (2012:32).

I start this chapter with a discussion of my wall-chart for two reasons. Firstly, to illustrate the contrast between the continuity of rule pre-twentieth century, however contested and uneven, and the rapid changes seen in the last quarter of the twentieth century, the sedimented legacies of all of which can be detected in current state formations. Secondly, as an introduction to the enduring notion of exceptionalism, which has been part of discourse about the Ethiopian nation since the earliest of times.[37] It is a common trope in the persistent 'grand narrative' of Ethiopian historiography to attribute 'the key to fifteen centuries of Abyssinian[38] survival' (Prunier 2015:421) to the hierarchical way in which power has been understood and exercised, primarily by the state rather than by resting on 'non-existent civil society or even on embryonic social classes' (Prunier 2015:422). This reading of a 'state-led ordering which distinguishes Ethiopia from the rest of the continent' (Vaughan 2011:623) has a bearing on another aspect of

[36] Marzagora defines *habesha* as follows: 'self-designation predominantly used by Christian highlanders inhabiting the region between Asmara and Addis Ababa, i.e. mainly Amharic- and Tigrinya-speakers' (2016:10).
[37] 'Diodorus Siculus, a first-century B.C.E. Greek historian, wrote that the "Ethiopians" claimed not only to be unique but also to be widely acknowledged as such. Everyone knew, the "Ethiopians" insisted, that they were the only true natives, the first of all peoples and the most pious, so righteous that the gods had never allowed them to suffer the rule of a foreigner' (Belcher 2012:27).
[38] Etymologically related to *habesha,* Abyssinia 'is a geographical area that roughly embraced the northern highland provinces of Tigray, Gondar, Gojjam, Wag, Lasta, northern Shoa, and much of highland Eritrea, which generally shared a common polity, social structure, system of land tenure, culture, and religion' (Young 1997:3).

contemporary Ethiopian exceptionalism: the characterisation of it as a strong and expanding state that has retained the ability, post-1990s, to implement its own indigenous developmental political, social and economic programmes in the face of neoliberal hegemony.

In this chapter, I will provide the historical background to the particularities of the current systems of state power and governance in Ethiopia. This will be crucial to understanding the assumptions that permeate writing about the Ethiopian state, in which hierarchy and patronage systems are figured as central to its functioning. These are assumptions that I found during the course of my research to be subject to slippage at the lowest levels of governance in present-day rural North Shewa, and that I will explore through my ethnographic data in the following chapters of this thesis. This chapter will examine the recent rethinking of hierarchy in anthropology, in order to problematise how it has been understood in the political realm in Ethiopia. I will also discuss how representations of a society that is supposedly extremely amenable to hierarchical forms of authority can have repercussions in modern statecraft and contemporary consequences for Ethiopia's global relations.

The State in Historical Context

The last quarter of the twentieth century was a period of massive political turbulence in Ethiopia. Following a serious famine in the north and a period of national unrest in the early 1970s, Emperor Haile Selassie I, crowned in 1930,[39] was overthrown in 1974. After the coup, the Derg ('committee') regime under military-communist leader Mengistu Hailemariam eventually consolidated its power by brutally crushing counter-insurgent dissent in a campaign known as the *qey shibr* (Red Terror), which killed tens of thousands, including large numbers of young activists and intellectual elites (Bahru 2014, 2010; Wiebel 2014). The Derg

[39] Before his coronation, the former Ras Tafari Mekonnen acted as regent during the reign of Empress Zewditu (1916 - 1930), following the death of Emperor Menelik II and the short lived reign of Lij Iyasu (1910 - 1916).

were in turn deposed in 1991, by an alliance of rebels with a Marxist-Leninist background, who became the current ruling party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Under their original ideologue Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, until his sudden death in 2012, followed by Hailemariam Desalegn (2012-2018), and Abiy Ahmed (2018 onwards), the EPRDF governed according to the self-designated principles of *abyotawi* (revolutionary) democracy and state decentralisation on the basis of ethnic federalism.[40]

Despite the very different philosophies of rule, which can be very roughly glossed as imperial, military-communist and developmental, it would not be accurate to demarcate the three time periods under question as entirely separate, either in ideology or practice. Momentous policy changes, most notably the nationalisation of land under the Derg and the ethnically-based decentralisation of the EPRDF, caused seismic shifts in previous forms of governance; however, 'moments of rupture concealed longterm continuities of significance' (Donham 2002:3). From the perspective of the rural majority, many overlapping features of rule remained the same. This point was made by Teferi Abate, when he questioned whether 'EPRDF's self-representation and ideology were accompanied by similar changes in the images, metaphors and administrative practices through which state powers have been locally understood and experienced by ordinary citizens' (2004:612). Overall, as Dessalegn Rahmato writes in an overview of Ethiopian state policy in the twentieth century 'the three regimes under discussion have many things in common, and may be described as intrusive regimes. Each in its own way has been driven by the desire to regulate, manipulate and mobilise rural society for its own ends' (2009:309).

The majority of those responsible for performing the labour of 'regulating, manipulating and mobilising' the people were - and remain - the government workers sent to rural areas where the vast majority of the population live. As

[40] Although Abiy has 'presided over a dramatic set of iconoclastic policy shifts' (Fisher and Meressa 2018:194) that have resulted in media commentary stating that the current government is EPRDF in name only (e.g. AfricaFocus Bulletin 2019; Davison 2019)

context for what follows in this thesis, I will look here at the roles, backgrounds and status of these government workers over the course of the three different periods in question. Systems of land tenure, as the basis of rural livelihoods and a key focus of political activism in Ethiopia's late twentieth century, are a crucial factor in understanding forms of social organisation and relations to authority; a huge subject, but one to which I will turn for an overview next. In what follows, I will generally concentrate on highland, specifically Amhara, Ethiopia, concomitant with the area where I carried out my research,[41] while acknowledging the impossibility of separating the history of the traditionally hegemonic polity from the so-called peripheral areas. This point is widespread in historiographies that counter the hegemonic 'grand narrative,' which especially from the 1970s onwards 'gained international visibility and internal legitimacy… [at] present, they hold a considerable weight in the country's national narrative' (Marzagora 2016:95), and have played a key role in shaping the state structure in which ethnic identity is the dominant principle of political organisation (see below). As Benedikt Korf et al. write about Somali Region '[although it] appears to be at the periphery, it is nevertheless central to the constitution of the Ethiopian nation-state' (2013:40).

Setting the Scene: Land Rights in Imperial Highland Ethiopia

The historical pattern of land tenure found in highland Orthodox Christian areas of Ethiopia, based on an ox-plough agricultural system, was exported to other parts of the country in periods of imperial expansion, modified during Haile Selassie's reign, and decisively discarded with the reforms that were initiated by the post-revolution Derg regime from the mid-1970s. It is still, however, deployed in support of the idea that Ethiopian society as a whole is deeply hierarchical (e.g. Prunier 2015). In this section, I will outline the traditional system of land rights and explore the ways in which land tenure affected social relations and mobility, and is supposed to have fostered a particular type of hierarchy.

[41] Although, as I will show in the next chapter, my research site was atypical of Amhara Region, for its location in the lowlands bordering Afar Region.

Distribution of land in Amhara, as elsewhere in imperial Ethiopia, was based on hereditary use-rights, called *rist* in Amharic, that derived from descent from a common ancestor. Land held as *rist* was neither communal nor private and holders were neither serfs nor tenants; other members of the *rist* group had no authority over the individual *rist* holder's plots, which were permanently secured to them, but neither were they that individual's sole property, as they could not be sold. As Messay Kebede writes 'based on descent rights, [*rist*] cannot be expressed in terms of commodity relations, any more than it can be evoked to exclude claimants so long as the kinship tie is established' (1999:129). These *rist* rights coexisted with another form of land tenure, called *gult*. *Gult* land was given to the elite by rulers in reward for service, or to churches and monasteries as endowments. *Gult* and *rist* were different types of right to land rather than distinct areas of land; for example, a *gult* holder could hold *rist* rights to some of the fields within his own *gult* estate. *Rist* holders were not tenants, but did owe tribute in the form of tax and/ or labour, seen as a tribute to the imperial power who allowed its use. However, the imperial power was not seen as the true owner, but an intermediary between the people and a higher power. In an imperial decree from 1800, Ras Gugsa declared:

> The land belongs to God, Man has only its usufruct... Who then dares to call himself the owner of something stronger than himself? Holders of fiefs: lords of Provinces, listen: there is no more hereditary suzerainity. God alone has possession always. He gives sovereign right to whom he pleases. He has given it to me... I am master of the soil... I give rank and investiture (quoted in Messay 1999:130).

Another striking aspect of the *rist* system was that people always held more rights than they could actualise: the amount of land held by individuals was highly unequal and subject to political manoeuvring. Thus hereditary land-use rights were not the fixed category that may be assumed by such a term; Allen Hoben's ethnographic study of land tenure in the rural Gojjam area of Amhara (1973), carried out between 1960 and 1970, showed that the amount of land held by households varied significantly during the course of the household head's life.

Ambitious individuals were able to increase their landholdings through litigation that was able to prove a claim of membership in several descent groups at once, sometimes through their wife's descent group, as well as through clearing scrub land or claiming 'unused' land. Power and status - the ability to mobilise support and influence people - was as an important means of acquiring land through claiming hereditary control over that land and according to John Young 'the fluidity of land-holdings from one generation to the next... made social mobility both upwards and downwards common' (1997:41). The power that allowed some farmers to claim more land than others was 'diffuse, localised and personal' (Hoben 1973:184), and was often based on the individual's active role in community affairs. In the case of *debteras*, non-ordained church choristers whose combination of spiritual and esoteric knowledge allies them with sorcery, 'political influence may also be enhanced by an element of fear' (Hoben 1973:184).

The descent group through which *rist* rights were available was not a cohesive entity and did not hold any significance in terms of kinship, ritual, religious or social life, for example marriage arrangements. It had no function other than than the distribution of land rights, and even then, membership of one descent group often overlapped with membership of others, thus introducing 'an element of disorder, ambiguity or conflict into social organisation' (Hoben 1973:17). In a succinct summary of his position, Hoben writes:

> The *rist* system is not a system of solidary corporate groups providing men with a set of nesting economic, political, and ritual loyalties to one another in opposition to successively more remote groups; it is rather a system of structured ambiguities which tends to keep men apart from one another except to form temporary alliances on the basis of frank self-interest (1973:237).

The weakness of the (cognatic or bilateral) descent group as an enduring form of social organisation is in contrast to many other (agnatic or lineage-based) African societies. Writing about Tigray, Barbara Hendrie says that, although descent groups were only operational in land claims (called *risti* in Tigrinya)

the operating principles of cognatic descent probably encouraged what can be called an ethos of optation in Tigray social life… individuals are oriented toward a high degree of autonomy in choosing which social relationships they maintain and which they allow to lapse… calls to social action based on appeals to group solidarity usually have little effect (1999:54).

Hoben believes the 'structured ambiguities' of the *rist* system led to a similarity of lifestyle and lack of cultural distinction between *gult*-holding gentry and *rist*-holding peasant farmers, and in turn this prevented the emergence of distinct social classes. As historian Donald Crummey summarised 'Ethiopia had classes in themselves, but not classes for themselves' (1979:23). In this reading, the land tenure system was the primary reason behind the inability of the nobility to solidify into a class or caste. In this situation, high status was based not on an essentialist idea of different types of person born into particular positions, but is contingent upon the skills and personal qualities that facilitate the ability to manoeuvre and to rally allies.[42]

In a similar vein, Messay (1999) argues that feudal is not a useful term to describe pre-revolutionary Ethiopia, despite its prevalent use both internally and externally (e.g. Gilkes 1975). He contrasts the situation in Ethiopia to feudal Europe where a class of nobles developed their own hereditary system of power with de facto autonomy from the central monarch. In Ethiopia, however, political dispersion was weak: the aristocracy did not develop hereditary rights and were therefore replaceable and interchangeable, although the power of individual emperors to do so waxed and waned. The tax burden, which rested on the land rather than the individual, was onerous. However, the inalienable land use rights of *rist* holders prevented the nobility from becoming a class who were able to acquire large estates of private land on which peasants were required to labour,

[42] However, there are exceptions that resulted in the social differentiation and exclusion of some groups, decided by birth; for example, the boat builders (*weyto*) who live around Lake Tana and other groups of craftspeople, such as tanners and potters. There is disagreement about whether 'caste' is an appropriate term to describe their position (for discussion, see: Epple 2018; Freeman and Pankhurst 2003; Pankhurst 1999). Slave descent is another important means of drawing distinctions between different categories of person (Boylston 2018; Kiya 2018; Meckelburg 2015).

and it is on this basis that Messay denies that imperial Ethiopia could be defined as feudal.

The rural Amhara household of the imperial era is described by Hoben as 'an enterprise,' based on, but not defined by, kinship and whose access to land may shift over time. There was a 'comparatively low degree of trans-generational continuity... neither the household, nor the homestead, nor the estates of *rist* land upon which they depend, are enduring units of social organisation' (Hoben 1973:64). Members of the household were under the hierarchical authority of the household head, but the composition of those who live in the homestead was not fixed by strict or unvarying rules of marriage, birth or other kinship principles. Divorce and remarriage, and therefore step-children, were common; as long as paternity was not disputed, this did not diminish the child's potential claim to equal *rist* rights in the future. Servants, temporary workers such as shepherds, and others, whether distant kin or non-kin, were integrated into households in a patron-client relationships with the household head and his wife. As with all other positions of power, however, these relationships, according to Teferi Abate based on his research in Amhara Region 'were conceived [of] only as temporary contracts that should shift and fluctuate as time goes by' (2004:618).

Historically, Ethiopians have famously been quick to have recourse to the law; the 'commonplace observation that "Abyssinian society must surely rank as one of the most litigious in the world"' (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003:22) is one I have heard several times from friends and acquaintances over the years. According to Hoben, this can be traced to the *rist* land tenure system 'with its overlapping and ambiguous land rights, its ever-present possibilities for upward mobility at the expense of others, and the premium it places on political expertise, [it] produces what, in comparison with many other agrarian systems, appears to be a high degree of endemic competition for and conflict over land' (1973:243). However, he writes that although litigation through asserting descent rights was the major means of claiming land, in practice the poorest households, especially female-

headed, or those who provided services for the community, such as priests, were not targeted for court cases.

Tenancy as a means of accessing land was not an indicator of low social status in highland Ethiopia, as it historically has been elsewhere in the world, and tenants were not a discrete class of subordinated people, dependent on and controlled by landlords. In fact, as Hendrie shows in her work in Tigray in the 1990s, the ox-plough form of agriculture meant that land was less important than oxen in creating wealth and social status. As it was impossible for households with no ox or only one ox to farm their holdings, 'the poor tend to act as landlords of the rich, a situation the reverse of what is usually found in peasant economies' (1999:119). The multiple economic and social identities and positions held by farmers, who could be simultaneously 'owners,' tenants and landlords, according to Gebru Tareke 'diverted attention from group concerns,' and meant that 'classes were dynamic social categories the members of which may or may not, fully or partly, have been conscious of their identical interests' (1991:73).

The situation was radically different especially in southern and western Ethiopia from the last quarter of the nineteenth century, where northern settlers acquired tribute rights over farmers as a result of state conquest of previously independently governed (although often tribute-paying) areas. Land was divided by *siso* (third), with only one third left to the indigenous population, via *gult* rights to local *balabbats* (chiefs). Large tracts of land were bought, seized or granted to northern incomers, pejoratively called *neftegna,* often administered by a proliferating number of agents or subdivided among relatives, and to the Orthodox church, who built churches in traditionally Muslim or animist areas. In this way, mostly without being evicted, as John Markakis and Nega Ayele write 'the majority of southern population became tenants on what used to be their land,' with a massive increase in tribute 'from a third to half of the produce, plus a tenth in land tax, plus extensive service in labour, far exceeding custom and practice in the north' (1986:23). By the mid-1960s, according to Bahru Zewde 'the problem of tenancy became too acute to ignore' (2001:195), and the defeat in

Parliament in 1965 of a bill to regulate tenancy was the precursor to the 'Land to the Tiller' student demonstrations that eventually led to the overthrow of Haile Selassie.

The Modernising Imperial State

Ethiopia's 'modern' period is often understood as beginning during the reign of Emperor Menelik II in the late nineteenth century: as Marzagora writes, the secular teleological version of the grand narrative[43] holds that 'Ethiopia's maturity is achieved under Mənilək II, when the double processes of modernisation and centralisation led to the dawn of the present-day nation-state' (2016:89). Instrumental to this account is the 1896 Battle of Adwa, in which Ethiopian forces repelled an attempted Italian invasion and consolidated their position as one of only two non-colonised African states.[44] As the discussion of tenancy above indicated, Menelik's rule was a period of massive national territorial growth with imperial rule expanding from the highlands of Amhara and Tigray to the south, west and east, bringing different polities under its ambit.[45]

Menelik's successor Ras Tafari Mekonnen, designated as heir apparent in 1916 and crowned as Emperor Haile Selassie I in 1930, had 'a vision of a modern imperial Ethiopia,' as Ayala Levin writes (2016:449). This involved a balance between the maintenance of tradition, which he claimed to represent in his own person as the direct descendent of the Biblical King Solomon, and engagement with technologies and educational, artistic and cultural currents in the wider world. This balance was especially evident in Addis Ababa, which 'the emperor sought to

[43] As distinguished from the transcendental narratives drawn from the *Kibre Negest* (e.g. Messay 1999).
[44] Liberia was the only other 'sovereign and independent state in sub-Saharan Africa until the end of the 1950s' (Bonacci 2015:148), although its history is entirely distinct from Ethiopia's, in that it was constituted in the nineteenth century by 'manumitted slaves and their free black counterparts' from the US and the Caribbean who 'vowed to create a haven where they would be the sole owners of capital, land and the means of production' (Pailey 2019:13).
[45] To the east of the highlands, the populations that came to be ruled by the Ethiopian state under Menelik were predominately pastoralists, whose mobile way of life led to different dynamics from those experienced by cultivators in other areas, albeit no less fraught with violence (Barnes 2000).

shape… so that it embodied African modernity while simultaneously representing an ostensibly uninterrupted continuity with tradition' (Levin 2016:449). Haile Selassie was also active in enacting laws and policies that were intended in part, according to Bahru 'to impress on Europeans Ethiopia's political modernity' (2001:141). He consolidated power through the 1931 Constitution, which was supposed to 'in the words of its main author Täklä-Hawaryat, "…let foreign governments know that Ethiopia had a Constitution and that its government was therefore constitutional, and to answer allegations of arbitrariness, feudalistic rule, undefined administrative procedures and chaotic government"' (Marzagora 2016:155). Contesting the modernity of the Ethiopian state was foregrounded in the lead-up to the Italian occupation of 1935-41, as Italian and pro-Italian British media[46] represented Ethiopia as a country of barbaric slave owners[47] in need of the civilisation the fascists would bring. In service of their 'civilising ideals,' the Italian army had gassed a quarter of a million Ethiopians to death by 1938 and combined 'old-fashioned savageries… with industrial killing methods… [this was] so out of keeping with Italians' self-perception as the more "humane" dictatorship that it has been edited out of popular and official memory' and it was not officially admitted by the Italian government until 1995 (Ben-Ghiat 2001:126).

The place of bureaucracy in this process of modernisation was crucial to its success. As Sarah Vaughan writes 'Haile Selassie I made a substantive attempt to centralise and bureaucratise government over the middle decades of the twentieth century, wresting away the traditional authority of regional elites to a newly educated administrative class' (2011:621). However, as I will describe in chapter 3, access to secular education in the imperial years of the twentieth century was only partially meritocratic. This meant that salaried state workers

[46] In a 1935 *Evening Standard* article entitled 'We Can Applaud Italy' British novelist Evelyn Waugh wrote 'Ethiopia is a barbarous country that is capriciously and violently governed. The conquest of Abyssinia is an object which any patriotic European can applaud' (in Gallagher 1996:163). Waugh went on to report from Ethiopia for the *Daily Mail* in 1935-6 during the fascist invasion, and described in florid language how Italy's road-building programme would allow the 'eagles of ancient Rome' to import qualities of industry and rationalism, which alone could develop the country (Waugh 1936:253).

[47] Efforts to suppress the slave trade started in the mid-nineteenth century and Ethiopia signed the League of Nations Slavery Convention in 1926, but slavery was not finally outlawed until 1942 (Whyte 2014).

largely consisted of urbanites from the north and central highlands, whose gaining of position was linked to 'traditional status, patronage and nepotism... educated sons of the aristocracy enjoyed the highest preference' (Markakis and Nega 1986:35).

The institution of *gult* land rights was weakened through the course of the twentieth century, and abolished in 1966-7, although some were still paying it until the revolution in 1974 (Gilkes 1975:116). As the bureaucratic apparatus of the state expanded, tax reform meant that tribute formerly paid to *gult* holders, often in the form of tithed produce or corvée labour, was now payable in cash to state representatives, answerable to national-level authorities in Addis Ababa. Land tax was initiated for the first time after the defeat of the Italians, in a proclamation of 1941 that abolished all payment in kind. In some readings (e.g. Hoben 1970), state employees took over the position of the nobility in their patron-client relationships with those beneath them in the social scale, with peasant farmers expecting protection and support in exchange for their loyalty and taxes. Others believe that this period was crucial to the formation of a group (or class) of state employees who held responsibilities without power. Writing about the northern region of Tigray starting in the 1940s, John Young says that:

> State centralisation and modernisation over the following twenty years further reduced the powers of the regional nobility... and crucially, gave birth to a petit bourgeoisie. The central state's efforts to replace personal means of control with bureaucratic institutions spurred dissension because it gave the petit-bourgeois functionaries of those institutions a critical role in the development and security of the state, but at the same time it denied them a share in power (1997:54).

Until the mid-1960s, the civil service provided fairly unrestricted access to state employment that was relatively well-paid for the educated few, enabling 'the smooth absorption of educated Ethiopians into the expanding state apparatus'(Markakis and Nega 1986:49). Despite this however, numbers of government employees overall remained small. Hoben describes the layer of bureaucracy at district level in Gojjam in 1966 - a medical worker, police sergeant, a tax collector and two judges (reflecting the high levels of litigation related to

claiming *rist* land rights) - as beyond the reach of 'most of the people most of the time' (1973:207). They were also often not local to the areas where they worked. Prefiguring the dynamics I will lay out in the following ethnographic chapters, Julianne Weis describes the frequent mobility of imperial public servants, and the effect this had on social relationships:

> Helina had moved frequently throughout the southern region of Ethiopia, remote from any close kin. Her husband was employed as a policeman in the Haile Selassie regime, and his frequent re-stationing was symptomatic of the empire's expansion within the previously peripheral zones of the south. With each relocation, Helina would have little time to properly engage with neighbouring families (2015:1).

By the late 1960s, civil service expansion saturation point was reached and recruitment curtailed, especially after economic retrenchment following the Suez crisis in 1967. Salaries, conditions and possibilities for advancement were also affected; for example, school teachers in the late 1960s were 'protesting pay and conditions, and their opposition to the education reforms proposed that would limit education to primary and practical level' (Markakis and Nega 1986:82). Disenchanted government workers and students who could no longer automatically expect to become state employees became radicalised. Marzagora writes that the socio economic conditions of different generations of intellectuals in the 1960s were instrumental in their attitudes to dissent: 'while the older thinkers had secure and well paid jobs in the government, civil service or state-sponsored cultural institutions, the students graduated when unemployment was on the rise' (2017:439). In alliance with peasants, who had started to become conscious of the 'land to the tiller' slogan, circulated by university students since 1965, government workers played an instrumental role in the revolution that overthrew the imperial regime in 1974. As these state employees often gained their positions - and prior to that, their access to education - through patronage, nepotism and status, according to Markakis and Nega (1986), this meant that the activism of students and young public servants was directed against the elites, who in many cases were their own parents. Describing this era in North Shewa, Ahmed Hassan includes a widely circulated verse couplet, written from the point

of view of a local government official whose child had joined the revolutionaries: 'The wild rose we nurtured to grow/ Weeding and turning its soil/ Began to sway back and forth/ To prick us with its thorns' (2002:76).

The Derg Era: 'Development through Cooperation'

The turbulence of the Derg regime era saw the state enact massive structural reform, including, according to agricultural historian James McCann 'the revolution's most profound single act. It outlawed private ownership of land and land holdings over 10 hectares (the maximum a single ox-plough household could manage), abolished rural wage labor, and guaranteed access to land to all claimants' (1995:248). The effect this had on the Orthodox Church, previously a major land-holder, was seismic and heralded an 'abrupt change in the fortunes of the church' (Boylston 2018:30), even if 'in fact the encroachment of secular bureaucratic institutions into domains of church authority has been going on for at least a century' (Boylston 2018:22).

As well as land reform, the Derg took charge of 'a project of transformation, that was pursued with energy and dedication' (Clapham 2018:1153). This transformation was envisaged within (and financially supported by) Soviet-style directed socialism, and encompassed many economic, social and political initiatives, including large-scale resettlement, restructuring of local government, nationalisation of industries and agricultural production, and the expansion of primary education and adult literacy programmes (see chapter 3). These programmes were partly implemented by new and often zealous cadres of the *zemecha* (campaign) for 'development through cooperation.' Overall more than 50,000 students and teachers were involved in the *zemecha* (Teferi 2004), who, among other activities, formed the peasant associations that became present-day *kebeles,* in a process that Christopher Clapham (2002) called 'encadrement,' or the incorporation of citizens into structures of state control. The *zemecha* provided practical help in implementing the new programmes; they were also

vectors by which new ideas spread, often in unpredictable and contingent ways (James et al 2002; Donham 1999). An important part of the role of the *zemecha* and Derg-appointed public servants was to oppose and bypass their predecessors. As Dessalegn Rahmato writes, in 1975 '1,000 men - plus a single woman - were appointed as administrators, development agents and land reform bureau staff, called "apostles of change," to dislodge the imperial provincial bureaucracy' (2009:142). Despite this there were similarities with government employees under Haile Selassie: like them, students of the *zemecha* were largely drawn from urban backgrounds. According to Clapham, the *zemecha* 'had become accustomed to think of the countryside as a zone of backwardness and squalor... the encounter between peasants and students was one of discovery on both sides: it is scarcely too much to say that the creation of a politics of urban-rural relations in Ethiopia dates to that moment' (2002:14). The idea that development was a top-down process, a 'higher form of wisdom' (Clapham 2002:16) that the *zemecha* - representing the state - held the responsibility to impart to the peasants below them, was a continuation of imperial attitudes to modernisation, augmented by the centralising power of the encadrement process.

State Contraction and Expansion under the EPRDF

The EPRDF came to power in 1991 with a dirigiste political philosophy of revolutionary (*abyotawi*) democracy: a system in which development is seen as a reciprocal obligation, enforceable by a vanguard state (or fusion of state-party-market) with a hierarchical model of civic participation, and in which 'political sovereignty resides in collectivities' defined as ethnic groups or 'nations, nationalities and peoples' (Dereje 2011:809). This ideology has Marxist-Leninist origins, adapted during the period of struggle against the Derg in the late 1970s and 1980s, and linked to the revolutionary student movement of the 1960s and 1970s.[48] In a similar vein to other African socialist-revolutionary movements who

[48] The entangled history of leftist resistance to the imperial regime emerging from the student movement informed both the Derg and what became the EPRDF. Exploring this history and the

gained power in the post-Cold War era and adopted 'illiberal market-building' policies (Weis 2016:343), but with its own specific characteristics, *abyotawi* democracy is what Jean-Nicolas Bach calls 'an original ideological innovation' that operates as 'a "bricolage" [of] … Leninism, Marxism, Maoism, and also liberalism' (2011:641-2). The EPRDF position has shifted over its years in power, as talk of *lematawi habt* (developmental capitalism) came to the fore in the early 2000s; however, this did not result in state retreat. Toni Weis calls the EPRDF's ruling philosophy, 'vanguard capitalism,' as it combines 'the centralising political logic of a Leninist movement party with the expansive logic of capitalist markets' (2016:326).

The rural focus that has been central to EPRDF's political ideology has been retained into the 2010s (as I will discuss in chapter 3). Ethiopia has the largest agricultural extension programme in Africa (Chinigò and Fantini 2015), although there has been a shift since the mid-2000s from support focused towards the *ch'ikun* (oppressed) and prevention of rent-seeking as a priority, to the promotion of market expansion and commercialisation among farmers (Lefort 2012; Vaughan 2011). In parallel there has also been a 'new focus on urban development… a significant shift in the EPRDF's political agenda which, during the party's first decade in power, was primarily concerned with rural constituencies' (Di Nunzio 2019:382).

Undoubtedly the most fundamental change in political organisation since the EPRDF came to power has been the decentralisation of power based on the principle of ethnic federalism, in a fundamental break from the centralising 'pan-Ethiopian' narrative of previous governments. In the process of the reorganisation of Ethiopia's territory into nine ethno-regional states,[49] the Constitution of 1994 famously (or notoriously) gave regions the right to self-determination, including the right to secede, according to Stalinist principles

ideological shifts of different factions is beyond the scope of this thesis; see: Bahru (2014, 2010); Bach (2011); Aregawi (2004).

[49] Plus two self-governing cities: Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa.

about 'the national question.'[50] An account of the complex history of ethnic-based federalism under EPRDF is beyond the capacity of this thesis;[51] I will merely outline three main points arising from analysis of Ethiopia's decentralisation and formal accommodation of ethnicity as a political principle. Firstly, decentralisation, the recognition and celebration of ethnic difference and 'unprecedented expansion of the civil service in the rural peripheries' (Weis 2016:187) happened alongside a paradoxical reinscription of power at the centre (Emmenegger 2016; Dessalegn 2009). Secondly, the Soviet-influenced ideas about 'nationality' were hybridised - 'grafted' or 'layered' (Donham 1999:5) - with notions of human rights in the early years of *abyotawi* democracy, in part to ensure support from the west for the newly formed government, and this intertwining has had diverse political effects (that are too complex to describe here). Finally, the foundation of all political action and interest is frequently reduced to ethnicity in analysis and commentary on the contemporary Ethiopian state, ignoring the multiple and overlapping ideologies and logics of rule that make up the political arena. Furthermore, some argue that increasingly, and especially since the watershed 2005 elections, other factors have become more prominent; according to Dereje Feyissa and Bruce Lawrence 'EPRDF has changed the core basis of its political legitimacy, shifting from ethnicity to development' (2014:302). Others state that the two have been held in productive tension since the early days of the TPLF. For example, Sarah Vaughan writes that 'conscious, as Marxists, that ethno-nationalist sentiment was insufficient to retain active peasant support, the Front's leadership sought to secure it by means of the delivery, and control, of socio-economic advantage' (2011:625).

[50] The established narrative is that the basis of ethnic federalism can be found in Walleligne Mekonen's article 'On the Question of Nationalities in Ethiopia,' published in the student paper *Struggle* in 1969 (reproduced in Gedion 2013). According to Vaughan, the consensus is that it was in Walleligne's 'terse analysis that the national question burst onto the scene, fully formed and endorsing self-determination up to and including secession, transforming Ethiopian politics forever and at a stroke' (2003:129-30), although she finds this narrative overly simplistic (for an extended discussion, see 2003:127-38).

[51] For a small selection of the writing on this topic, see: Asnake (2013); Abbink (2011); Aalen (2011); ICG (2009); Vaughan (2003).

The effect of EPRDF's accession to power on the public sector was initially paradoxical. Occurring at the end of the Cold War and the high point of structural adjustment policies[52] in the 1990s, the EPRDF's accession brought a significant increase in the influence of global financial and development institutions on domestic policy, leading to an 'IMF-mandated reform [that] required a significant downsizing of the public sector' in which, as Daniel Mains writes, state employees fell from 65 percent of the formal male labour force in 1990 to about 30 percent in 1997 (2012b:10) and privatisation of dozens of state-owned companies also occurred (Weis 2016:238). In 1997, a large scale dismissal saw over fifteen thousand public sector employees lose their jobs (Weis 2016:189), in part through the mechanism of *gimgema*, an evaluation technique that, as I will discuss in the following section, is often seen as a tool of political control (Labzaé forthcoming; Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003).

At the same time, however, new public service jobs were being created. In the decade leading up to 2003, nearly a quarter of a million local administrative positions had come into existence, according to Sarah Vaughan and Kjetil Tronvoll (2003:25). The majority of these new jobs required being stationed in peripheral rural areas and the ability to speak local languages, rather than only the national language of Amharic, creating a mutual antagonism between old and new state employees. Many new EPRDF officials reportedly expressed views such as 'that the "moribund" civil service was "the next enemy we have to fight now that we have overcome the Dergue"' (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003:25). The Derg-era administrators, known as *birokrasi*, were thus partly replaced, as René Lefort writes, by 'a new category of local administrators, generally poor young peasants who were judged to be naturally close to the new regime,' with its roots in mass mobilisation of rural populations (2012:687). The alliance with what one observer at the time described to Vaughan as 'lumpen intelligentsia,' or 'those with some education and authority but at the lower end of the social scale - junior teachers or government employees' (2011:627), was accompanied by sanctions (including

[52] The dictating of economic (and therefore social) policies using debt as leverage; 'free-market shock therapy' as Jason Hickel calls it (2017:22).

land redistribution), on the *birokrasi* as well as the *kirit fewdal* ('feudal remnants') of the imperial era. This process was sometimes known as 'war on the *birokrasi*,' a slogan, according to Vaughan, 'that was understood in different ways at different levels. The international community welcomed and supported what it saw as a determined national attempt by the new government to reform the overblown centralised socialist bureaucracy of the previous regime' (2011:627). As well as mass dismissals, 1997 also saw the start of a four year civil service reform programme, well-supported by donors, using the Ethiopian Civil Service College that had been opened in 1995. In this way, while the transitional period of the EPRDF's first years in office had damaged administrative capital 'heavy investment in the formation of new civil servants had restored much of it by the late 1990s' (Weis 2016:191), especially in the creation of a whole new layer of regional, rural-based bureaucrats.

After Prime Minister Meles Zenawi emerged victorious from an ideological tussle at the highest levels of the EPRDF that culminated post-2001 in what was known as the *tehadso* (renewal) of the party (Medhane and Young 2003), a 'politicised national capacity building bureaucracy of party members replaced the party per se as the engine of state building' (Vaughan 2011:620). The 1990s civil service reform was followed in 2003-04 by a large-scale public sector capacity building programme (PSCAP), the cornerstone of efforts to decentralise service delivery, which aimed to reform and streamline tax collection, recruitment and service delivery, and to introduce digital technology. The PSCAP used the language of 'new public management,' including 'business process engineering,' but 'the extent to which the government and its bilateral and multilateral funders shared analysis of what these transformation processes involved is moot' (Vaughan 2011:630). During this period, privatisation also reached a standstill: from the high point of eighty state-run companies sold to private investors in 1996 to none in 2005, when Meles declared that privatisation had come 'to a temporary halt' (quoted in Weis 2016:239).

New political dynamics arising from the opening and swift closing of political space following the contested and violent 2005 elections saw state and sub-state structures further reinforced in tandem with strengthened party linkages. A new position of *kebele* manager was created; a technocrat responsible for coordinating administrative tasks, whose upwardly accountable orientation shifted power away from the locally elected *kebele* chairman (Emmenegger et al. 2011). The *kebele* manager 'joined a dramatically expanded salariat at local levels:... teacher, development agent and health education worker numbers grew from 126,300 in 2004/5 to more than a quarter of a million in 2009/10' (Vaughan 2011:633-4), and overall 'the number of paid public officials doubled from about 400,000 in 2005 to 870,000 in 2010' (Weis 2016:313).

According to the World Bank 'the magnitude of the public sector as an employer is significant. Ethiopia... has a much larger share of wage employees in the public sector than many of its peers' (2016:32). At present, at around 23 percent of total employment and 45 percent of paid employment, public sector employment in Ethiopia is high compared to elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa (average 11.6 percent from total), and only slightly lower than the average in Europe and Central Asia (24.9 percent from total) (Mo Ibrahim Foundation 2018:50-1). However, as a percentage of total population, public sector employment in Ethiopia is low, at 1.3 percent: less than elsewhere in Africa (average 3 percent) and much less than other regions of the world (e.g. North America, 9.1 percent) (Mo Ibrahim Foundation 2018:50). In urban areas, from where most detailed employment statistics are drawn, government employment makes up a fifth of total employment (World Bank 2016:xii) and up to half of waged employment in smaller cities and Addis Ababa respectively (Monga et al. 2019:106; World Bank 2016:31).

Leninist thought was central to the EPRDF's formation and continued to play a large role in its political ideology after it came to power (Bach 2011; Aregawi 2004). In Lenin's *Theses on Bourgeois Democracy and the Proletarian Dictatorship*, the 'apparatus of bureaucracy and judiciary, under capitalism, even

in the most democratic republic, [is] for the workers and the working masses the greatest obstacle to making democracy effective'; the only remedy, and means of true freedom, is 'by drawing the mass organisations of the working people into constant and unrestricted participation in State administration' (quoted in Vaughan 2011:622). This influence provided a line of thinking about popular participation that ran alongside the expansion of the public sector into rural areas; unless people participated in the activities of the state, the developmental project would not be accepted as necessary and legitimate. In the words of Meles:

> Development is an exercise that requires appropriate behaviour on the part of millions of individuals [which cannot] be created and sustained by coercion alone. The development agenda must be hegemonic if successful development is to take place and if a developmental state is to be established (2011:168).

Mass associations, especially those for women and youth, have thus been an important (although shifting) part of state administration, under first the semi-autonomous areas administered by the TPLF in Tigray (Hendrie 1999) and then nationally under the EPRDF. They were disassociated from the party in the early 1990s; allowed to wither until the mid-2000s; and re-emerged post-2005, as the Women's and Youth Leagues, which were given the status of civil society organisations and cooperatives for economic activities (Vaughan 2011). By 2009, they had more than two million members (Weis 2016:276). Mass organisations were in the same spirit of participatory development as the sub-state structures I will describe below, with the equal possibility to act as both a means of tempering, or even bypassing, centralised forms of state power, while paradoxically also being a route by which the party-state can extend its reach.

The Decentralised Developmental State at Local Level

The lowest formal level of government administration in the Ethiopian state structure is the *kebele*, also known as a sub-district, a division of the *wereda* or district. Set up as peasant associations under the Derg, the *kebele* under the

EPRDF has been the 'constant object of administrative and political reforms and of continuous rounds of decentralisation' according to Rony Emmenegger (2016:268). The *kebele* is administered by a council of approximately two hundred elected people (men), who must also be EPRDF party members, and a cabinet, also known as the *meseretawi dirijit*. Some people told me that the former designation was officially for EPRDF party business and not made up of exactly the same members as the *kebele* cabinet. In practice, however, the same people attended (or did not attend) to deal with both 'political' and 'development' issues. At the head of the cabinet is the *kebele* leader (*liqe menber*), who is a local (almost certainly) male farmer, elected by the population of the *kebele* from the council members. Other elected members of the cabinet, in voluntary rather than salaried positions, are the vice-chair (*mikitil liqe menber*), the heads of the social court (*yemahabarawi firdibet halafi*) and the voluntary militia force (*ts'et'eta halafi*), and leaders of youth affairs (*yewet'atoch guday halafi*), and women's affairs (*yesetoch guday halafi*): these last two are the mass associations mentioned above. During my research period, I found that their attendance at meetings was highly variable, from the chair, who attended often, to the women's and youth affairs leaders, who never once did. The rest of the cabinet consists of salaried public servants. Each *kebele* has a salaried manager, called *sira askayaj*, who is responsible for co-ordinating development activities and administrative affairs; starting in the mid-2000s, more than ten thousand *kebele* managers were hired within a few years (Weis 2016:313). The head teacher and school supervisor; the heads of the agricultural extension and land registration offices; and the two health extension workers are also supposed to attend all meetings of the *kebele* cabinet, alongside any non-permanent residents visiting from the *wereda*, or from the police. Weekly meetings are known as 'command post' (used in English), a military metaphor that is mirrored in the designation of the 'change army' (*yelewt' serawit*); a structure within the civil service parallel to and working in concert with the 'development army' that I will describe below, that was 'designed as a tool to measure and improve administrative performance' (Weis 2016:314).

As well as the increase in the number of public sector employees post-2005, local level governance structures have also grown rapidly. From 2007, membership of the *kebele* council grew exponentially, from tens to several hundred in each *kebele* (Vaughan 2011). This meant that the total number of *kebele* council members grew from about 600,000 members to 3.5 million between 2005 and 2010, and party membership from about three quarters of a million to more than 5 million in the same time period (Tronvoll 2010:132). Membership of the ruling party is often linked to access to goods and services (Lefort 2012; HRW 2010), and to job or promotion opportunities in the public sector - a topic that was discussed and disputed by government workers during my research, with little consensus about the reality, at least at *kebele* level.

Government worker salaries are very low, especially those at *kebele* level. In recent years already low salary levels have been affected by high levels of monetary inflation; due to this 'nominal wages for public servants had to be adjusted significantly in 2014/15' (World Bank 2016:x). There are two forms of salary increase. Firstly, an overall percentage increase across the public service, as cited above. My informants believed this was supposed to happen annually, but could be suspended, as in 2018, due to the financial crisis arising from the shortage of foreign currency (Davison 2019). Secondly, individual increases that happen every two years, depending on the person's score in their performance evaluations (one type of *gimgema*), reaching a set level.

Gimgema (evaluation) is not only used to decide on salary levels, but for overall deliberation and monitoring purposes, and to encourage participation: it is a fundamental tool for the 'change army' and (in principle if not practice) for the 'development army' that I will describe below. In research among civil servants in western Ethiopia, Mehdi Labzaé found *gimgema* to be a means of discipline that allowed for personalised grievances to be aired, and power relations among different levels of the party-state to be cemented (forthcoming; 2019). According to my informants and my observations, however, *gimgema* at *kebele* level, especially for the majority consisting of teachers and extension workers,

was perfunctory and often had no concrete results, even where deserved according to the rules. Part of the *gimgema* process is called *his gelehis* or 'criticism and self-criticism.' This involves groups of people critically and publicly evaluating each others' and their own performance, and is 'used to reprimand defects and mistakes in members' (EPRDF policy, quoted in Bach 2011:647). According to my interlocutors, *gimgema* that takes place in larger groups, including non-government workers, and focuses on projects or activities rather than individuals is more common, while *his gelehis* is used only among those 'with position,' and is a more conflictual occasion in which each person present has to publicly defend their performance against a checklist of potential issues. However, the experience of *gimgema* obviously varies in different locations across the country: Labzaé (2019) found that overall *gimgema* were highly politicised events, entirely intertwined with party considerations, and *his gelehis* was omnipresent.

Although evaluation as a technique of governance is often seen as central to 'audit cultures' that are concerned with transparency and accountability (e.g. E. Hull 2012), in Ethiopia *gimgema* has its own specific history. Derived from Maoist ideals, according to Sarah Vaughan, it 'emerged in the context of the Front's [the TPLF's[53]] determination to "eliminate ideas that don't benefit the revolution": it was a part of the dialectic associated with class struggle' (2011:628). It remains an important part of government practice: as one government worker described it to me '*gimgema* is basic and basic and basic for *Ehadig*.[54] *Ehadig* itself exists through *gimgema*!' Notwithstanding its origins, many - including high level Ethiopian decision-makers (Vaughan 2011:637) - have noted the similarity of *gimgema* to the technique of *kaizen* (continuous improvement) used in public institutions, in which small teams 'monitor the work, discuss main problems and identify potential solutions' (Fantini et al. 2018:74). Labzaé (forthcoming)

[53] The Tigray People's Liberation Front was founded in 1975 as a small guerrilla band with its grounding 'in an ethno-nationalist consciousness generated by the cumulative grievances of Tigrayans against successive central governments of Ethiopia… and eventually grew to provide the core of the Ethiopian government' (Aregawi 2004:569).
[54] The Amharic version of EPRDF.

comments that *gimgema* is an interesting way 'to assess the plasticity of most contemporary government techniques… neither socialist nor neoliberal per se.' As I will show in the following section, I agree that such techniques benefit from an attention to context-specific particularities, rather than a blanket 'invocations of neoliberal governmentality' that 'mask more than they illuminate' (Kipnis 2008:280).

Sub-State Structures

The Ethiopian state is commonly accepted to be expanding its reach to ever lower levels of the population, in part through setting up sub-state structures in a process similar to the Derg's 'encadrement.' Emerging from Ethiopia's imperial, military-communist and Marxist-influenced guerrilla history and intersecting with international development modalities that valorise participation (Hickey and Mohan 2005; Cooke and Kothari 2001), the various structures that extend beyond salaried civil servants to the population as a whole are a mixture of coercion, conscription and voluntary participation; remnants of past elements that have theoretically been superseded; and party political entwined with development objectives. The core idea, according to the EPRDF, is to encourage a 'favourable condition in rural areas for good governance' in which 'the people there are actively participating in an organised manner in development efforts' (Meles Zenawi quoted in Weis 2016:316); others read it as primarily the means by which 'the ruling party aims to sustain its political hegemony' (Lefort 2012:681). The co-optation of rural people into the work of 'doing the state' echoes the mobilisation of youth in inner city Addis Ababa that Di Nunzio describes, and the plan to 'create a tighter chain of command between the elaboration of policy and political strategies at the top and the activities of political mobilisation and the implementation of development programmes at the lowest levels of the state bureaucracy' (2014:441).

In parallel with the change army within the civil service, the 'development army' (*yelemat serawit*) consists of specific sectors of the population. It is organised into cells of five, called 1-5 or *and lamist,* with one person acting as a role model or head (*meri*), intended to encourage the others to perform better in the relevant area. This concept of role modelling was first used in agriculture, with *ginbar kedem* ('vanguards' or 'front'/ 'model' farmers), who officially had to fulfil various criteria, although the political (party membership) became dominant over the socio-economic (primarily wealth), according to Lefort (2012). The development army itself has been in operation since 2011 (in the fields of health and agriculture, later in schools, universities and among government workers), and is 'a key tenet of the Government's approach to knowledge dissemination and mobilisation' (Dom 2017a:9). Weis calls the development army concept 'a unique amalgamation of socialist party cells, East Asian productivity techniques like *kaizen*, and "the discipline of an army"' (quoting an EPRDF official, 2016:310).

Although 1-5 officially operates across sectors, in Kuré Beret it was most active in two areas: agriculture and the overlapping areas of women and health. As I will show in chapters 4 and 5, the latter was focused on the health extension 'package,' which largely relates to sanitation, hygiene, pregnancy, birth and young children. Literature written or commissioned by development organisations sometimes calls this the women's development army (*yesetoch lemat serawit*) or the health development army (*yet'ena lemat serawit*); one typical report characterises it as containing 'two main structures… the development team and the 1-5 network, which are the main gears for its successful implementation' (Della 2014:13). The 'development team' consists of twenty to thirty households containing four or five 1-5 'networks,' with the 'ones' in the 1-5 chosen by the development team leader based on how much of the health extension package they have completed. Later on in the same report, however, the 'health development army (HDA)' seems to only refer to 1-5: 'given that every fifth woman is an HDA leader, one can argue that they are part of the general population' (2014:77). The 'development team' (*lemat budin*) is not chosen but is rather the whole (tax-paying) population of the *kebele* split up into

groups of up to thirty households, after sub-division of the *kebele* into sub-*kebele*s and *gotts* (hamlets) for 'purposes of administration and service delivery' (Dessalegn 2009:254). According to Kenneth Maes et al. (2018), the 'army' will eventually incorporate up to ninety percent of rural adult women, making the concept either laudably inclusive or totally meaningless. Maes et al. (2018) also conclude that 1-5 has 'resulted in the recruitment of a massive amount of unpaid labor by the state, provided by women who already shoulder heavy work burdens.'

Another parallel to 1-5 is a political structure called *hiwas* (cell),[55] with each of the main political parties in the ethnically-constituted regions (in Amhara Region, ANDM, the Amhara National Democratic Movement)[56] that make up EPRDF coalition having their own *hiwas* structure. At one meeting chaired by a visiting *wereda*-level cabinet member, he complained that people were not aware of the difference between 1-5 and *hiwas* (echoing the confusion between the *kebele* cabinet and the *meseretawi dirijitoch*), the latter of which, he said, focused on political discussion with a 'parallel track on development.' Other government workers told me that *hiwas* was concerned with only party matters, and their priority was to increase membership in EPRDF, with members given monthly targets for new members. Another (supposedly)[57] regular activity was political education through the communal reading and discussion of the EPRDF magazine *Addis Raey* (New Vision), and the monitoring of opposition activity in the local area, especially around elections. Research in another rural *kebele* in North Shewa (Ethiopia WIDE 2013) reported seven to ten *hiwas* members (male household heads) in each development team, who are all *ginbar kedem* and mainly, but not necessarily, development team leaders. On the other hand, the farmers who could qualify as *ginbar kedem* but do not want to take up that role[58] by becoming EPRDF members cannot then be either *hiwas* or development team

[55] See Emmenegger (2016) for an account of the equivalent *celli* in Oromia Region.
[56] ANDM changed its name to Amhara Democratic Party (ADP) in September 2018.
[57] People told me this did happen at *wereda* level, but was rarely seen at *kebele* level.
[58] These men are usually those labelled as *birokrasi*, who held positions of power in the Derg era: see chapter 5; see also Lefort (2010) for more on the *birokrasi*'s role in fomenting support for the opposition in the 2005 elections.

leaders. Women cannot be *hiwas* unless they are a household head, and their involvement in development is largely through *and lamist* and the health extension workers.

Ethiopian Exceptionalism in the EPRDF Era

The widespread structural adjustment that occurred across Africa and elsewhere in the 1980s and 1990s led to widespread immiseration and the tumbling of social, health and economic indicators (Hickel 2017; Ferguson 2006). This process was more limited in Ethiopia (Furtado and Smith 2009; Borchgrevink 2008), as the figures about the public sector above indicate. This was in large part for fiscal reasons: the Derg government had not accrued a large national debt in the 1980s (Dereje 2011), so the new EPRDF government were not forced by economic considerations to fully accede to the policy demands of multilateral donors, especially in terms of liberalising the financial market and privatising land or telecommunications (which remain state owned as of late 2019). Several other factors also played a part in improving Ethiopia's negotiating position. These included the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's international reputation as an intellectual heavyweight (de Waal 2013; Stiglitz 2006);[59] Ethiopia's strategic geopolitical positioning as a reliable ally of the west against Islamic fundamentalism (Desplat and Østebø 2013); and its unique history of resistance to European colonialism, 'which is enshrined in the collective memory of the nation and strongly informs the country's international relations' (Dereje 2011:800). The perception that corruption is limited, and that 'Ethiopia has made a reputation for itself among donors as a reasonably honest and efficient user of the aid that it receives' (Clapham 2018:1157) also helps. Unlike elsewhere, Ethiopia consolidated national control of the aid negotiation process (Furtado and Smith 2009) and in the 2000s began 'a new push to centralise economic rents' from aid (Weis 2016:241). This was despite the extremely high levels of development aid: in the 2000s, total aid to Ethiopia, at a level of around US$

[59] Clapham writes that Meles 'must qualify as one of the most remarkable leaders and original thinkers in independent Africa' (2018:1153).

three billion per year, was the second highest in the world to countries not at war, and made up around a third of the national budget (Dereje 2011:788).

Thus during the transitional decade of the 1990s, and especially afterwards, the ideological role of the state as vanguard, critical to *abyotawi* democracy, remained central, even if the size of the public sector initially decreased during the dismantling of the Derg's socialist command economy structures. This did not preclude external influence over political developments. For the newly minted EPRDF government in the early 1990s, with the end of the Cold War and disappearance of the Soviet bloc as a potential ally, as Sarah Vaughan writes, 'some form of "liberal democracy" was pretty much the only option' of viable political system (2003:14). Into the twenty-first century, the EPRDF government continued to push back against pressure from Western governments, NGOs and multilateral institutions, although it did not stop the weight of that pressure from being applied. Based partly on analysis of cables sent from the US Embassy in Ethiopia,[60] Weis writes:

> Despite the constant and vocal rejection by the EPRDF government of a developmental framework based on free markets, uninhibited capital flows, and restrictive public spending, all of these remain cornerstones in the economic advice that was given by aid agencies, international financial institutions and Western, especially US, diplomats (2016:59-60).

The relative independence of the Ethiopian state from interference in domestic policy making provides another strand in the narrative of Ethiopian exceptionalism that I outlined above: that of a strong and sovereign African state in a landscape of those that are crumbling, retreating or becoming 'ghosts,' as diagnosed by many writing about the state in Africa (e.g. Graeber 2007:157-180). One pertinent question here is whether Ethiopia can be accurately described as neoliberal, as Daniel Mains does when he describes 'neoliberal times' (2007) and young men in Jimma as 'embedded within processes associated with neoliberal capitalism' (2012a:164). Based on research in rural Konso, James Ellison makes an even stronger case for 'Ethiopia's neoliberal reforms' (2009:82) becoming 'subtly

[60] The cables were made public via Wikileaks in 2010.

drawn into people's cultural lives' (2009:81), manifesting in changing kinship relations drawn from neoliberal discourse about individual freedoms. Although Mains also questions the usefulness of neoliberalism as an analytical tool (2012b), it is in the 'hidden pockets of nonmarket social relations' (2012a:166) that he finds 'the limits of capitalism' and resistance to lives being defined by the market (2012a:167). The state itself, however, he characterises as having downsized the public sector (which, as I have mentioned, I think he overstates) and engaged in the privatisation of infrastructural development, while still managing to create a 'perception' and a 'faith' in 'narratives' (2012b:5) about state-led development, backed up by use of state force in resettling people and in mobilising troops for war.

My position is different. While I agree with Mains (and others, e.g. Ferguson 2015; Clarke 2008) about the limited utility of neoliberalism as a coherent analytical category overall, I also do not think that the Ethiopian state project can accurately or meaningfully be termed neoliberal in any empirical sense. The limits of a diffuse neoliberal rationality are not just found in pockets of social resistance or in a 'narrative' of state-led development, based on perception rather than reality. At its core, and taking the EPRDF political philosophy seriously, the contemporary Ethiopian state does not easily fit within either element of Aihwa Ong's double definition of a neoliberal ideology: that public services are better distributed by the market than the state (2006:11); or the cultivation of an 'ethos of self-governance' (2006:9).

In opposition to a system that promotes the primacy of market provision, Weis (2016) writes that there are three main elements of what he terms 'vanguard capitalism.' Firstly, political scrutiny and direction of markets, which nevertheless operate relatively freely, but with control over 'rent-seeking' via extremely tight regulation on foreign investment, looser controls over domestic companies, and the presence of state-owned enterprise and endowment funds. Secondly, the Ethiopian state is 'an administration that rejects bureaucratic autonomy but values bureaucratic professionalism'; the EPRDF retains political control and 'has

attached great importance to the expansion of the bureaucratic apparatus… entirely congruent with its socialist organisational heritage' (2016:87). Thirdly, vanguard capitalism favours 'a culture of top-down economic planning which is embedded in a hegemonic developmental discourse' (2016:89): in a context of extreme poverty, the government believes that functional markets will not spontaneously emerge, but rather need to be guided by the state. Despite heavily donor-funded civil service reforms in the 1990s and early 2000s in the mould of 'new public management,' in language if not reality, core components of the 'good governance' ethos that emerged from the Washington Consensus[61] are weak or absent from the contemporary Ethiopian political space, including downsizing of the public sector; managerial autonomy from a centralised state (despite decentralisation); and the competitive contracting out of public services to commercial providers.[62]

That the encouragement of an 'ethos of self-governance' cannot be found in Ethiopian state forms is a harder point to argue. Wendy Brown describes neoliberalism as follows: 'while foregrounding the market [it] is not only or even primarily focused on the economy; it involves extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action' (2005:39-40). The state and sub-state structures described previously certainly contain elements - such as auditing, self-evaluation, and the 'conduct of conduct,' or 'helping (monitoring) people help (monitor) themselves' (Strathern 2000:4) - that are associated with pervasive neoliberal forms of governmentality. However, to characterise these forms of governance as deriving solely or mainly from a neoliberal elsewhere would be to ignore their embedding within larger structures that do not fit at all neatly within a definition of neoliberal capitalism. As Weis writes 'no single narrative can account for the diversity of capitalist trajectories in Africa. Looking

[61] Starting in the early 1980s '"modernization" gave way to neoiberalism, in what came to be known as the "Washington consensus" (the "consensus" referred to being that amongst development agencies, particularly the IMF and the Bank, located in Washington D.C.). The starting point for ideas that came to command general agreement was with the view that markets should be left to themselves, and that then economic development would more or less take care of itself' (Harriss 2001:78).
[62] Although, as I indicated in the introduction, the political direction of Abiy Ahmed's government appears to indicate a substantial ideological shift.

for a unified theory in the face of this multiplicity of experiences is necessarily reductionist' (2016:353). It would also ignore their intertwining with other, often older, forms of governance that derive from different social and political traditions. Seeing 'neoliberal regimes of truth' (Ellison 2009:82) only as imported concepts that are adopted and 'crossed into kinship domains' or other areas of social or cultural life (Ellison 2009:84), risks constructing 'local neoliberalisms' from over-determined notions of choice, responsibility and autonomy that leave little room for other understandings or values. As Andrew Kipnis writes:

> Anthropologists must recognise that many culturally specific traditions of governmentality often involve ways of disciplining and cultivating the self, governing from a distance, and calculating value. The mere existence of such governing actions cannot be considered evidence that something called "neoliberalism" has diffused from the West, even when such indigenous governing actions are merged with those of external origin or labeled with exogenous terms (2008:286).

Reconsidering Hierarchy

The notion that government workers in Ethiopia inhabit a higher level in a strict and vertical hierarchy, so over-determined in the scholarly literature, was one that I shared when I started my research. The narrative of obedient peasants under the yoke of an authoritarian state in the person of local government workers was reinforced by a strain of literature from NGOs, especially those concerned with human rights. Reports by Human Rights Watch (2010a; 2010b) and International Crisis Group (2009) painted a picture of local government as almost entirely concerned with surveillance, coercion and suppression. The entire structure of the *kebele* is painted as primarily 'a useful method of control and political repression' (HRW 2010a:15) and local government workers, 'often with little understanding of, or sympathy for, the peasantry' (HRW 2010a:17), are portrayed as 'systematically abusing their power and authority for political purposes' (HRW 2010a:92).

This assumption was gradually eroded during my research as I came to wonder how this hierarchically organised power and status was manifested in my observations of daily life among rural public servants. Did the government workers evince fear or command respect among local people? I saw no evidence of it. Although I am not suggesting that low-level government workers never exercise power in abusive and harmful ways, whether on orders from others, through trying to gain personal advantage, or due to a latent disdain for rural peasants, this was in general not at all the picture I found. Was higher status evident in different modes of dress, speech, food or other consumption habits? Although they generally dressed differently, at least from older generations, the government workers overall appeared at a material disadvantage compared to the farmers amongst whom they lived (although not compared to the poorest local people, especially the elderly, sick and disabled). Was there a noticeable physical, social or spatial divide between the two groups of people? In some ways there was, but the distinction was ambivalent (as I will show through the medium of coffee drinking practices in the next chapter), and in other important ways (for example, sexual and lasting friendship relationships) did not exist. Did local people do what the government workers told or advised them to do, with or without question? They did not, especially if the issue at hand did not interest them or appear to benefit them. If 'hierarchical relations are defined by silence' (Malara and Boylston 2016:41), silent acceptance was certainly not the hallmark of government-citizen interactions as I witnessed them. Attempting to enforce directives and meet targets on development-related issues (as I will show in chapters 4 and 5) was the bane of government workers' lives. Did government workers receive special treatment in any other respect? Not that I could see, and in their daily lives they were actually often in a position of acting as dependent clients of local people in order to achieve basic life necessities, including food, housing and access to transport (see chapters 2 and 3). Clearly the Ethiopian state is hierarchically organised and administered - as demonstrated in the diagrams displayed in every government office - with power concentrated at the top and mechanisms in place to ensure upward accountability. So why did local

representatives of the state - supposedly 'above' local people in terms of both power and social status - appear to lack both?

Thorny questions of hierarchy, then, have been ones that I have grappled with since I began this thesis, starting with how to define and locate hierarchy. The question that has preoccupied and confused me is how hierarchy is defined in the literature on Ethiopia: is it (primarily, or solely) referring to the ability to exercise power and authority, and how does this interact with status? Is this hierarchy as form (in this case, of state organisation) or hierarchy as value? And how does it speak to wider moral values? Or does hierarchy have different valency in different spheres of life, and if so, how do these spheres interact? As I will explain below, a recent body of anthropological literature has been engaged in reconsidering the values (and value) of hierarchy. How does the 'political culture of hierarchy' in Ethiopia, where people are constrained 'to obey the "orders from above"' (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003:11), fit into this rethinking?

Hierarchy in Anthropology

In his foundational work, Louis Dumont's position was that hierarchy is a fundamental organising principle of an holistic social system in India; he contrasted this with a universalised Western individualism in order to show the 'nature, limits and conditions of realisation of the moral and political egalitarianism to which... [Westerners] are attached' ([1970] 1980:2). One of his interests is to show that presenting values as natural and fundamental, egalitarianism as much as hierarchy, prevents analysis of their constraining effects. In a society where equality and liberty are normative principles, this brings about the valorisation of the individual in which each person must represent the whole of humanity, despite their specificities, and whose rights, therefore, are only constrained by the rights of other individuals. This conception of humans as fundamentally separate units is opposed to the basic idea of a society organised along hierarchical lines, where humans are socially and

relationally constituted; inequality is group-based and 'founded on a totally different cultural logic to "social stratification" in Western societies' (Gledhill 2000:47). Dumont uses the caste system in India as the primary example of a highly developed hierarchical structure, where there are absolute distinctions between pure and impure and between the religious and political spheres, and where this separation is a key element of the system. The political domain is encompassed by and subordinate to the religious domain; as a higher and more universal sphere, the religious sphere has a greater value. Thus, while 'in the majority of cases, hierarchy will be identified in some way with power… there is no necessity for this' (Dumont [1970] 1980:20).

Dumontian forms of hierarchy have been subject to extensive postcolonial critique for their essentialising, totalising and exoticising effects; for example, as Arjun Appadurai writes, hierarchy 'is one of an anthology of images in and through which anthropologists have frozen the contribution of specific cultures to our understanding of the human condition' (1988:36). However, there has been a recent revival of interest in the concept of hierarchy within anthropology (e.g. Graeber and Wengrow 2018; Haynes and Hickel 2018; Bialecki 2017; Ferguson 2015; Hickel 2015; Peacock 2015, 2013). These reappraisals have in common a view of hierarchy as essential to theories of value rather than (only) as a form of social organisation. In agreement with Dumont, they also argue that, while correlated with power, authority and inequality, hierarchy consists of more than simply power relations. In hierarchical societies, it is often understood by many to be a social good, an important aspect of constituting personhood and maintaining harmonious relationships (Hickel 2015). It can lead to the 'pursuit of subordination' by those who see 'declarations of dependence' as not bondage but as incurring positive obligations (Ferguson 2015); especially in contemporary conditions of labour surplus, acceding to a position in a kin-like and paternalistic hierarchy enmeshes that person in a total social system and confers a measure of protection.

To greater and lesser extents, these recent works have embraced the usefulness and ubiquity of hierarchical forms against the widespread adoption of 'flat' metaphors for human sociality and subject-object relations. Bruno Latour and actor-network theory are often used as an example of this tendency; as Navaro-Yashin writes 'flattening is a methodology that Latour intentionally prescribes in an attempt to generate symmetry between different modes of agency' (2012:163). The counter-argument is that horizontal networks are related to commodity forms of exchange, specifically those found under neoliberal conditions, while hierarchy can be a means of challenging the individualistic basis of the liberal ideal of a good society. In this reading, asymmetrical social forms have the potential to bring about the acknowledgement of the social responsibilities of those in positions of power to those below them in the hierarchy. Writing about the neglect of hierarchy in recent anthropological thought, Vita Peacock asserts that 'if hierarchy involves the clear binding of responsibility for social projects to known and visible persons, then the negation of hierarchy will do the very opposite' (2015:14). She suggests that unknown and invisible capitalist elites evade responsibility for the ill effects of neoliberal ideologies from which they benefit. The people who suffer these effects have no recourse to anyone they can identify as responsible, because the chain of cause of effect is too diffuse and removed. Instead of looking to others above them in a holistic hierarchical system, they must then develop into self-fashioning individuals whose solutions are within,[63] in a world where 'all of its actors are commensurable, and where social totalities are always secondary rather than primary to [its] activity' (Peacock 2015:5).

To take one of these recent ethnographic example, Jason Hickel's (2015) discussion of the often violent rejection of the ANC's version of liberal democracy by rural Zulu migrants makes the case for taking seriously the cultural logic of hierarchy. The Zulu ideal of a homestead in which age and gender are crucial in determining hierarchical roles and behaviours is not a timeless social institution.

[63] This argument shares some similarity with literature on witchcraft in Africa, in which concerns about anti-social or destabilising effects of globalised forms of capitalism are understood or translated into supernatural idioms (e.g. Bonhomme 2012; Geschiere 1997)

It is directly related to the exploitation of male Zulu migrant labour under apartheid, while women stayed in their rural 'homelands' ruled by 'native' authorities; thus fulfilling the dual imperatives of a supply of cheap labour without the costs of social reproduction and maintaining 'separateness' between the domestic lives of white and black citizens. This created an enduring urban-rural divide, in which migrants 'come to fetishise an ideal vision of the ordered homestead that does not necessarily match the crumbling, contested reality of actually-existing homestead life' (2015:17).

The argument centres on the notion that Zulu ideas about personhood - which are enmeshed in social relationships - expose the Euro-American bias of supposedly universal models of human nature as characterised by individualism, rational self-interest and a basic inherent equality. Hickel writes that the Zulu attachment to a hierarchical social order, in which everyone is not equal, cannot be explained away as a result of essentialist 'culture'; a version of false consciousness, in which they are tricked or lack the information to make a 'better' judgement; or as a purely instrumental logic, for example, in which men exploit women for their own personal gain. Placing this example in a context in which anti-liberal social movements are gaining traction globally, the question, following Saba Mahmood (2005), is how to take hierarchy seriously; how to 'make sense of the curious fact that even those who are rendered subordinate within hierarchical systems quite often embrace them, or even regard them as necessary to the realisation of their own moral aspirations?' (Hickel and Khan 2018:ix).

Hierarchy in Ethiopia

Let us now return to the issue of the type of hierarchy attributed to Ethiopia. Alongside the quote from René Lefort in the introduction, the following provide a good summary of the typical tone:

> Where relations between individual peasants and state officials are concerned, these are always vertical, entrenching a hierarchy that

> prevents trust or interdependence from developing (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003:45).
>
> The high social value accorded in the highlands to order and stability premised on hierarchies of authority has translated into a statist approach and a degree of state-led ordering which distinguishes Ethiopia from the rest of the continent (Vaughan 2011:623).
>
> Ethiopians' everyday encounters with the state continue to be marked by obedience and compliance with local representatives of the party-state (Hagmann and Abbink 2013:6).

In this, they draw heavily on the scholarly record from the imperial era (e.g. Levine 1974, 1965; Hoben 1973) that strongly characterises Ethiopian - specifically highland and Orthodox Christian - society and political culture as innately hierarchical and deferential to authority, predominately through patron-client relationships.[64] Some scholars extend the critical role of submission and mediation in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church directly into the realm of the political. Lefort states this case succinctly: 'God, at the top, is the sole master of the destiny of each and every one [of Amhara peasant farmers], from whom, ultimately, all power emanates. To submit to divine will leads to an acute sense of obedience to the authorities' (2012:687). Teferi Abate provides a similar account of the relationship between farmer and state; the former, he says 'recognise the legitimacy of local officials who bridge the gap between state and people, albeit in the way they also recognise the roles of a hierarchy of supernatural beings in mediating relations with God' (2004:627). Also relevant are historical patterns of land-holding and associated social organisation, as I discussed above, which are said to to have inhibited class formation and instead contributed to a competitive, individualistic form of social organisation. Accordingly, highland Ethiopia is historically supposed to lack forms of civil society,[65] or any voluntary horizontal forms of association, which elsewhere in Africa have often arisen from

[64] Although this last position is contested: 'Ethiopia's large civil service and its hierarchical culture are the product of a long history of centralised bureaucracy and reflect the strong indigenous roots of an autocratic state more likely to coerce than to co-opt; they are not the result of coalition-building based on clientelism and patronage' (Weis 2016:69).
[65] Here I am not referring to the 1990s 'NGO explosion' (see chapter 3), but older forms of organisation.

the corporate group allied to control over land. Despite the decisive separation of church and state and the nationalisation of land under the Derg, this paradigm remains in much of the literature. The suggestion is that these are enduring cultural forms immune to changing structures of governance. Such claims foreground the continuity of hierarchy as a 'dominant cultural schema' (Poluha 2004:172) that is central to the strength of the state, whatever shape it takes.

Discussing Weber's notion of value 'spheres,' 'in which various domains of value - religious, political, aesthetic - compete for superior positions of influence' Naomi Haynes and Jason Hickel write that 'this competition can involve the position of hierarchy in the constellation of elements that make up a particular society' (2018:11). Recent work (Boylston 2018; Malara and Boylston 2016) has shown that top-down power in Ethiopia remains legitimate and desirable in some spheres (the religious and, broadly, the domestic). Hierarchy is undoubtedly essential to Orthodox Christian understandings of the incommensurability of the divine, leading to the critical importance of mediation between the worldly and spiritual realms, in explicit contrast to the levelling of relations that is the hallmark of *P'enté* forms of Christianity.[66] Hierarchies of gender, age, wealth, and ethnicity (see below) all have an effect on the status of groups and individuals, including government workers, varying in different locations and combinations. However, my interest here is in what is portrayed as an unshakeable, vertical and rigid divide between the state and its representatives, and the rural population amongst whom they work. What kind of understanding of hierarchy does this characterisation rest upon, and to what ends its ascription has been employed?

Here I should reiterate the point I made in the introduction to this chapter: that hierarchies between rather than among ethnic groups were a crucial part of the 'grand narrative' of Ethiopian history. This narrative, in which the Orthodox Christian highlands - the historical nation of Abyssinia inhabited by *habesha*

[66] Although religious practices among Orthodox Christians, notably fasting, also undermine hierarchies. Malara quotes a friend as saying 'we call beggars *yene bité*, which means "my own kind", so as not to humiliate them. But when you fast, you understand better that they really are your kind, like you, because we are all sons of God in this troubled world' (2018:28).

people - were hegemonic 'tells an eminently top-down political history; it is a history of the elites, focused on the centre of the Ethiopian polity' (Marzagora 2016:74). It has also been highly assimilative. In one of anthropologist Donald Levine's best known arguments, he states that the country has a 'single societal system' ([1974] 2000:69), which he justifies by describing supposedly universal pan-Ethiopian traits, including hierarchical patterns of authority. There is no doubt that the historical reality of the conquest of previously independent polities into the Ethiopian state and their absorption into (exploitative) land holding systems did have consequences in non-highland areas (Donham 2002; Donham and James 1986). Scholars have written extensively about how the highland system based on a particular form of landholding was imported through conquest and then reinscribed as 'tradition' (e.g. Freeman 2002), and how post-socialist economic reforms reconfigured the status of hereditary groups, part of a twentieth century history of reshaping social relations 'articulated with political-economic changes' (Ellison 2006:666). However, narratives such as Levine's 'Greater Ethiopia' hypothesis overlook significant differences between forms of social organisation across the country, in a way that has reproduced inequalities and been central to the production of the counter-historiographies mentioned above.[67] For example, studies of the Oromo *gada* system (e.g. Bassi 2005; Asmarom 1973; Knutsson 1967) have shown how rotating age-based groups take on different roles and responsibilities according to their stage of life, growing into and out of power as a cohort. In this system the patron-client form of hierarchy has no place, as the holding of power is temporally restricted and borne by groups rather than individuals (Ficquet and Dereje 2015). Levine himself allows this point when he writes: 'where the Amhara system is hierarchical, the Oromo is egalitarian. Where the Amhara is individualistic, the Oromo is solidaristic' ([1974] 2000:128).

[67] And, indirectly, to the reconfiguration of the country into a system of ethnic federalism. As Markakis (1987) writes, the Shewan Amhara hegemony achieved under Menelik gave birth to a twentieth century in which contested nationhood and nationalisms took centre stage.

Hierarchy in highland Ethiopia (with the above proviso in mind) is described variously as fluctuating (Messay 1999), competitive (Hoben 1973; Vaughan 2011) and individualistic (Teferi 2004). This is not a Dumontian conception of hierarchy as a totalising and all-encompassing social system that supposes fundamentally different categories of person. Instead, individuals consider the important and powerful to be worthy of respect and obeisance from those below them on the social scale, whether sincerely based on their qualities or attributes, or as part of a calculation of advantage. It would be remiss here not to include the much-quoted Ethiopian proverb: 'the wise man bows low to the great lord and silently farts' (Donham 1986:7). However, unlike in other forms of social stratification - notably and in extreme form, the Hindu caste system - Ethiopian conceptions of personhood retain a fundamentally egalitarian character. In an 'egalitarian hierarchy' where 'people are regarded as ontologically equivalent, and the various ranks of the system are theoretically and often actually open to anyone' (Haynes and Hickel 2018:5), social movement is - or is thought of as - fluid. Accepting one's (temporary) place in a hierarchical structure through acting with deference, therefore, does not entail accepting hierarchical difference.

There are important exceptions in the literature on highland Ethiopia, which do assert that certain categories of person are fundamentally 'other' (e.g. Boylston 2018; Epple 2018; Freeman and Pankhurst 2003). Boylston makes a strong case for the interconnected categories of slave descent and those accused of being (or having) *buda* (often translated as 'evil eye') as bringing about 'different levels of inclusion and exclusion' and that, despite being hidden and unnamed, these are 'defining mechanisms of Amhara life… *buda* discourse in Zege blurs the lines between what is due to your essence and what is due to your actions' (2018:92). In Kewet and North Shewa more widely, however, I found the categories of people associated with *buda* and slave descent to be limited enough not to disturb the basic picture of ontological equivalence between people.[68]

[68] In the latter case, this could well be because of the unspoken nature of the topic and my reticence in addressing it. Slave ownership was certainly widespread in the North Shewan highlands: my mother-in-law, who is around seventy years old, remembers a majority of

Overall, then, the 'culture of hierarchy' is characterised as emanating from and intrinsic to the practice of (political) power. As Hoben writes 'it is only chance of birth, political aptitude, and luck that differentiates …[people] from one another… and not innate worth' (1973:245). Despite drawing from Hoben's work on land tenure that shows 'innate worth' is not the basis of social differentiation among the Amhara, Sarah Vaughan and Kjetil Tronvoll make a subtly different point. They assert that social interactions are imbued with 'notions that people are *not* equal and the world is *not* egalitarian. Individuals are ranked according to a set of criteria which invest some people with greater "value" than others - both in social and political terms' (2003:11, emphasis in original).[69] In Wello, Harald Aspen and Svein Ege found that local people identified 'a peasant's work capacity and luck as the main factors that produce differences between people' (2010:87). And, as Dessalegn Rahmato writes about his research, also in Wello, 'peasants often say in response to questions about inequality: "look at our hands, are our fingers equal?" Inequality arising from specialisation, innate ability or honest effort is considered natural' (2009:324). I read this as a form of 'egalitarian hierarchy'; that is, Vaughan and Tronvoll's '*not* equal' people refers to individuals who are not equally endowed with skills, intelligence, or the ability to maximise their positions. This last is crucial: the 'value' that people hold for others lies in how they are able to assist them to gain advantage, whether socially or politically, not in their position as such.

The notion of the cynically advantage-seeking individual is addressed by Diego Malara and Tom Boylston, who state that such a 'portrayal of an entirely atomised society based on favour-grubbing and ambition is far more individualistic than the reality on the ground' (2016:43) and, crucially, it neglects the importance of relations borne of love and care. In this reading, asymmetrical

households having at least one slave until thirty or forty years ago. She does not know where they came from, but says that they did not speak Amharic.

[69] However, in later work Vaughan seems to soften this argument, including by alluding to changing social mores and how 'the profile of popular attitudes to government on the ground is undoubtedly changing fast' (2011:622).

relations between people are morally valued, if exploitation is tempered by protection. This has its basis, as Boylston shows (2018), in the intertwining of religious and noble power in the imperial era. Personalised and enduring relationships were the basis of legitimate power and authority. Funeral feasts (*tezkar*) were a particularly important means of realising forms of morally-constituted mutual dependence (in which hospitality ensured loyalty and support), while also reproducing social hierarchies.

It has been more than forty years since the revolution that decisively separated church and state, and decimated the social and economic basis of the land-holding imperial nobility. Even before that, from the 1940s onwards under Haile Selassie, there was a gradual dissolution of previous political forms. As Allen Hoben wrote about pre-imperial times 'with their authority backed to a greater extent than ever before by the force of the central government, officeholders are no longer willing or able to feast their followers and reward their favourites as in the past… modern officials are frequently criticised… for being stingy and selfish as well as for being unresponsive to the problems of their people' (1973:209). Personalised relationships based on tribute, then, were gradually replaced by formal taxes collected by bureaucrats, resulting in state employees being given a critical role in the functioning of the state, while at the same time being 'denied… a share in power' (Young 1997:54). As Boylston writes about the reduction in the size and import of *tezkar* 'the decline of sacrifice and hospitality, or their relocation within the aegis of the church, represents massive changes in how status gets figured out' (2018:35), and is associated with a 'decline in traditional authority, hierarchy, and values, and their replacement by something as yet uncertain' (2018:105).

Where does this leave contemporary public servants? Government workers are in no position - materially, financially or legally - to provide even small-scale hospitality for rural people, let alone the lavish displays of excess that characterised *tezkar*. Although they do have the ability to provide some aspects of the public good, they are often engaged in performances of the state - as I

showed in the prologue - which everyone knows are not wanted, needed or likely to be effective. Furthermore, the work of the state is partially devolved to flattened 'networks' of people, via 1-5 and other mechanisms, in an explicit refiguring of a hierarchical top-down model of authority. There is another critical factor here: the ability of landholding nobility allied with local churches to host *tezkar* relied on an assumed permanence of relationships developed and constituted through such practices. The frequent mobility of government workers was another reason - compounding their youth, (often) gender, low salaries, and all the material and affective factors I will describe in later chapters - for the shift within a few generations from the extravagant hospitality of *tezkar* to the makeshift coffee ceremonies to which government workers did not even invite local people (see chapter 2).

If moral authority and coercive power are tightly linked in situations of intimacy and close contact, as Malara and Boylston (2016) assert, an increasingly precarious and mobile cadre of public servants employing an often unconvincing authority cannot provoke reactions analogous with the love and fear that are associated with Orthodox conceptions of God, or with the head of a patriarchal household. Furthermore, whereas scrutiny or judgement of these figures of power is seen as inappropriate, *abyotawi* democracy not only encourages but mandates participation in the state, including, at least in theory, oversight and evaluation of local state workers. If 'love and care are not confined to private or domestic life but rather have broad legal, political, and religious ramifications' (Malara and Boylston 2016:43), I suggest that the inability of low level public servants to actually provide protection, support or care - either by enacting changes that people value or through forming longterm relationships - affects the legitimacy of their authority. In an 'egalitarian hierarchy,' this has an impact on their place in a state-society hierarchy.

The Accepted Wisdom of Hierarchy

In the last part of this section, I will reflect on the ways in which hierarchy, conceived of as a means of exercising power rather than of strengthening social responsibilities, can be inscribed into wider global narratives. Some of the key insights of postcolonial theory - that dominating 'grand narratives' deny agency to the non-Western Other (Chakrabarty 2000); that Eurocentric assumptions at the base of social and epistemological categories go unexamined (Amin 1972); and that Orientalist imaginaries have long-lasting and harmful effects (Said 1979) - are, however imperfectly, integrated into the anthropological project of unsettling our understanding of the world. As Timothy Mitchell shows in his study of modernisation schemes in Egypt (2002), generating and maintaining representations of other societies and setting them against modes of order and thought in the western world was a crucial mechanism of the colonial encounter. Critiques of Dumont's schematic of hierarchy show how it follows colonial ethnographers in India in their valorising and entrenching of the caste system in the legal and social fabric of the nation (Appadurai 1988). The impact of these insights in the world at large, however, is less certain. As Achille Mbembe writes about the categorisation of Africa, 'the oscillation between the real and the imaginary, the imaginary realised and the real imagined, does not take place solely in writing. This interweaving also takes place in life' (2001:241-2).

It may seem to some that theorising about the nature of hierarchy in Ethiopia - with reference to a historical system of land rights that was overturned in 1974 - is purely of theoretical academic interest.[70] However, when ideas about an 'innate' hierarchical social and political structure move from scholarly writing into development discourse, they become part of accepted wisdom with the potential to influence policy and practice. 'Grey literature' - the semi-public reports, research and working papers so abundant and essential to making the

[70] Although not to those who follow contemporary Ethiopian politics: reports in late 2019 describe how 'residents of Oromia's eastern Hararghe Zone took to the streets chanting "down down Menelik, down down *Neftegna*",' referring to a land tenure system overturned and an emperor who died almost fifty and more than a hundred years ago respectively (HaileMichael 2019).

business of making development work (semi-)visible (Karlsson 2013) - is one way in which the ambiguities and complexities of ideas derived from detailed (and disputed) anthropological studies are condensed into soundbites. A working paper on polling techniques provides a typical example:

> Particularly in rural areas, patterns of social interaction sustain a strictly hierarchical stratification of society, which is shaped by a system of collective ideas to obey the 'orders from above' (*yebelalakal*). As such, the age-old relations between authorities and peasants are resoundingly hierarchical and underpinned by the reverence of authority in political culture (Gagliardone and Patel 2014:28).

Supported by the British Embassy in Addis Ababa, this quote is from the historical background section of a paper which tentatively suggests that 'Ethiopian political culture' is 'tangential and even in opposition to democratic outcomes' (2014:28-9; see also Messay 1999). This conclusion is in line with western government policies towards Ethiopia, which see economic growth as overriding the importance of other norms such as civil and political rights (Kelsall 2013; Booth 2012). It echoes a 'new pragmatism' in the overall direction of international development (Harman and Williams 2014); a pragmatism that acknowledges the logic of developmental states, such as the EPRDF's Ethiopia, that see improving state capacity and state accountability as subject to 'sequencing,' meaning that the former has to be in place before the latter can be expected to materialise. As I described above, historically the limits of international influence on Ethiopian domestic policy-making have diverged substantially from the situation elsewhere in Africa. However, the belief that Ethiopia has a 'natural bent' towards authoritarian forms of hierarchy feeds into intertwined national and global narratives that justify certain forms of governance above others. After all, as Weis says, 'tapping into popular concepts of an all-seeing government and a tradition of hierarchical administration is a deliberate choice, not merely the "appropriate" response to pervasive cultural norms of power. Political culture is not set in stone but reproduced, and occasionally altered' (2016:100). Whether this enduring narrative of the Ethiopian state as 'vertically stratified, and rigidly hierarchical' (Vaughan and Tronvoll

2003:vi) remains accurate at the lowest level of government in rural areas is one of the topics that will be addressed in the ethnographic chapters that comprise the rest of this thesis. Its presence as an idea, however, is likely to generate real-world effects for some time to come.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have laid out the historical antecedents and the current particularities of the state and its local representatives in Ethiopia. Inseparable from this background is the overarching characterisation of Ethiopia as a hierarchical society (while it is also important to note that this characterisation co-exists with a 'grand narrative' that has had the effect of appropriating and assimilating other peoples into the hegemonic Abyssinian 'core'). Conceptions of hierarchy as applied to the Ethiopian state derive, explicitly or implicitly, from a 'distinctive Amhara theory-practice of knowledge' (Boylston 2018:152) that is inseparable from Orthodox Christianity and its associated historical forms of social and political organisation. Despite the nationalisation of land and the decisive separation of church and state in 1974, this paradigm remains in place in much of the literature. My interest in this chapter has been to show that in my research area - and no doubt more widely - the idea that 'power cannot be contested, because it is divine by essence' (Lefort 2007:258) is no longer evident; if it ever was, so strongly stated. Ethiopia's long history of revolts and rebellions suggests otherwise (Young 1997; Gebru 1991). This does not mean to imply that religion has lost any of its moral valency in contemporary Ethiopia. Instead it indicates that shifts in the political realm - from personalised and longterm power-relations to impersonal and rule-based ones, as well as the extension of state networks such as 1-5 to ever smaller units of the population - have effected change in popular attitudes to the state. These changing attitudes however, are little reflected in the social science literature, that is then reproduced in the 'grey literature' of development and policy.

I have questioned the scholarly record on hierarchy on two levels. Firstly, I have questioned whether these hierarchies have been overstated as they relate to the public servants who embody the contemporary state. Secondly, I asked how the type of hierarchy that is imputed to Ethiopia should be understood, what forms of personhood it presupposes, and, following recent thinking in the anthropology of hierarchy, whether it holds moral valency. I proposed that hierarchies in the religious and intimate domains do not map easily onto political hierarchies, and suggest that state authority can be characterised as an egalitarian form of hierarchy, in which superiority is not innate but achieved through action and is therefore subject to fluctuation. In the ethnographic chapters that follow, the particular circumstances of the low level public servants in my research area will provide a window onto how and why their place in a hierarchy of authority is weakening.

Chapter 2: Drinking Coffee in Kuré Beret: Space, Sharing and Exclusion in the Everyday State

Introduction

There are two centres to the village of Kuré Beret. The first is the spacious government *gibbí* (compound), sometimes just known as the *kebele*. Within its stone walls are offices for administration, agriculture and police, a meeting room, a health post, a single room jail for use before transferral to the *wereda*, a filthy latrine, and a 'traditional conflict resolution hut.' This last is a tiny structure that had clearly never been used except occasionally by goats; the *kebele* manager openly told me it had been built 'for the report'.[71] The government *gibbí* is found on the outskirts of the village, beyond the residential areas - except for the house of a man known as a *t'enqway* (sorcerer) - where the marketplace slopes down to the *beret* (waterhole) after which the village is named, and beyond that, to the low scrubland of Afar Region that stretches away to the eastern horizon.

This *gibbí* and the nearby school, just across the dusty and windy space that was the location for the small Tuesday market, are where most of the formal business of the state takes place: the convening of committees, teams, cells and the whole panoply of state and sub-state groups; the management of government workers through evaluation, goal-setting and auditing; the frequent meetings and training sessions, and the endless production and circulation of paper records and documents: ID cards, marriage and divorce certificates, land registration papers, minutes of meetings, charts, tables, graphs, work plans, lesson plans, registers, posters. Aside from paper, other materials are also critical to the performance of government that took place in the *gibbí*: the vaccinations and limited amounts of other medicines administered by the health workers; the textbooks, flags and

[71] Although almost all responsibilities have been transferred to the court at *wereda* level, 'social court' adjudicated by *shimagelé* (elders) has jurisdiction over minor cases, mostly concerning petty theft (up to 1300 Birr in 2015), marriage disputes and land boundary disputes. Social court was operational in Kuré Beret; it just did not sit in the little hut.

sports equipment in the school; the state-subsidised distribution of sugar and oil; the coffee ceremonies and sharing of *difo dabo* (traditional bread) that often accompanied events; and, as a focus of state management, the substances that I will argue in chapters 4 and 5 are crucial to producing relations between state and citizen: breastmilk (and porridge) and shit.

Blurring the boundaries between public and private, the government *gibbí* was also a social space for the government workers, who could be found sitting on the veranda of the health centre at any point of the day, including at the weekends. They would sometimes be listening to music on their phones or the radio, or talking on the phone, circling around the tree where the best mobile signal was found. Otherwise, they would be engaged in desultory chat, often sighing over their fate at being found in such a place as Kuré Beret. There was nothing comfortable or special about the *gibbí*. There was no cafe, no seat that was not a rickety wood and metal bench, and no attempt at decoration or beautification, through plants, paint or any element of intentional design. But it was the only semi-public space that 'belonged' to government workers and in which they appeared to feel fully comfortable, even if its lack of amenities and utilitarian unattractiveness reminded them of their hard lot in life. The habitual presence in the *gibbí* of at least one government worker meant that local people would come and go, but not often spend much time there. This does not mean, necessarily, that they were satisfied with their treatment or had found a resolution for their problem, but they were not made to wait in a way that asserted state power over their time and bodies (Gupta 2012; Bourdieu 2000). Government workers however, seemed to be perpetually waiting; their boredom and frustration evident in their conversations and their bodily dispositions, as they slumped on a hard bench whacking dust from their clothes.

The second central node, at the physical centre of the village, is the area around a long building called *simint kifil* (eight rooms) that contains beds rented out to day labourers and used by sex workers. The area of *simint kifil* is also the centre of public social life in Kuré Beret: there are a few bars, a generator-powered (until

the arrival of electricity in 2015) video house showing mostly action movies, and an open-air butchery, where meat is slaughtered and sold. Young landless men sent back from illegal shepherd or gardening jobs in Saudi Arabia congregate there, smoking cigarettes, chewing *qat*[72] and sometimes illegally gambling on cards in a half-built house. So do a few older men, drunk or mad or both, staggering and shouting at the sky. There is sometimes music, often ear-splittingly loud, and attempted horseplay with girls returning from their two hour round trip to fetch water from the river, who will usually have to pass *simint kifil* to reach their home.

My exposure to *simint kifil* was mainly limited to walking through it, following the lead of my government employee friends. They mostly did not go there to socialise and would not take me there; going alone might have been unwise. As a group (and as far as I could tell),[73] they barely drank alcohol, and neither did they chew *qat* or smoke cigarettes. Their avoidance of these behaviours was probably in part due to personal taste, disposition and wish for respectability (and was no doubt highly gendered). It was also inculcated in their professional personas: 'we should be models for the people,' one government worker told me, 'getting drunk on *katikala* [strong alcohol] and dancing would not be good behaviour for *yemengist seratenyoch*.' Like other 'respectable' residents, their social life was largely based in the *gibbís* where they rented rooms and those of their colleagues, as well as, in their particular case, in the school and government *gibbí*. However, their work responsibilities frequently called for them to move around on foot, exposing them to perceived danger and causing local people to both pity and scorn them. The young female health extension workers, for whom house-to-house visits were an essential part of their job, were thought to be especially vulnerable, in a similar way to the girls fetching water. This danger could be

[72] A legal mild stimulant drug in the form of fresh green leaves that are chewed but not swallowed. *Qat* (also spelled *chat* or *khat*) is an important cash crop and Ethiopia's fourth largest export in value (Lefort 2015:377). Originally associated with the predominately Muslim east of the country, *qat* is now common across Ethiopia, especially among urban youth, although many Orthodox Christians disapprove of its use (Ezekiel 2004).

[73] My gender and age may have affected my impression here; possibly some did and kept it hidden from me, assuming that a woman who was older than them would be less likely to join them or to approve.

physical; resulting from over-exposure to the sun, drunken lunges, or unwelcome involvement in fights. If farther afield, there was a real risk of attack by Afar people. Danger could also involve verbal insults, or the social danger of contact with the rougher and non-respectable folk of *simint kifil*. Or the danger could have a more existential element. The association of visibility with danger is well-documented in the ethnographic record on *buda* (often translated as 'evil eye'), 'the most consistent source of anxiety in daily life, because they are ever present, unpredictable, and potentially fatal' (Boylston 2018:86).

Bored Teachers near Kuré Beret, 2011.

I start this chapter with descriptions of the physically separated spaces of state life and public social life that are traversed by the government workers as a prelude to the wider theme of space in this chapter: the frontier space of the region where Kuré Beret is found, and the social spaces where government workers host coffee ceremonies. I also want to suggest that the dangerous visibility of government workers reveals a contrast with the notion of the power-

vision of the panopticon state (Strathern 2000; Scott 1998; Foucault 1991). In their work about village-level state workers, James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta suggest that they 'perhaps even more than other villagers, experienced the state as an organisation "above them" that was concerned primarily with surveillance and regulation, even as they themselves served as agents of that surveillance' (2002:985). In contrast, in her work in hospitals in Papua New Guinea, Alice Street (2012) writes that patients want to 'be seen' by the state as a means of eliciting a relational response, thus upending the association of vision with power and domination. I suggest that the government workers in Kuré Beret were not on the whole 'seen' to be acting as dangerous agents of surveillance, but rather viewed as semi-stranger figures exposed to physical, social and existential danger. Their moving around on foot can be seen, as Mimi Sheller and John Urry suggest, as 'a recentring of the corporeal body as an affective vehicle through which we sense place and movement, and construct emotional geographies' (2006:216). The 'emotional geography' of their mobility is one of the means by which I want to paint a picture of how the government workers understood their daily lives as precarious; a precarity they aimed to counter through their coffee drinking practices.

In what follows, I will introduce the group of public servants who are at the heart of this thesis, and centre on the material, affective and relational aspects of their daily lives in the rural area where I carried out most of my research. I will also introduce the setting of Kuré Beret: a *kebele* in the peripheral lowlands of North Shewa in Amhara Region, right on the border of Afar Region, that was the undesirable posting for most of the government workers who lived and worked there. In the second half of this chapter, I will discuss the practice of coffee drinking, fundamental to social life all over Ethiopia, as another lens through which to think about the production of social space within the village. I will explore the combination of boredom, discomfort and danger that the area evoked in government workers, bringing to mind Yael Navaro-Yashin's argument that 'the environment exerts a force on human beings in its own right… that there is something in space, in material objects, or in the environment that exceeds, or

goes further and beyond the human imagination, but that produces an affect that may be experienced by human beings, all the same' (2012:18).

Ifat: Tirfu Lifat (Ifat: Its Reward is Fatigue): Working at the Frontier of the State

The Shewan highlands were the historical origin of the Shewan imperial dynasty from which Emperor Menelik II descended, and the zone is physically relatively close to the capital, Addis Ababa. However, North Shewa has been described by Ahmed Hassan (2002) as '*yeqirb ruq*' (close yet far) for its lack of transport infrastructure that has made connections through and around the area challenging since imperial times. This characterisation is compounded in Kuré Beret by its location in the lowlands, in an area historically known as Ifat that is associated with non-Orthodox, non-Amhara peoples; with danger, adversity and lack of 'proper' behaviour (behaviour that displays obedience to state authorities). The remoteness that it is attributed to it, therefore, is not only an outcome of its physical attributes, but an example of the production of a particular kind of place (de Certeau 1988) that 'highlights the cultural and political work involved in rendering spaces with a seemingly natural and self-evident geography' (Mathur 2016:37). The 'incessant production of remoteness' (Mathur 2016:55) that government workers attributed to Kuré Beret - despite the rural North Shewan origins of the majority of them - was key to its undesirability as a work posting, and thus to their efforts to leave. Characterisations of lowland areas such as Kuré Beret, I am suggesting, had a particular valency in the way government workers conceived of their work in the service of the state; this does not mean that other (highland) rural areas were exempt from the desire of public servants to escape to a better elsewhere.[74]

[74] Nor does it mean that the state-society hierarchies I described in the last chapter remain extant in highland Amhara areas, in accordance with received ideas about the 'obedience' of highlanders compared to the 'uncivilised' lowland dwellers, whatever their ethnic origin (cf. Woldeab in the prologue). As my research took place in a particular location, however, I cannot say how much influence the highland-lowland distinction has on attitudes to the state in other places. Of course, this is not the only factor contributing to the precarious mobility of government workers, as this and other chapters will show.

As I showed in the previous chapter, Amhara hegemony has been central to Ethiopia's history as a nation. As Walleligne Mekonnen wrote in his famous article (see chapter 1), 'to be an Ethiopian, you have to wear an Amhara mask (to use Fanon's expression)' (in Gedion 2013:26), or, as Donald Donham puts it, 'being Amhara, well into Derg times, was assumed to set the (vertical) standard of what it meant to be Ethiopian' (2002:6). The historical region of Shewa, some of which correlates with the present-day zone of North Shewa, was prominent within Ethiopia's Amhara centre of power. After attack by Ahmad Gragn[75] in the sixteenth century reduced the Shewan nobility to a small number of petty chiefdoms, over the next three centuries one of these chiefdoms waged successively victorious warfare over regional rivals until 'in 1889 Menelik became emperor, continuing the process [of expansion] until he had conquered most of what is now Ethiopia' (Ege 1978:1). Yet, as Christopher Clapham writes 'in some respects, historically "core" areas of Ethiopia became a peculiar kind of periphery in their own way' (2002:12). According to Ahmed, Northern Shewa at the tail end of the imperial era in the 1960s and early 1970s, although not geographically distant from the capital, 'did not have the basic infrastructural elements which would have facilitated trade and political relations with the surrounding areas and with Addis Ababa' (2002:74): this was what made it *yeqirb ruq*. By this token, Ahmed writes, during this period 'the state hardly penetrated to the grassroots level in Northern Shewa' (2002:74).

Lack of infrastructure was only one facet of remoteness. As a counterpoint to the idea that 'looking down on hill people is a generic feature of hills-plains political cultures, as the word hillbilly indicates' (Mathur 2016:57; see also Singh 2011; Scott 2009), in Ethiopia the situation is reversed. The lowland areas surrounding the Ethiopian highlands - the latter historically the locus of hegemonic power - have been at the margins of the Ethiopian state since their incorporation into

[75] Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al.-Ghazi, known as Ahmad Gragn, led the 'destruction of the Christian kingdom (1529–1543)' as 'an Islamic holy warrior from the town of Harar, who united many of the Muslims of the Horn of Africa' (Erlich 2013:189-90); his troops mainly consisted of Somali and Afar soldiers (Rettburg 2013).

then-Abyssinia from the nineteenth century onwards. Christian highlanders have typically, literally and figuratively, looked down on those who inhabit the *qolla*[76] lowland areas. The lowlands, frequently disparagingly referred to as *bereha* (desert), have historically been associated, broadly, with Islam and a pastoralist mode of life (to the east) or forests, indigenous forms of religion, and a history of slavery (to the west), and in this mode of thinking, civilisation, true religiosity and 'proper' behaviour are found at higher elevations. Lowlands are seen as spaces of debilitating heat, with the disparate dangers of disease, bandits, and wild animals that are not found in highland areas. This characterisation can be heard in the words of Emperor Sahle Selassie, who told British traveller Major W. Cornwallis Harris in 1840 that 'the water of the Kwálla [*qolla*] is putrid, and the air hot and unwholesome. Noxious vapours arise during the night and the people die from fever. We fear their [the lowlanders'] sultry climate and their dense forests, and their mode of warfare' (quoted in McCann 1995:126-8). Drawing on a long history of such attitudes, Mengistu Hailemariam, leader of the Derg, justified his policy of forced resettlement (or 'villageisation')[77] in part through condemnation of lowland pastoralism; as a way 'to rehabilitate our nomad society' (quoted in Scott 1998:248). This is of course a generalisation, as there have also been longstanding currents of cooperation and mutual reliance between highland and lowland. Writing specifically about the Afar, Frehiwot Tesfaye says that they, 'for centuries kept the Ethiopian highlands connected with the outside world… they helped link isolated villages and small towns together, acting as catalysts, extending formal commerce, long-distance trade and economic processes' (1998:70-71).

The area around Kuré Beret, part of what was previously known as Ifat,[78] is at the periphery of the 'peculiar kind of periphery' (Clapham 2002:12) of North Shewa.

[76] 'Virtually all languages spoken on the highlands distinguish three general gradations: *daga*, cool highlands about 2500 meters, *wayna daga*, midrange areas between 1800 and 2400 meters, and *qolla*, hot lowlands below 1800 meters' (McCann 1995:28).
[77] On Ethiopia, see: Pankhurst and Piguet (2009); Pankhurst (1992). More widely, see: Scott (1998).
[78] Before administrative divisions were rearranged in 1993, Kuré Beret was in the *awraja* (sub-province) of Ifatina Timuga (Ifat and Timuga) in the province of Shewa.

In her thesis, Frehiwot provides an Amharic couplet that sums up the 'the hardships of life in Ifat caused by both natural and human factors': '*Ifat… Tirfu Lifat*' or 'Ifat: Its reward is toil/ fatigue' (1998:72). For government workers in the twenty first century, this remained true. They felt that life in Kuré Beret was 'rewarded by fatigue' and it was still experienced as *ye qirb ruq*: not actually far from the nearest town - a four-wheel drive car could make the journey in an hour or so - but without access to transport, their experience was one of remoteness. The government workers' difficulties in navigating their mobility (as I will describe in detail in the next chapter) reveal the socially constructed nature of space and people's movement through it. As Caroline Knowles writes 'journeys bring configurations of people and objects in motion into analytic focus' (2014:9); 'people are *where* they go and *how* they go' (2014:11, emphasis in original). Journeys to, from and around Kuré Beret were indicative of government workers' status less as 'agents of surveillance and regulation' (Ferguson and Gupta 2002:985) than as precarious figures outside of settled social relations; an 'outsideness' that their coffee drinking practices aimed to counter.

Kuré Beret: Background and History

Kuré Beret *kebele* is in Kewet[79] *wereda*, in the North Shewa Zone of Amhara Region, approximately 230 kilometres north of Addis Ababa. The nearest town of any size is Shewa Robit, the seat of the *wereda* administration, although itself administered as a separate municipality. Shewa Robit is on the main road between Addis Ababa and the large city of Dessie in the highland area of Wello; a dramatic drive north of the capital over the mountain pass at T'armabir through a series of switchback tunnels first constructed by the Italians in the 1930s. In the swift descent down many hundreds of metres in altitude in the space of less than an hour, sensory and visual changes are startling: cold breeze and thick mist, pine trees and *gelada* baboons, indigenous to the mountains, give way to papaya,

[79] The *wereda* name, written ቁዉት in the Amharic alphabet, is transliterated in many different ways. I have seen all of the following: Kewot, Kewet, Kuwot, Qawat, Quowet, Qewet, Quet, Quewet. I am using the spelling Kewet, following usage in the census (FDRE 2007).

avocado and orange trees, laden camels, warm air and white dust. Kuré Beret is reached by a road that turns to the east from Shewa Robit, passes by the rural town of Abayat'ir, turns to the right in the large village of Sefí Beret, past the enclosed Argobba village of Wesiso and finally ends with a short incline, farmland on either side, at the low walls of the village. A track continues to the village of Enbuwaybad and past the village, turns a sharp left towards Afar Region. This track is not regularly used and only by the strongest vehicles. Lying below the Mafud escarpment, Kuré Beret is overlooked far to the west by the areas of Menz, Tegulet and Bulga in the central Amhara highlands. Some parts of the *kebele* - the villages of Werq Amba, Meda and Qollé - are themselves located at higher altitude. Further north and east into Afar Region, towards the border with Eritrea, lie the salt pans and sulphurous volcanic landscape of the Danakil depression, which at 120 metres below sea level is the hottest place on earth.

Tuesday Market in Kuré Beret; looking towards the highlands, 2014

As much of the settlement of now-majority Amhara farmer residents in the lowland parts of the *kebele* happened within living memory, population density is moderately low and soil fertility has been retained. At the end of the Derg era, only 14 percent of land was classified as intensively or moderately cultivated in the old *awraja* of Ifatina Timuga, compared to 79 percent in neighbouring highland Menzina Gishé *awraja* (Daniel 1990). Nowadays extensive livestock rearing and cash cropping of *masho* (mung beans) for export as animal feed to Europe mean that local farmers are relatively financially comfortable, especially compared to surrounding highland areas (Yared 2002). One NGO report calls lowland Kewet 'a productive and food secure livelihood zone' (FEG 2007:9). Frehiwot writes that the historical area of Ifat was long known for being 'endowed with fertile soils and water, conducive both for farming and grazing… Ifat valley became a perennial lure for Wello peasants in search of subsistence and autonomy' (1998:65). This remains the case: during the harvest months starting in August, large numbers of seasonal labourers, mainly from highland Wello, arrive for temporary work. However, the poorest local people rely on food aid, as well as paid labour for others, to supplement their livelihoods, especially in years when rains are poor, such as in 2015. Despite its relatively prosperous nature, infrastructure in Kuré Beret is poor: the road from Shewa Robit is unpaved, in terrible condition and impassable in rainy season; electricity arrived only in 2015; and women and children make the daily round trip of several hours to fetch untreated water from the river. Construction of a piped water system was started in 2015, but was not operational by the time I left.

The majority of inhabitants of Kuré Beret are ethnic Amhara Orthodox Christians, with a small number of Muslim Amhara, and one wholly Muslim and Argobba village. Although Argobba and Afar people have a long history of residence in the area around Kuré Beret (the former much longer - see below), the Argobba are now a small minority of the population,[80] while the Afar have

[80] From the zonal population of 1.83 million, 31,000 are Argobba, according to the 2007 census (FDRE 2007:131). Furthermore, by the 1960s, according to McCann 'the distinctive Argobba culture had largely disappeared' (1995:113).

moved farther east into what has been designated as Afar Region since 1995. Adherence to various types of Evangelical and other Protestant forms of Christianity, known generically in Amharic as *P'enté,* is growing rapidly in the *wereda*.[81] As of 2015, however, there were no non-Orthodox Christians in the *kebele*, with the exception of the employees of Mulu Wengel, an indigenous church organisation that I will write about in chapter 3. This situation is very unlikely to last, as there are growing numbers of evangelical Christians in neighbouring *kebeles* and, especially, in Shewa Robit. Mulu Wengel's development organisation was the only formal non-governmental organisation with any long term presence in the *kebele,* although there were visits from others for occasional training or awareness raising meetings (see chapters 4 and 5). Other forms of indigenous informal civil society organisation, *idir, iqub* and *mahber,* were also active. The first two are means of mutual saving: the former connected with funeral expenses, the latter paying out a monthly lump sum on a rotational basis to each member, and often dissolved once everyone has received payment. A *mahber* is a social group, often wholly or predominately female, that is dedicated to a particular saint. There may have been equivalent groups in Wesiso centred on Muslim religious practices, but as I spent much less time there than in Kuré Beret, I cannot confirm it.

The east of Ethiopia has a long, dynamic and fragmented history with Islam, since it established 'a foothold along the Red Sea coast from the ninth century onward through Arab migrants and traders' (Rettburg 2013:74). The area around Kuré Beret was historically ruled by the Muslim Sultanate of Ifat[82] from its capital in Zeila in present day Somaliland; its exact era is still disputed by scholars, but it was thought to flourish between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries (Fauvelle-Aymar et al. 2006). Tensions increased between the Christian Solomonic dynasty and the sultanates, of which Ifat was the most prominent,

[81] In 2007, there were almost 100,000 Orthodox Christians and more than 17,000 Muslims in Kewet *wereda* from a population of c. 118,000 (FDRE 2007:170). Since then, the reported population of approximately 1,000 Protestants has certainly increased.
[82] Also spelled Yifat or Yefat, and, in referring to the historical sultanate, Awfāt (Fauvelle, Hirsch and Chekroun 2017).

during the reign of Amde Siyon (1314–44), 'erupting in conflict… and leading to partial occupation of Ifat and the establishment of a Christian garrison at a number of important sites' (Demichelis 2016:230).

Argobba people have a long association with Ifat. Ahmed Hassan states that 'according to local Arabic manuscripts, "Argobba" would designate the inhabitants of one ancient Muslim city (Goba) in Ifat' (in Demichelis 2016:227). Abbebe Kifleyesus tells us that 'there is evidence indicating that the present Argobbā of Šäwa and Wällo are a remnant population of the Sultanate of Yefat' (2007:450). In the seventeenth century, there was Oromo settlement in Ifat, as part of a wider Oromo migration that 'resulted in large- scale displacement of the Amhara and the Argobba' (Atkilt 2003:54). An Amhara-Argobba alliance took back much of the land occupied by Oromo settlers by the later part of the century, although some Oromo herders remained. The history of the Afar in the area is relatively shorter: they started extending westwards into Ifat starting in the late eighteenth century and especially by the late nineteenth century, due to a combination of intra-clan feuding, ecological conditions, and the large-scale famine of 1888-92 (Atkilt 2003). The area of Ifat has thus been characterised by Frehiwot as historically a 'scene of divided loyalties and endemic conflict over land for pasture, farms, rivers, and lakes. It is a frontier area contested between different faiths, people following different livelihoods, and regional aristocracies' (1998:71).

Since the early nineteenth century and especially during the latter half of the twentieth century, there has been steady movement of Amhara Orthodox Christians from the highlands of North Shewa to the eastern *qolla* areas; from areas administered under *rist* land tenure to areas that had 'the characteristics of *gasha maret*; that is, the distribution was controlled by local landlords' (McCann 1995:118). Many of these Amhara farmers had originally come from farther west in the central highlands, especially from around Gonder, during the reign of Sahle Selassie (1813-47). From his base in Ankober, Sahle Selassie 'extended his

control over the eastern lowlands inhabited by Argobba Muslims' (McCann 1995:110), in part through granting *gasha meret* rights to Amhara in-migrants.

In Ifat, Amhara movement caused conflict with Afar people, who were also moving there around the same time period, especially after the serious famine in the late nineteenth century. Oromo-Afar conflict that flared in the 1920s over access to grazing resources eventually resulted in the withdrawal of Oromo herders from the wider area (Ahmed 1994). Ethnic conflict was affected by political manoeuvring during the short reign of Lij Iyasu (1910-16), whose links with the Muslim eastern lowlands contributed to his downfall (Ficquet and Smidt 2013). Conflict was intensified by the brutal Italian invasion and occupation in the 1930s, which intentionally split collaborators (*banda*) and resistance, known as patriots (*arbegnoch*) along ethnic and religious lines (Rettburg 2013), called by Taddesse Zawalde 'the period of devouring one another' (quoted in Ahmed 1998:180). A farmer from Kuré Beret called Tashabbaru played an unrecognised but important role in the course of the conflict. In 1937 Tashabbaru, who was a member of a local patriot cell, killed Shaykh Mohamed Sultan of Bati, the head of the alliance of collaborating forces. Shaykh Mohamed - who had studied in Wesiso, among other centres of Islamic learning (Ahmed 1998:171) - was known as *Abba Saytan* (Father Devil) for his indiscriminate violence against civilians (Ahmed 1998:176). After the Shaykh's death, the collaborators' campaign fell apart, leaving the Italians increasingly vulnerable to attack and causing their retreat to urban areas, where they were easily defeated by Allied forces in 1941. Although Tashabbaru's action had been a significant factor in shifting the course of the war, it was never acknowledged: a regional dignitary claimed the killing as his own, and reaped the glory and rewards that followed (Ahmed 1998:177).

During the post-Italian imperial and Derg eras, ethnic relations were sometimes strained over access to natural resources, but generally Amhara dominance ensured their ability to settle the area. Current residents remember clearing land for agriculture that was previously used by Afar pastoralists. As I mentioned in

the prologue, when my landlord Tibebe moved from the highlands above Werq Amba to a place near Kuré Beret in the mid-1970s, 'it was just forest and wild animals, and we cleared it', he told me. The Afar, he said, 'had no power, and would run away if they saw Amhara.' Based on research just after the end of the Derg era, Frehiwot says that

> in Qewet even the Adal [Afar] have opted for sedentary life side by side the Amhara population. As a result, the occupational, ethnic and religious boundaries between groups are not permanent and unalterable: boundaries are not fixed but are dynamic and fluid (1998:88).

This fluidity appears to have been altered as regional boundaries hardened under the current ethnic federalism mode of government: in the 2007 census, the population of Afar was reported as only 216 people from the 1.83 million in North Shewa Zone (FDRE 2007:131). Local people say conflict has worsened under the EPRDF: Tibebe blamed the easy access to *klash* (kalashnikov guns), and also the concept of *iqulinet* (equality) between different ethnic groups. 'People knew their place before there was equality,' he told me, obviously referring to what he saw as Amhara superiority. Afar respondents in Atkilt Daniel's research meanwhile felt that 'farmers are expanding cultivation over the areas, which they consider as rightfully theirs…[and also] are increasingly encroaching to their grazing areas for grazing and fuel wood collection and in the process they degrade the rangeland as well as destroy the bush cover' (2003:109). Indiscriminate killings, animal raids, crop damage and attacks on property with small-scale explosives, by both Afar and Amhara, are a frequent occurrence in Kuré Beret *kebele* and neighbouring *kebeles*; special gravestones marking, and celebrating, those who were killed by Afar fill the Orthodox church burial ground in Kuré Beret.[83] According to Atkilt, in Kewet *wereda* as a whole, 116 people were killed in the eight years between 1994 and 2002 (2003:74). This number includes one famous and particularly horrific event just outside Kuré Beret village. In this incident, 27 Afar women were detained as they left Kuré Beret's weekly market to walk back to their homes, and then killed all at once by brothers whose relatives had

[83] At least this was my understanding; Atkilt says that in fact they mark the grave of someone who has killed an Afar (2003:121).

themselves been killed by Afar, dramatically breaking the mutual agreement that women attending the market were exempt from the conflict (Atkilt 2003:79).

In my experience (and understandably), it is now very rare to see anyone Afar in Kuré Beret, although some Amhara families retain a special relationship (*wodaj*) with an Afar family. Tibebe could speak the Afar language as a result of having an Afar *wodaj* passed down from his grandfather to his father, and then to Tibebe, who had retained the relationship despite the growing tensions over the years. Tibebe said the reason for the *wodaj* was 'to keep us safe'; some other people told me that *wodaj* were also suspected to be used by Amhara as proxies, with farmers asking them to attack or steal from other farmers with whom they are in conflict, with the expectation that Afar regional authorities had neither the capacity nor the desire to pursue or punish wrong-doers.

These historical and ongoing currents of conflict and cooperation with Afar pastoralists and Argobba farmers, as well as recent large-scale youth migration to the middle east, have given the area a look and feel that is distinct from neighbouring rural highland areas. It is visible, for example, in the villages encircled by thorn-bush barricades and the personal style choices of young men who eschew the green shorts of their highland kin for a checked *sherit* (type of cloth used as a skirt) that would elsewhere likely mark them out as Muslim. Other intangible forms of difference from the highlands were part of the discourse about the area, as indicated by remarks to me by incoming government workers, who variously told me that the local people were '*balegé*' (rude, rough), 'not obedient,' and 'not good Orthodox.' Getahun, a teacher from a family of priests, told me that his mother who lived in a neighbouring highland *wereda* would be shocked by people's lenience in religious observance and the ease, as he saw it, with which they would nominally convert to Islam to ease their path as migrant workers to Muslim countries in the Middle East.

Highland-lowland interactions are part of a frontier mode of governing, what Benedikt Korf et al. (2013), in the case of the Somali Region of Ethiopia, call a

'zone of indistinction,' where the state does not end but fades away into a disorderly 'fuzziness.' The frontier between Afar and Amhara has both similarities and differences from that of Somali Region, including that national 'governmental interventions and policies [have] failed to acknowledge pastoralism as a viable way of life' (Rettburg 2013:76). Ethnic Somalis live in wide swathe of different states and unrecognised territories across the Horn region, contributing to the Ethio-Somali (or Ogaden) war of 1977-8, and to the contemporary imbrication of Somali territories in regional and global security calculations related to the 'war on terror' (Korf et al. 2013). Although Afar people also live outside the borders of the Ethiopian state, in Eritrea and Djibouti, their small population and the successful exploitation of internal divisions by the central state in the pursuit of quiescence (Clapham 2002:22) have contributed to Afar Region's status as marginal among the marginalised frontier regions. Nevertheless, Korf et al's claim that 'although the Somali region appears to be at the periphery, it is nevertheless central to the constitution of the Ethiopian nation-state' (2013:40) can be applied more widely. The formalised border since 1991 between Afar and Amhara regions - a frontier space, as Igor Kopytoff puts it, that is 'a political fact, a matter of political definition of geographical space,' and a space where political control is absent or uncertain (1987:11) - has its own history of conquest and division, contestations and negotiations, and, importantly, role in strengthening ethnic identity above other forms of belonging. The more mundane existence of a frontier as a space in and through which people live and travel can easily be overlooked, but is nevertheless central to the everyday constitution of the state. As Yael Navaro-Yashin writes 'all spaces, when aligned with state practices, have make-believe qualities' (2012:6); the entanglement of the physicality of the 'making' and the imaginative work of 'believing' combine to produce the spaces of the state.

The public servants in Kuré Beret are not, since decentralisation, involved in 'the quest of the political centre to colonise and transform the pastoral frontier' (Korf et al. 2013:46). They have no jurisdiction over or even, since the brutal mass killing of the early 2000s, any contact with Afar people. The 'fuzziness' of state

power is revealed in their perception that Afar attackers can escape punishment across the regional state border, that 'political fact' that makes state power 'fade away'; as Joel Migdal writes, such boundaries 'signify the point at which something becomes something else, at which the way things are done changes' (2004:5). The embodied and affective experience of the frontier by government workers is thus a quotidian state-making practice that shapes and reveals not the expanding reach of an authoritarian state, but rather the vulnerable precarity of those at the lowest level of the state. The social and political construction of the frontier produces actual embodied danger, and is part of what makes government work so unattractive. The rendering of Kuré Beret as a remote frontier space is one of the primary ways in which it becomes, for the government workers, a place from which to escape.

Introducing the Government Workers

Conflict-ridden, with a de facto curfew past the hours of darkness; lacking basic services; uncomfortably hot for at least a third of the year; and literally at the end of the road: this was the setting to which the government workers had been sent after qualifying from college or university. With the exception of Aklilu in Werq Amba and another teacher, who had resigned his job in an urban high school when he married another teacher working in the village - the others thought he was crazy, or that she had somehow bewitched him - the government workers were not there by choice, and, as I have already shown, most were not at all happy with their assignment.

There were between twenty-five and thirty government employees in Kuré Beret *kebele* during the period of my research. The majority, approximately twenty, were teachers. On a permanent basis, there were also health extension workers (two in 2010/ 11; none by 2016, although nurses on short term contracts had taken over some of their work); agricultural extension and land registration workers (up to four); and the *kebele* manager. Others who came for extended periods were

two policemen, and sundry visitors from the *wereda*, especially from the health office and the cabinet (see below). In terms of qualifications, most of the public servants in Kuré Beret had studied up to diploma level, and a handful had degrees. The minimum qualification was completing high school up to Grade 10 (one of the agricultural extension workers), or Grade 10 with one further year of training (the health extension workers). Their ages ranged from twenty-two - the freshest diploma graduates - to around thirty (although, as I will explain in chapter 6, official age and actual age did not always align.) State workers are assigned to positions by the *wereda*, as they had been assigned to their studies according to their grades. Among those who do well enough at their preparatory level exams to attend a state higher education institute,[84] a medical degree is generally considered the pinnacle. Other courses of study descend down the hierarchy of desirability to a diploma in primary school teaching; not an option anyone I met consciously chose, but the result of disappointing grades and a fate to be continually rued and cursed. For men (as women were generally not sent to satellite schools), it could mean being sent to an isolated single room school as the only teacher.

Freshly qualified workers know they will be sent to rural areas like my research site. At least the first year of service (*gideta*) is decided by lottery among rural areas where teachers are needed; the more remote or difficult, the more likely there will be a vacancy, but protests against the lottery assignation are common and sometime successful (see chapter 6). After the *gideta* period is finished, they can request a transfer, so how long an individual stays in one place and where they move onto after that is determined by ambition, personal characteristics, and social connections, as well as an element of luck in where vacancies open up. There is huge turnover: between my first visit in 2010 and 2016, only four teachers remained among all state employees. Most change places every year or two within rural areas, trading off various factors: ease of access (one teacher arrived from a previous posting where he had to walk eight hours from the road); the availability of desirable food (another teacher in a satellite school claimed he

[84] See the next chapter for more about the educational system.

lived on eggs for a year as the *yemashela* [sorghum] *injera*[85] was so bad); the weather (hot and dusty like Kuré Beret being deemed the worst); and the degree of isolation (which, as I have shown, can be related to wider narratives about remoteness). Being formally assigned to an urban area could take five or ten years of service, but there are other means of trying to reach the end goal, as expressed by most, of a job in, or at least near, a town. Some employ unconfirmed but suspected strategies, such as family connections or sexual affairs, or deploy unfortunate events, consciously or not, such as an HIV diagnosis or an attack of *zar* spirits.[86]

The government workers were very nearly all were ethnic Amhara and broadly reflected the general population of the area in their majority Orthodox Christian, minority Muslim mix. At least while in Kuré Beret, none of them were openly evangelical Christian, although some of the government workers converted after leaving government employment (see chapter 6). Most were from rural or peri-urban areas within North Shewa; some knew each other from high school in Shewa Robit or from teacher training college in the zonal capital Debre Berhan. Others were from more distant areas in Amhara Region - Wello, directly to the north, or faraway Gojjam in the north-west - with a very small number, at *wereda* level, from other ethnic backgrounds. Strikingly, not one was from Addis Ababa or any large urban area; the mix of ethnicities and middle-class or elite backgrounds that were apparently found among the *zemecha* of the Derg era (Clapham 2002) or the urbanite civil servants of imperial times (Marzagora 2016) were nowhere to be found. A common conversational topic among government workers was recounting the dangers that faced those who moved to other regions. Hostility or attacks on ethnically different others were discussed on these occasions, whether truth, rumour, or a mix of both was impossible to tell. However, events in the last few years indicate that such fears about the risk of

[85] A fermented pancake bread that is the staple food of highland Ethiopia, usually (and most desirably) made with an indigenous grain called *teff*.
[86] Accounts of the nature, results of, and reasons behind possession by *zar* spirits are ambiguous and disputed (Boylston 2012; Young 1975).

ethnic conflict for those who work or study in regions where they are not a member of the ethnic majority are founded in reality.[87]

The government workers' relationship status was varied. A handful were married and lived together in the village, while others had spouses who lived elsewhere, often in Shewa Robit. A small number had children, who did not live with them in Kuré Beret and were cared for by relatives. For the most part however, they were single; either divorced or never married. Some of the men were engaged or had an informal 'promise' arrangement with women from their home area or from college or university days. Several of their fiancees were working as domestic servants in the Middle East and the separation loomed long: from one or two, to as long as four years into the future. Others, both men and women, had less stable love lives, from short-lived sexual encounters to serial romances, with other government workers, with people from Shewa Robit, and - a small number of women - with local farmers.

Expectations for marriage were sharply divided between farmers and government workers, as they are more widely between rural and urban areas, and between those with different levels of income and education. Local people were almost universally married for the first time by their late teens (for women)[88] or early twenties (for men), while being unmarried into ones mid- or late twenties was not unusual among those with an education, especially for men. While it is common to encounter unmarried professional women in their thirties and older in Addis Ababa, in smaller urban areas this still provokes comment and the designation of being *qome qer* (lit. left standing; on the shelf, an old maid). A single woman in her early forties with a successful career in government administration who had never been married and had no children was pointed

[87] Hayalnesh (2019) is just one example of media reports about serious ethnic conflict within universities.

[88] Legally marriage is not allowed for under the age of eighteen in Ethiopia under the Family Code of 2000 (Hannig 2018:212). In practice, in Kewet, girls are frequently married at fifteen, sixteen or seventeen, although people told me that the age is shifting upwards and marriage is no longer common for girls aged fourteen or under (except for a particular type of marriage in which a boy and a girl are 'promised' as children, but which will not be consummated until they are older).

out to me several times as an object of curiosity and pity. For men and especially women, lack of children is considered a sad and unfortunate circumstance in life, far beyond marital status. Based on research in highland North Shewa in the imperial era, Wolfgang Weissleder argues that for rural peasants, marriage is considered in 'pragmatic terms of household formation and organisation of a livelihood' (1974:72), and that this leads to high rates of divorce.[89] This characterisation was criticised by Helen Pankhurst for being overly materialist, and for ignoring emotional motivations and women's agency in 'careering through marriage' (1992:118). In North Shewa, divorce remains very common and the rate of remarriage is correspondingly high. Neither carries very much stigma in either rural or urban areas; at least up to three times, according to Anita Hannig's respondents (2018:46). The step-mother of Yeshi, the teacher-turned-entrepreneur who I will introduce in chapter 6, had been married an unusually high ten times.

The general consensus among the unmarried government worker men in Kuré Beret was that no woman would be interested in them as a long term marriage prospect. One teacher friend, Gedela, talked to me often about the difficulty of finding someone willing to marry him. All women care about is money, he would complain. 'Minimum, you need a bed, a *buffet* (display cabinet) and a TV. Plus a sofa and a fridge, if she's really fussy.'[90] He lamented that a government worker on a basic salary like him could never afford such things. Comparing himself to a young man who was sitting with us one day, an unmarried relative of Gedela's landlady, who had recently returned from illegally working in 'Jidda,' Gedela said 'he is not married like me - but he has land, so no problem for him. And she [the landlady] - she has land too, so if her husband loses his money, she can divorce him!' This cynicism about love relationships, among men in particular, was widespread, and indicated a dissonance between being a 'modern' person, with

[89] Except for *qurban* marriages - the only type of marriage that takes place in a church - among priests and the very pious, which cannot be dissolved.
[90] Deborah James has written about the politics of respectability and ubiquity of debt related to furniture in South Africa that 'arose in part within in a customary ritualisation of the life course, entailed aspirations to suave urbanism and modernity, and exposed householders to gradually increasing expenditure - and expanding credit access - over time' (2015:102).

the expectation that relationships would be freely chosen based on love and compatibility, and the reality, as they perceived it, that economic imperatives loomed above all other factors, putting teachers and other government workers at a disadvantage.

Government workers' imaginaries about the opportunities afforded by the outside world, partly informed by their consumption of media (mostly through radio, TV and Facebook), mainly coalesced around three particular avenues: employment by foreign companies and NGOs (which, as I showed in the introduction, was not either a likely or a well-paid option in North Shewa); evangelical Christianity (which, even in indigenous churches, was associated with global forces, visions and sources of money; see chapter 3); and global migration. In the latter case, their orientation was directed elsewhere than the yearnings towards Europe or the US of many young urban Ethiopians. Instead they looked towards the middle east, which they saw as providing their most realistic prospect of social mobility through movement. No one I met in my research area, government worker or local resident alike, was untouched by migration of a family member or loved one to what was colloquially known as 'Jidda,' encompassing Saudi Arabia as a whole, Lebanon, Yemen, Dubai and elsewhere in the Emirates; to a lesser extent Turkey and, pre-2010s, Syria. Unlike making it to the USA[91] or 'fortress Europe,' the possibility of going to 'Jidda' was realistic and acted upon by people in huge numbers,[92] as well as being highly gendered. Women could, until 2013, be legally employed as domestic workers in Saudi Arabia through the *kafala* (sponsor) system, while it was very unlikely that men would be able to access a legal route. Many women left legally, but once

[91] This was primarily seen as the domain of the urban, educated and connected, even for the Diversity Visas (DV) scheme. It was also subject to changing political circumstances. In a possibly apocryphal story but related to me as true, a senior level Ethiopian government official claimed asylum in the USA after attending a meeting there in 2016. A few weeks later, Trump was elected and the official put out feelers to see if his old job would still be open if he was to drop the asylum claim and return to Addis.

[92] 'Data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs on legal migration to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates show a big jump from about 42,000 in 2010/11, to almost 200,000 in 2011/12 and almost as many in 2012/13. This excludes the many more who moved through irregular channels' (Dom 2017b).

abroad became illegal in a bid to escape abusive conditions or through choosing a better paid option.

In late 2013 the Saudi government started to expel illegal migrants as part of King Abdullah's 'Saudization policy'; by February 2014, around 160,000 Ethiopians, both male and female, had been sent home (RMMS 2014:53). In response, the Ethiopian government banned all travel abroad for employment purposes until 2015, when new proclamations regulating overseas employment, smuggling and trafficking were adopted (Dom 2017b). As elsewhere in North Shewa, there were many men and women repatriated during this process living in Kuré Beret. Most described themselves as waiting for any opportunity to re-migrate, despite both direct testimonies and rumours about abuse, rape, violence, imprisonment and terrible hardship experienced by both legal and (especially) illegal migrants. The majority opinion among many local people and government workers alike was that the risk was, as Tekalign Ayalew writes about migrants heading to Sweden, worth 'the possibility of creating opportunities' (2017:12).

Despite the common perception of them as remote, Kuré Beret and Kewet are firmly entangled with distant places and people - and always have been, as I showed earlier in this chapter. However, direct unmediated contact with non-Ethiopian 'outsiders' (or even, to some extent, those from outside North Shewa) was not so common. Unlike the urban street hustlers (Di Nunzio 2017; Mains 2012a), tourist guides (Boylston 2018; Bridonneau 2014), or hospitalised women (Hannig 2018) of recent ethnographies of Ethiopia, the government workers were largely removed from tourist or international NGO circuits. Even the town of Shewa Robit was little-visited by foreigners,[93] explaining the breathless (and dubious) reports I heard when a young European woman was briefly reported to have moved there ('She walks around eating chocolate and kissing her boyfriend!' 'Her skirts are so short you can see her knees!'). The limited number of foreigners that some of the government workers had personally come across -

[93] Although there were some; I will discuss the visits of Turkish railway engineers and American missionaries in chapter 6.

some mentioned an Indian teacher at school or a white health expert at a training session - had been distant, professional or fleeting figures. Often their general shy diffidence, poor English and ideas about proper behaviour had prevented them from engaging further. One teacher told me that there had been two white foreigners based in their college for two years, but he had not talked to them, and did not know what they were doing there or anything else about them. As a white foreigner myself, I was amazed, assuming the attention I received translated into a sort of localised celebrity. 'They mostly sat by themselves in the cafe,' he told me. 'We felt bad, but we did not want to approach them in case they thought we were *duriye* [rude].' The government workers were not in the position of 'eating foreigners with their eyes' as a challenge to the discipline of fasting (Malara 2018), leave alone finding foreign women as providing 'realistic prospects of material advancement in life' (Boylston 2018:148). Their knowledge of the western world was strikingly Ethio-centric. One of the degree-holding government workers wondered how and where I had learned to speak Amharic; 'do they teach it in school in your country?' he asked. When I answered that they did not, he replied 'that's a shame; they should.'

Living Conditions

In Kuré Beret, Wesiso and the three single-teacher satellite schools, the government workers lived in rented rooms. In Kuré Beret, these were in five or six compounds belonging to richer farmers, who had the space and money to build extra rooms. These rooms had tin roofs and mud walls, and were overrun with rats and bedbugs: the hotter the weather, the worse the bedbugs, and in the hottest months of April and May, some people chose to sleep outside among the livestock.[94] These rooms were small and narrow, most with only enough room for a foam mattress, a small table or stool for storage of basic necessities, and a

[94] I bought a 'bedbug tent' from a foreigner who was leaving the country; a unwieldy contraption that was nicknamed 'the *bajaj*' and made me feel a bit ridiculous. Without it however, it is no exaggeration to say that I would not have lasted a week: those things were vicious.

bucket for water. The more homely rooms were decorated with religious posters or sheets of paper with handwritten sayings. Most, however, were bare, unloved and very obviously temporary. They were far cry from the 'minimum buffet and TV' that Gedela believed were essential to marriage prospects, or even the decorative *mededaria* (shelves) displaying pots and other household items that local married women crafted from mud in their main living spaces that, barring divorce or migration, would be their permanent homes. During 2014 a handful of government workers moved into larger rooms in a newly completed concrete house belonging to a successful *delala* (broker), who had made a lot of money sending people illegally to Saudi Arabia via Yemen (including some ex-government workers). However, unlike their farmer landlords, all the government workers - even the lucky few in the new house - slept, cooked and socialised in the same cramped and plain space.

Neatly Arranged *Mededaria*, Enbuwaybad 2010

With no families to provide food, in the form of staple grains and pulses; no transport to bring any back from visits home; and no place to store it even if so, government workers' access to food - as well as water, accommodation and other goods - depended on the farmers. Their low salaries meant that many went into small-scale debt to local farmer-merchants, sometimes for two weeks of each month. 'You have to eat meat on the first day of each month [when salaries are paid]' people said. 'Then back to *shiro.*' Justified anxiety about price-fixing and being over-charged was widespread; for example, in 2014, the rising cost of a ready-made single *injera*, seemingly after agreement by all the local *injera*-sellers, caused consternation, but nothing could be done to persuade the sellers to reduce the price.

Government Worker Rented Accommodation, Kuré Beret, 2014.

As well as the permanent government workers based in the *kebele*, there were several *wereda* employees who would come to Kuré Beret regularly, some for a month or more as part of a special 'campaign,' as was the case for Woldeab

during the *shintabet gizé*. Another was Shimeles, a member of the *wereda* political cabinet, who came in part to solicit donations for the Meles Foundation, a government organisation set up after Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's death in 2012. The money would be used to set up a museum in his memory; government workers were under the most obligation to pay.[95] Shimeles was a tall and forceful young man whose eyes were unusually close together, which gave him an appropriate look of determination. He had a penchant for giving unsolicited advice and was skilled at keeping meetings on track, even when someone else was supposed to be chairing. On one occasion he wielded a stick against a local alcoholic man, Mamoush, an ex-teacher who now spent his days slurring and falling down drunk, to banish him from the government *gibbí* when a meeting was taking place. Some of the teachers I think found him condescending and an annoyingly over-zealous party man, but he was generally friendly and his daily interactions with others displayed little evidence of marking out his own higher status in the governmental hierarchy through the subordination of others. While in the village, he shared a barebones room with Yared, a government worker based in Kuré Beret full time. Neither spent much time in the room, but they did have to eat. Shimeles would often cook pasta or *shiro,* which he and Yared, both unmarried, would eat with their friend Eshetu. Eshetu was a married farmer with five children who was involved in the *kebele* cabinet, and who would never be expected to do any kind of domestic work relating to food preparation or cleaning. Unlike the farmers then, whose adult labour was strictly divided by gender into domestic work (female) and heavy agricultural work (male), the government workers had to shift for themselves. They had to shop at the small Tuesday market, as well as consider bringing food from town to keep costs down and compensate for the limitations of Kuré Beret's market. Sometimes even onions and garlic were not available, making food preparation extremely bland for local tastes (or any taste - I was caught out a few times, and found allium-free food quite unpalatable too). Government workers also had to do their own cooking, dishwashing, cleaning, and clothes washing, although most paid their landlords and local women to fetch water and make *injera* respectively.

[95] As they had been to buy bonds to support the building of the Renaissance Dam.

Although quotidian sharing of food, coffee and alcoholic drinks certainly took place between farmers and government workers, as I will show in the next section, and government workers often cooked for each other, it was also common for them to cook and eat alone. This social isolation was striking in a cultural milieu where as Boylston writes about elsewhere in Amhara Region, 'eating together is the first sign of community belonging' (2013:260), and 'to be alone is always bad, and much of village life revolves around making sure to show others that you are present to them' (2018:122). In this sense, government workers were not fully present to other people. While some stayed longer than others, and some did form meaningful friendships and romantic attachments, for the most part government workers were shadowy and interchangeable figures. Penny Harvey describes the state as 'an abstract shadowy presence' (2005:129); here the government workers were a present shadowy presence. In the rest of this chapter, I will explore the social space of the coffee ceremony. Coffee, unlike food, was never consumed alone, and this made coffee drinking practices an important means of building group solidarity to counter the onerous anti-social effects that being such a 'shadowy presence' could entail.

The Social Importance of Coffee

If I ever complained of a headache during my research someone would advise me to drink *buna* (coffee). As frequent coffee drinkers, like many Ethiopians, people in Kuré Beret were well aware of the physical attributes of coffee, including caffeine withdrawal headaches. However, the non-material aspects of coffee far outweigh its stimulant properties: ethnographic work from highland Ethiopia shows that commensality, or the sharing of substance, is the primary social and moral idiom among the Amhara, both in the religious sphere of Orthodox Christianity and the secular social world (Crawley 2018; Boylston 2013). Coffee is associated with social unity across religious and ethnic boundaries; according to Rita Pankhurst 'coffee is the substance of togetherness' (1997:536). Frehiwot

describes in North Shewa how 'the communal sharing of coffee bolsters collective empathy and solidarity even in conditions of utmost poverty' (1998:181). Dropped into the mouths of infants from a few months old, coffee is central to idealised notions about national culture for Ethiopians at home and abroad: Don Seeman defines '*buna* practice as a privileged site of culture's transaction' (2015:737). Ethnographic literature documents *buna* drinking as a site of specifically female bonding (e.g. Yedes et al. 2004), as well as being notorious for engendering gossip about those not present (Seeman 2015). It is both symbolic of the nation, the probable original source of the wild coffee plant (McCann 1995:149), and vital for the national economy as an export crop, as well as having a strong domestic market.

This was not always the case. Charles Poncet, a French doctor who visited Ethiopia in 1699 writes that although coffee could be found 'the Aethiopians do not esteem [it] much… at present they cultivate it in Aethiopia only as a curiosity… they make no use of it' (quoted in Merid 1988:22). Until the twentieth century, coffee was not cultivated in plantations but gathered in the wild, mainly from forests in the southwest of the country (McCann 1995). McCann writes that there were conflicting reports about the consumption of non-cultivated coffee, with some arguing that it was freely gathered and used by peasant farmers (Guglielmo Massaja [1886] in McCann 1995:160), while oral testimony sources claim that it was associated with the state and permission to consume it was restricted. In the Oromo region of Gera, an elderly resident called Abba Dura who was born around 1900 recalled coffee practices among his parents' generation:

> People did not drink coffee, as it was the property of the state. Only with permission of the state that people got the right to drink coffee … A soldier who had scored brilliant victories and gained a reputation for bravery - such a figure would get permission from a committee which gave him the advantages he deserved as an honourable person, including the right to drink coffee (quoted in McCann 1995:160).

While McCann asserts that coffee was not exported at any scale until the early twentieth century, in particular after the establishment of Addis Ababa as the capital city and construction of the railway to Djibouti in 1917 (1995:53), Merid Walde Aregay speculates that the coffee trade played a part in the rise of the Shewan kingdom under Menelik. He writes that, starting from Sahle Selassie's reign that ended in 1847, the coffee trade 'enjoyed a dramatic expansion, and by the 1880s clearly made an important contribution to the resources of Menelik's state' (1988:19). Presently coffee accounts for around a third of all exports from Ethiopia, earning approximately 900 million US dollars in 2014-15, with the domestic market consuming more than half of total production (ICO 2017; Farley 2013).

Much more than just a cash crop however, coffee plays a vital role in marking occasions of all kinds and acts as a material medium through which to make contact with the spiritual. It is also an ordinary part of daily life for the majority of people. The mediatory role of food practices are important for both of Ethiopia's main religions, Islam and Orthodox Christianity: Boylston (2012) writes that they are definitive of Christian personhood in Ethiopian Orthodoxy, more so than matters of belief or doctrine. In particular fasting (*tsom*) is a primary way in which Orthodoxy is actualised and also constituted as separate from Muslims and Protestants (Malara 2018; Boylston 2012). Until 1889 the Orthodox church banned coffee drinking as a 'Muslim' or 'pagan' custom: in 1841 a British diplomat was banned from a religious site in Shewa reportedly because 'the English were in the habit of drinking coffee and smoking tobacco, both of which Mohammedan abominations' were not allowed on religious grounds (quoted in Seeman 2015:737). Nowadays coffee has no formal prohibition in contemporary Orthodoxy or Islam, but is associated with other religious or spiritual traditions that make its role somewhat contested. It is refused by many evangelical Christians and some reformist Orthodox Christians, due to its addictive properties that are connected to both *zar* spirits and loss of self-control, and the harmful gossip that some associate with the coffee ceremony. Especially in urban areas, others reject it not as part of a group identity, but as a type of individual

self-making practice, setting themselves against what is construed as old-fashioned and rural-inflected. Some of these coffee refusers reject not the substance itself - they may drink coffee in cafes or prepare it at home - but avoid coffee ceremonies specifically, whether through fear of hurtful talk or a desire to use their time more productively.

Nu! Abol Ent'at'a! (Come! Let's Drink the First Cup Together!)

The Ethiopian coffee ceremony is a complex event that requires specialist equipment and time, as well as considerable skill to prepare. It starts with the whole green coffee beans, which are rubbed roughly between the hands in water to remove husks and dust. The beans are then roasted in a flat iron pan, preferably over charcoal. It takes experience to roast them to an even dark colour, with neither burned black patches nor raw green ones. When ready, the roasted beans are circulated by the person preparing them, who swishes the smoke towards every person in the room. People waft the smoke towards their nose with their hands, so they can take a deep draft of the delicious scent. The beans and sometimes spices of choice - usually cardamom, cinnamon or cloves - are then pounded in a pestle and mortar before being boiled in a *jebena*, a clay coffee pot with a round bottom. Bringing the coffee to a boil, leaving it to settle, tasting, perhaps boiling again or adding more hot water - all these actions shows the skill of the coffee maker, and young girls will check with older women how to proceed. Making coffee and jointing a chicken into twelve parts for *doro wat'* (chicken stew), the quintessential holiday food, are considered important markers of Ethiopian womanhood.

Aesthetic and sensory elements other than taste are also critical to the coffee ceremony. All the accoutrements for service are kept in a miniature lidded table called a *rekabot*: the small *sini* cups, sugar bowl and teaspoons, and the crocheted cover, or *dantel*. Incense is essential for the ceremony, either a small piece of fragrant wood or a commercial brand of joss stick manufactured in India for the

Ethiopian market, with the unfortunate brand name in English of *Shitto*, which means scent. There will often be some sprigs of strong smelling *t'enadam* (rue) to dip in the coffee. There must also be some form of snack however nominal - popcorn or roasted grain are traditional, manufactured biscuits a cheap easy alternative - and grass, leaves, and on special occasions flowers are spread on the floor around the *rekabot*, or are substituted by a plastic mat with green fringed edges. The female coffee maker must cover her head, and preferably should be wearing full traditional dress made of embroidered white cotton.

One of the most popular decorations in rural houses is a poster depicting such an ideal ceremony with a beautiful smiling young women in traditional white clothes and an elaborate hairstyle inviting '*Nu! Abol ent'at'a*! (Come! Let's drink the first cup together!). The first cup is important, as each pot produces three rounds, with the first round being the strongest and most prestigious. Gender hierarchy in the serving of coffee is pronounced: women are supposed to make the coffee and offer the first round to men in order of age, followed by women and then children. For example, the coffee ceremony prepared by and for the teachers at the school for International Women's Day in 2014 followed speeches about how men and women can and should perform the same work, but was served by the two female teachers with the customary display of bodily deference: a covered and bowed head, delivering the coffee cup in a semi-curtsey with one hand while the other hand cups the elbow. The liminal and ambiguous status of government workers was evident through their status during coffee ceremonies. They were not classed as *ingida* (translated as both strangers and guests), who would have coffee brought to them. However, neither were they generally treated as kin, even of the temporary or adopted kind, such as domestic workers and shepherds, the solution to whose liminal status is to 'incorporate them structurally as very junior members of the family' (Boylston 2018:123). Nevertheless, government workers would sometimes be expected to act as subordinates and hand the coffee to their elders.

A sign that I saw on a local minibus provides a different perspective on inviting others to drink coffee from the straightforward enthusiasm of the poster; one that acknowledges the material effects of hospitality. Stickers featuring witty, pithy and sometimes bawdy sayings, either cheaply printed or reproduced via calligraphic-style writing, are commonly found on public transport. They often utilise, however crudely, the double meanings found in the *semina werq* (wax and gold) literary tradition, the commitment to polysemy described by Woubshet (2009), which Levine (1965) believes indicates a wider attachment to ambiguousness in Amhara culture. This particular sign - not actually an example of the double meaning genre - read *buna t'ett'u t'ett'u, qurs sayt'eyiqu.* This can be translated as 'come and drink coffee, but don't ask for breakfast as well.' This twist on the expectation of hospitality provides the humour, The person is offering coffee, presumed to be given freely without calculating reciprocal expectations in return according to social norms, while simultaneously tempering their generosity by telling the would-be guest not to expect food as well as coffee because, implicitly, they cannot afford it.

Sharing and Exclusion through Coffee

My own coffee drinking involves no skill or ceremony, but is extremely habitual: every morning, before I do anything else, I drink a strong black coffee. It is more than a routine, it's almost like taking medicine. I don't think I can function without it, and actually I never try - although on exceptional occasions where I have not drunk coffee in the morning, I have experienced a cracking headache by lunchtime. When preparing to live in Kuré Beret, I planned to try to experience life in the village as closely as possible to the other people who lived there, but soon realised this was hopelessly naive. Among the many exceptions - malaria tablets, a copious first aid kit, my laptop and the bedbug tent, to name just a few - I also took a cafetiere and a large bag of roasted ground coffee. I drank it alone, semi-secretly, every morning and sometimes after lunch. This was a source of huge pleasure to me; as well as physically feeding my addiction, drinking it alone

without having to wait for some undetermined future coffee ceremony was an assertion (to myself) of my individual will and provided me with a measure of control over events that often felt lacking during research. Although I also of course drank coffee during ceremonies, my personal coffee consumption involved the denial of social relationships in which it is so enmeshed for others.

Aside from my own wilfully isolated and secretive actions, the centrality of sociality and relationship-making to coffee drinking in the village was paramount, as illustrated by the following event. When I left my rented room in Kuré Beret, I organised a final coffee ceremony in the compound where I had been renting a room, as I knew was only right and proper. It caused me considerable social anxiety, as I still wasn't sure about the correct etiquette for invitations, especially one that signalled the end of daily sociality. Still, I thought it would have been self-aggrandising to make too much of it; after all, coffee drinking was an absolutely ordinary and unremarkable part of normal life, and advance notice was not usually needed. So, not wanting to make a big deal of my leaving and hoping word would spread organically among the government employees, I casually mentioned it to a few of them the day before. That turned out to be a mistake, as word did not spread to everyone, and over the following days before I left I encountered some reproachful remarks from those I should have invited personally, such as the head teacher and, worse, others too shy to say anything showed a more distant demeanour towards me even when I returned several months later. I realised that I had been found guilty of favouritism; unlike farmers I knew in the village whose non-invitation was not noticed or marked as a rejection, the government workers constituted a social group and should have been invited as such.

What my error reveals about the social relationships engendered by coffee drinking is that, as much a site of conviviality, inclusive sociality and specifically female bonding, as documented in the ethnographic literature, coffee consumption can also be a productive way to think about the opposite. As Mary Douglas writes 'if food is treated as a code, the message it encodes will be found

in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across boundaries' (1972:61). In this context drinking coffee, even more so than the sharing of other substances, is a way of affirming some social bonds and excluding the possibility of fully forming others. The exclusion I am considering here was not categorical; it was not the same type of action as the pollution-related rules that entirely exclude certain people from sharing substance, broadly construed, with those designated as unclean (see chapter 1). It is also a contrast to the coffee-house as a paradigmatic example of the public sphere, as a space for reasoned (male) debate as Jürgen Habermas describes (1989), or the 'milk coffee' drinking Deasy Simandjuntak describes in Indonesia, in coffeehouses that are 'egalitarian places in which diverse members of society may meet each other'; where elites spread information and cement reputations (2009:82). In Kuré Beret, it was rather an unacknowledged but habitual way of constituting the government workers as an exclusive social group.

While the government workers did drink coffee on occasion with their farmer landlords in the main living spaces of the famers' houses, they did not reciprocate by inviting the farmers to participate in the coffee drinking they hosted. While most farming families make coffee daily, for government workers it was less frequent and more of a treat. It was used to mark a special occasion or to pass time on a long slow weekend afternoon, an activity other than washing clothes and listening to the radio. These coffee ceremonies that took place in cramped rooms and occasionally on foam mattresses brought out into the compound were an important part of what marks out 'government worker' as a social category. In a situation where 'one who does not maintain their visiting networks, particularly as expressed by the coffee ceremony, cannot truly be capable of achieving full personhood in any Amhara community' (Boylston 2012:198), this is a statement of intent to differentiate themselves. Rather than an indication of their superior status, however, I see it as a function of the necessity to build short-lived relationships between the government workers who are living away from their own families and whose material lives depend upon the farmers who they are

sent to live amongst, as I showed above. The 'blurred boundaries' described by Gupta (1995), where local government officials live and work in the same milieu as those who encounter them as representatives of the state, are here being resisted, not due to hierarchical ideas about government worker superiority and 'societally pervasive respect for the state' (de Waal 2013:473), but because coffee drinking sociality provides solidarity against the potential for shadowy isolation.

The Making of a Government Worker Group

Writing about Nepali public servants, Stacey Leigh Pigg highlights their construction of a 'shared life and an outlook with their compatriots of whatever regional origin in the civil service' (1992:498). In Kuré Beret, the public servants were already ethnically and linguistically homogenous, and religious harmony between Orthodox Christians and Muslims followed national and local currents of tolerance and accommodation.[96] Village weddings usually involved the preparation of two types of meat dish (Muslim and Christian) and at least two kinds of drink - alcoholic *t'ella* (a kind of beer) and non-alcoholic *keribo* (an oat-based drink) - so that both Muslims and Christians could celebrate together. There were no barriers to intimacy or speed of friendship between government workers of different faiths (although I suspect marriage would cause more issues). Any new arrival would immediately be welcomed with warmth and familiarity, often by shortening and adding *é* or *ye* to the end of their name, which literally means 'my.' So Sarah becomes *Sarayé* or 'my Sarah'; Mohamed becomes *Moamé*, similar to 'my Mo.' These forms of address were, as Elizabeth Povinelli writes, 'a form of stranger sociality made intimate' (2006:231). However, they were not necessarily, as she describes, indicative of a self-reflexive and chosen relation between two individuals, but a friendship largely borne of circumstance. Friction or tension within the government worker group was low and quickly smoothed over when it occurred as unfeasible given the constraints of their situation; as Mathur writes about Indian bureaucrats 'it would not do to

[96] Although some argue that this famed religious tolerance for too long relied on an asymmetrical dominance by the Orthodox church to the detriment of Muslims (e.g. Østebø 2013).

harm relations with one another in *sarkar* [government/ state]' (2016:103). Although relationships between government workers were quickly established, and then cemented through long hours spent together at work and at leisure, due to the speed with which public servants moved around, these friendships were not necessarily, or even usually, long-lasting.

Coffee ceremonies were one important way in which government workers formed a group bond. Their role was particular in that generally all the government workers (and only they) would be invited - as my mistake above showed - which differentiated them as occasions from 'hanging out' in the *gibbí* or elsewhere. Farmers on the other hand - most of whom drink coffee daily, sometimes multiple times - would extend an informal ad hoc invitation to drink coffee to whoever was passing, often to those who rent rooms from them. Despite unspoken tensions mainly over access to goods, daily interactions between farmers and state workers usually ranged between cordial and warmly friendly, far from those implied by phrases such as 'relations of command and subordination' (Lefort 2012:699). Government workers were certainly not distant, high-status figures to be deferred to and respected or treated as superiors. As David Graeber writes, hierarchical social relations are characterised by the treating of those higher up as 'somehow abstract, sacred, transcendent, set apart from the endless entanglements and sheer physical messiness of ordinary physical existence' (2007:13), manifested in physical sensibilities that avoid bodily contact between 'higher' and 'lower,' or display overt deference. In Kuré Beret, it was common to find a male policeman, teacher or administrator in close physical contact with a male farmer, perhaps with their legs entangled or arms wrapped round each other stroking an earlobe. On the other hand, female workers could be victim to physical over-familiarity, such as when I witnessed a clearly uncomfortable first grade teacher being grabbed and her dress pulled down her chest by a visiting relative of her landlord during a coffee ceremony.

Government worker-only coffee ceremonies were different from the quotidian practices of local people in their exclusivity. They were used to share information

and come to group decisions about what treatment they would or would not accept, from local people or from the state as their employer. Newly arrived workers who had not had the chance to build social networks often struggled to access even the basics: one fresh young teacher asked our mutual landlady for an empty bottle so he could buy state-subsidised oil during its limited distribution session, but she said no and he walked off looking embarrassed and frustrated. A longer-term government worker who had witnessed the event whispered to me 'I remember when I was new and no one would help me. It was awful.' Coffee ceremonies were a way to form bonds that would mitigate such treatment and help them mediate access to goods, including sugar, an integral ingredient for most people's enjoyment of coffee.

Since 2010, the state has placed price controls on staple commodities such as oil and sugar, ostensibly to prevent price fixing by merchants (Weis 2016:302). The state-controlled Ethiopian Sugar Corporation has a monopoly on the production and processing of sugar in the country, although demand is currently more than a third higher than national supply. ESC has stated its aims to increase production from 440,000 to 4.9 million tons of sugar by 2020, and to become a major sugar exporter (Fantini et al. 2018). In the meantime sugar is in short supply and often rationed in both urban and rural areas, despite, since 2014, a state-owned wholesale trading enterprise that imports goods to sell through government-controlled shops (Weis 2016:303). Sugar is sold on the black market for high prices: in Kuré Beret, government workers had to reluctantly pay black market prices to farmer-merchants if they ran out of their allotted amount.

The solidarity built partly through coffee drinking allows the government workers to push back against price fixing by the famers or to put on a display of resistance. One day I came across two teachers leaning close in the narrow pathway between the yellow rock walls of neighbouring compounds, using their notebooks to shade the glare from their eyes while dust swirled around the hems of their long skirts. They were conferring urgently, upset after a recent purchase of grain. 'She increased the price by fifty cents a kilo' said one, a newlywed with a

sweet round face and frizzy hair, looking stricken. Later during coffee, she and the others were horrified to discover that I was being charged double the normal rent for my room - not for my sake, but because of the risk that the other landlords might find out and all increase their rents. This discussion dominated coffee that day, with the conclusion that it was not fair but just about acceptable to charge more for a foreigner, but they would not stand for it for themselves and would stick together to resist it. Dissent in the form of cynicism or critique of their work or of government programmes was also occasionally aired during these coffee ceremonies, 'the shared irreverence and defiance' that Herzfeld (2005:1) maintains enables the state to continue as a concept and a reality (see also Navaro-Yashin 2002:155-87). Open opposition however was not. As far as I am aware, only one government worker had openly been involved in opposition politics, when he was a student; he believed that his posting to a satellite school was punishment for his activism (see chapter 6).

The collective identity the government workers created through their social practices, including coffee drinking, helped them to cope with the vicissitudes, small humiliations and even dangers of their lives. As I have already shown, these dangers were real. They could arise from contact with wild animals - teachers walking to school sometimes returned shaken after crossing paths with a snake - but most commonly and viscerally, they were scared of accidental involvement in local hostilities. After shooting was heard late one night in 2014, one government worker friend, laughing and slightly embarrassed, told me the next day what had happened. His colleagues who slept in the room next door had insisted that he could not visit the latrine on his own, even though it was a few metres away, and they stood next to him shaking with fear while he did his business. Another danger was direct conflict with local people. In 2010 a teacher was reportedly attacked after being (apparently wrongly) suspected of having an affair with a local woman, and in 2014, another teacher was threatened. The following is a quote from my notes at the time:

The daughter of the man killed by Afar accused this new teacher of hitting her - the teacher says she didn't [do it].... The girl has a red eye, aggravated by her crying for her father, and her uncle - the brother of the dead man - came to the school and threatened her [the teacher] in front of everyone. He called her a prostitute and said he would kill her in the next five days. So she [the teacher] wants to leave and resign her job, and says it's better to die of hunger from no salary than to stay there and be killed.

The reciprocal and gift relationships involved in hosting coffee between government workers engendered at least a semblance of kin-like relations, even if temporary, that helped to mitigate the government workers' isolation and, perceived or real, danger. On the death of one teacher's grandfather in her home village, all the others contributed three Birr,[97] so that she could host a coffee ceremony, even if she was not able to travel back for the funeral. In general, money was pooled to buy the coffee, sugar and snacks in small quantities just for that occasion, unlike the farmers who would have larger quantities in supply. This was often the cause for bantering and prevarication over reciprocity: who should pay for what, who would ask to borrow equipment from neighbours or landlords, and who - or rather, which woman - should be responsible for the preparation. This kind of discussion would often channel the minibus witticism I mentioned above: I once sat through an argument lasting at least an hour about whether there *really* needed to be biscuits and whose turn it was to buy them. The government worker group was not homogenous, however, and coffee ceremonies could also be occasions to demonstrate status among the peer group. For example, one teacher with a sister working as a domestic servant in Kuwait was able to host more frequent and well-provisioned coffee ceremonies, with several types of snacks and the draw of new music videos on her fancy smartphone.

Conclusion

The Ethiopian coffee ceremony - a ritual form of preparation that is associated with both hospitality and harmful gossip, as well as being symbolic of an

[97] Equivalent to about ten pence at the time.

idealised nation - is a means of generating social ties that allow government workers to build solidarity in a situation where they are seen and see themselves as isolated outsider figures. This solidarity is a means of asserting their identity as a group through which they can attempt to counter their precarious and vulnerable positions. Coffee drinking groups also provide an occasion for pleasure and relaxation, and for the infrequent airing of dissent; however, they are also a temporary solution. Relationships between government workers are situational and, due to the high turnover of workers, often do not last. Coffee ceremonies were asymmetrical: while the government workers organised them infrequently and exclusively amongst themselves, they would also be invited to the more quotidian coffee ceremonies hosted daily by local people. This contrasts with the historical picture of the *tezkar*-hosting officials, whose feasting of local people created longterm dependencies and reciprocities. Overall, my account of the coffee-drinking practices of low level officials is intended as a contribution to calls for attention to the ways in which material, affective and spatial practices continually constitute the state as a reality.

This chapter has been centred on spaces and places: the 'near yet far' places of Kewet *wereda* and the *kebele* of Kuré Beret, and within it, the government *gibbí* and disreputable public space of *simint kifil;* the dangerous visibility of government workers as they traverse the *kebele;* their bare and un-homely living spaces, indicative of their temporary and (mostly) unattached positions, and the way in which they are transformed into social spaces for coffee ceremonies. All these spaces are interesting for how they shed light on government workers' precarious positions in rural areas. In different ways, they provide counter-examples to two the enduring narratives I have described: that of the aspirational nature of government employment, as a means of both economic progress and of insertion into advantageous social networks, and of a strictly vertical state-society stratification. They also complicate the idea of the state as a neutral entity with inherent authority over its territorial space. As Fiona Wilson writes, models of the state that are premised on 'the orderliness of its administrative structure, clear-cut hierarchical division of territory, and top-down lines of command paper

over the complex, mutating arrangements and relationships that weld province and state together' (2001:315).

*

A postscript: by 2015, returning female migrants from the middle east - many expelled from Saudi Arabia - were opening businesses in Kuré Beret where hospitality in the form of coffee and food was starting to be monetised. As I explained above, women generally had access to better paid work abroad, and so were more likely to have returned with savings. Shortly before I left the area, the landlord's daughter in one of the larger compounds where the government workers rent rooms, a returnee from Saudi Arabia via a perilous journey through Yemen, had opened a cafe at the entrance to the *gibbí*. She had pinned up signs on the walls warning people that they are not to sit without consuming anything, and they cannot consume without paying. Whether or not she will actually enforce these rules, this is an attempt to break with previous forms of sociality in which she and other family members would offer food and drink to visitors, including their government worker tenants. In Abayat'ir, the nearest small town where buses from Shewa Robit mostly terminate, involving a wait of many hours for another bus to Kuré Beret, another enterprising returnee had opened a tea shack near the bus stand. Perhaps taking inspiration from cafes such as Starbucks and their bucket-sized coffees, she had bought uncommonly large tea glasses and increased the price accordingly; a small sum, but remarked upon by the financially struggling government workers on their journeys to and from the village. Encouraging small-scale entrepreneurship is a government priority (Chinigò and Fantini 2015), and low-level government workers are supposedly the ones taking on the role of 'shaping capitalist subjectivities' among rural people (Singh 2012:119). In the mundanities of daily life, however, they may be the ones at a disadvantage.

Chapter 3: A Way Out or a Way Up? Education, Mobility and the Dance of Frustration

Prologue: Sketches from Schools

Right at the border where the two regions of Amhara and Afar meet, the village of Enbuwaybad is enclosed by a bank of mud and thorn trees, with wooden doors at the entrance that are closed at night and guarded against Afar attack by voluntary local militia members. The school lies outside the boundary at the back of the village, overlooked by the peaks of the Mafud escarpment that juts its fingers out into the flatlands. As of 2015, the school was half-built, consisting of an unfinished wooden structure divided into two classrooms that had uneven mud floors and no functioning doors. Some battered desks and a blackboard in each classroom made up the entirety of the equipment. A local farmer and parent had planted but not harvested *masho* (mung beans) in the small school compound, so the size of the area for playing games was diminished by the beans, shrivelled on yellow stalks. In front of the classrooms stood two flag poles. Each morning a chosen student would slowly raise the flags while the other children lined up with their hands on their hearts to sing, first, the national anthem, followed by the Amhara regional anthem, as their teachers stood straight-backed in front of them. This moment of disciplined nationalism with its 'ethno-federal' character was the most structured of the school day: little supervised, the two teachers very often came late, left early, and spent long periods sitting outside chatting.

The school was supposed to cover grades one to three, but one teacher had left in 2014 shortly after term began, unwilling to work in such poor conditions. There was no accommodation for the teachers in Enbuwaybad (although some was planned), so teachers had to walk for about forty-five minutes each way on a track that ran alongside the border with Afar Region, where they sometimes

encountered snakes. No one else was recruited to cover the absconded teacher's post, and teaching for grade three was only sporadically covered by other teachers visiting from the larger school in Kuré Beret. Numbers in that class had dwindled to a determined core of five or six children, eager to learn despite the adverse circumstances.

Raising the Flag, Enbuwaybad Elementary School, 2014.

*

Although it is also made from mud and wood and lacks equipment beyond desks, the school in the Argobba village of Wesiso, which serves grades one to four, is solidly built and boasts well-maintained gender-segregated latrines constructed from corrugated iron (latrines I will mention again in chapter 5). When I last met him, Yusuf, the head teacher, had been working there for nine years and was the longest serving government worker in the *kebele.* He was well-liked for his shy but warm demeanour and described by a fellow teacher as a *chewa sew* (a gentleman). Another of the rare long-term employees in the *kebele* was Yusuf's

wife Isra. They had met while both teaching in Wesiso; she had since transferred to the main school in Kuré Beret, where they both now lived in a small rented room. Smart and forthright, Isra was on track to convert her primary school teaching diploma to a degree in education (specialisation: physics) if she managed to complete six years of supplementary summer school in the distant regional capital of Bahir Dar. However, despite his years of experience, position as head, and unusual commitment to a single rural school, Yusuf was thinking of giving up teaching and buying a *bajaj* (type of auto rickshaw).[98] Squinting into the blinding sun as we walked back to Kuré Beret from Wesiso one afternoon, Yusuf anxiously queried Tekle, another teacher with *bajaj* driver friends, about the viability of such a move. 'Don't do it' warned Tekle. 'There are too many *bajajs* in Shewa Robit these days: you can't make a living. Anyway, even if, Isra won't get transferred to a school in town for years - five or ten years maybe!' With a measure of admiration for his friend's forbearance mixed with impatience, Tekle concluded that Yusuf would just have to continue walking that hot dusty road 'twice a day for love!'

New School Latrines, Wesiso Elementary School, 2015.

[98] See chapter 6 for more about how *bajajs* enabled public servants to exit state work.

Wesiso School, 2011: The signs around the children's necks indicate their future ambitions: the only visible one, on the boy at front left, says 'doctor.'

*

The school in Kuré Beret is where the majority of teachers in the *kebele* work. It is of a completely different scale and quality than the satellite schools - and from any other structures in the village, including the government *gibbí* - mostly thanks to a resident evangelical Christian NGO, as I will describe below. Fully

enclosed with a stone wall and a fence, the school covers grades one to eight and consists of four large concrete blocks, containing six classrooms, a staff room and an office for the head teacher. The blocks are painted with educational and decorative designs, including maps, birds, animals, the periodic table, and exhortations to study hard. Students sponsored through the NGO are the only ones in the *kebele* to wear uniforms - dark grey shirts and shorts or long skirts. Its amenities included a football pitch and accompanying football kit for the school team, a (dusty and little-used) library, and, from late 2015, a big flat screen television that was installed in the staff room. I never actually saw this television working for lessons as intended, via a troublesome satellite dish, but it did work, via a USB drive, to play music, music videos and Amharic films for the teachers.

Attendance at the school dropped sharply in the higher grades: in an interview with a senior teacher in 2014, he told me that there were nineteen students in the eighth grade who would take the exam that would allow them to progress to grade nine in the next town. From nineteen however, probably only two or three would pass. 'Last year it was two boys, one from Kuré Beret and one - *bet'am asdestonal* (that made us so happy) - from Meda [a small village, where he would have started in a single room, single teacher school]. He was top of his grade nine class.' 'And what is the reason most don't want to study more?' I asked? '*Negadayoch betachewen meserat sichilu, memhiranoch gin aychillum!*' (merchants can build their own house, but teachers can't!),' he replied.

Kuré Beret Elementary School, 2015.

Introduction: Rural Realities and Global Imaginaries

I begin with these portraits of three of Kuré Beret *kebele*'s schools as a way into looking at the intertwining of education, aspiration, and mobility. With their rural backgrounds, and from what I gathered during my conversations with them, all the government workers in Kuré Beret *kebele* started their educational careers in a school that shared similarities with the three schools described above. As the vignettes above I hope have made clear, to graduate from university from the starting point of an under-resourced rural primary school is an exceptional achievement. The tension between their educational success and their unsatisfactory life as rural public servants animates many of the dynamics that I have described so far, in which hierarchies are shifting and government workers are precarious and temporary figures. If as Boylston's informants told him 'modern education remains the indispensable ingredient for having any

hope of progress in life' (2018:150), what then of the educated who do not feel that they are experiencing any progress?

So far I have discussed shifting notions of hierarchy as they relate to the Ethiopian state; the particular space of Kuré Beret; and the backgrounds and daily lives of government workers, including the social relationships that they build through coffee drinking. In the two chapters that follow this one, I will look more closely at two under-considered areas of the work carried out by rural public servants, in the areas of child nutrition and latrine promotion, and how the substances that are the object of state governance come to constitute a particular kind of state. This chapter is slightly different: although it also focuses on another important area of state intervention, it is not about the practice of teaching as such, but about the idea of education and its close association with aspiration. My intention in this chapter is not to discuss the work of educating rural children in Amhara Region or the content of the education they receive, but rather to consider the lives of their teachers as a lens onto broader ideas about education as a means of progress and mobility. To do this, I will connect the spaces of rural government schools and the persons of their teachers to non-state actors, most notably NGOs and evangelical churches, who are also concerned with education.[99] I will use an ethnographic example of differential access to transport between teachers and evangelical NGO staff to highlight lack of mobility, in a literal sense, as one of the main ways in which teachers feel their hard-won education has not provided them with a desirable life. The transport challenges that they encounter are difficult in and of themselves, but also show how the hardships teachers face are brought into sharp relief in comparison with the resources available to globally-connected others. Crucially, lack of access to transport also hinders the maintenance of social relationships for many government workers, and this in turn contributes to a different kind of mobility: the precarious mobility that sees government workers bounce from village to village, or exit from state employment altogether. Their life trajectories, then, are

[99] Of course they are also concerned with many other kinds of other development initiatives; here I am looking at the school because it was the primary site of non-state involvement in Kuré Beret.

inimical to realising a third kind of mobility: the social mobility that education is supposed to provide. As Henrik Vigh puts it, they are experiencing 'movement without mobility' (2006a).

Here I should make it clear that access to transport was an issue for all the government workers, not just teachers, although in subtly different ways as I will describe below. Likewise, while the wider points about aspiration, success and social mobility apply more widely, my focus here is on teachers as the most directly involved in imparting education to rural children. This was a category they had only recently been in themselves, but their success in the rural classrooms of their own childhood had resulted not in what they considered progress, but rather led them back to other rural classrooms. Teachers are also by far the majority of the public servants in Kuré Beret; similar to the situation elsewhere in Africa, where 'up to 50 percent of all public sector employees are primary school teachers' (Bierschenk and Olivier De Sardan 2014:24; see also Wilson 2001).

Until the mid-twentieth century, the number of students attending government schools in Ethiopia was dwarfed by those receiving traditional religious education. More widespread access to state education did not happen until the turn of the twenty-first century, as I will describe below. Despite this, the secular education that started in earnest under Emperor Haile Selassie around a century ago was central to teleological ideas of progress, modernity and development. As elsewhere, it was conceived of as the only sure route to both improving individual lives and 'manufacturing citizens' (Bénéï 2005); a means of transcending local, rural, and 'traditional' origins towards broader national horizons. However, under the policy of 'Agricultural Development-Led Industrialisation' (ADLI), first initiated in 1993 (Tewodaj et al. 2009:10) and reintroduced by Meles Zenawi in the mid-2000s with a major reorientation towards market-led policies (Lefort 2015:365-6), educational philosophy has shifted. In this paradigm, education is seen as a way of producing 'better farmers' and providing 'a way up' rather than a 'way out' (Stiglitz 2006) of a rural life that

is central to Ethiopia's current reality. In the eyes of the teachers I came to know, and of the local people whose children they taught, the successful educational trajectories of government workers have not worked to provide them with a way of life that can be characterised as either a way out or a way up. This is especially so when contrasted with other non-state means or imaginaries of advancement. Emanuele Fantini conjectures that 'the break with the past promoted by the Pentecostal message appears among the factors that are cultivating [a] culture of expectation' about economic progress (2016:69). This appears to be the case even where, as in Kuré Beret, the presence of *P'enté* is limited. For rural teachers, however, the notion of temporal progress that is central to both education and development has stalled, with consequences for perceptions of the state and its ability to carry out its promise of transformative change.

A final ethnographic section will conclude this chapter, with a description of a remarkable impromptu dance by a teacher who had recently been punished for his absence from the classroom. His performance seemed to assert his frustration with the forces that constrain him from realising his modest aspirations for the present and the future; forces that are intrinsic to his work as a state-employed teacher. As I have shown, life in a rural area involved limited material, financial or status benefits, and was certainly far from Daniel Mains's assertion that 'education has been a means for young people to achieve rapid economic mobility' (2012:5). My contention here is that financial considerations are only one part of the picture. The social and relational constraints that rural state employment entails are also crucial to understanding the dissatisfaction with (and rejection of) their supposedly desirable jobs.

Education and Aspiration

The topic of education is at the heart of what the state is and does; it is 'a particularly hotly contested site for establishing the boundary between the public and the private, the state and civil society' (Bierschenk and Olivier De

Sardan 2014:24). Government education has long been understood as a primary means of producing the 'imagined community' of the nation (Anderson [1983] 2006), and - through embodied forms of ritual and discipline (e.g. Kulz 2017) and enacting 'invented tradition' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) - constituting 'pedagogical citizens' (Kaplan 2006) with a lasting attachment to an idea of the nation that legitimises state power. The crucial role of education in state formation has often been accompanied by the reproduction and extension of gender, class and racial hierarchies, especially through the figures of teachers often drawn from urban elites positioned as 'above' and superior to their students (e.g. Bénéï 2005). As Fiona Wilson writes, government teachers can be 'envisaged as the fingers of the state's long arms reaching down to the people, embodying and negotiating the blurred meeting point between state and society' (2001:314).

Education is also understood - by states and citizens - as one of the primary means by which individuals can improve their lives and become modern subjects. Beyond instrumental arguments, such as that education will 'expand economic opportunity, promote health, and contribute to greater gender equality' (Schewel and Fransen 2018:555) and act as the 'foundation for healthy and democratic societies' (Mulkeen and Chen 2008:8), education is painted as an existential benefit, the route by which people can reach their potential and fully participate in the world on their own terms. In Amartya Sen's terms, education is fundamental to the process of realising a person's 'capability,' defined as 'the substantive freedom… to lead the kind of life he or she has reason to value' (1999:87). Drawing from and in response to Sen, Arjun Appadurai sees the 'capacity to aspire' as a meta-capacity, an 'ethical horizon' that supports the nurturing of more concrete capabilities. The exercise of these capabilities 'verifies and authorises the capacity to aspire and moves it away from wishful thinking to thoughtful wishing' (2004:82). Increasing access to education, then, is an almost uncontested global goal for both states and individual citizens. Although 'over-education' is an issue in countries whose job market cannot absorb educated youth at the rate at which they graduate (e.g. Jeffrey, Jeffrey and Jeffrey 2008), for

individuals, each level of education reached is usually seen as an undisputed achievement and means of upward mobility.[100] It marks those who stand 'against' formal schooling - whether for girls, like the Taliban in Afghanistan, or in general, like Boko Haram[101] in Nigeria - as particularly dangerous in their denial of people's 'capacity to aspire,' and part of what makes them a legitimate target for outside intervention (Watts 2017; Billaud 2015).

With the aim of influencing education policy, there is a vast amount of scholarship, or as Lant Pritchett puts it 'an ocean of ink' (2019:198), on the type and quality of education provision in the global south. One area within this huge body of research concentrates on 'relative declines in teacher status,' in order to highlight how the lower status of the teaching profession 'may be demoralising and also have adverse effects' (Hickey, Hossain and Jackman 2019:186). Evidence from various African countries (e.g. Hickey and Hossain 2019; Mulkeen and Chan 2008) shows that there are widespread challenges in the retention and recruitment of rural public servants, the majority of whom are primary school teachers. There is also an extensive literature on the forces that negatively affect the desire of youth in Africa to become or remain farmers (e.g. Gatenet and Asrat 2014; Sosina and Holden 2014; Leavy and Smith 2010). These bodies of literature mainly consider, respectively, the effect of the decreasing status and low pay of teachers on the students and education system, and the effect of the waning attraction of farming on agricultural production and the economy; important issues that need serious consideration. However, less attention has been paid to the life-worlds of rural teachers, considered as social actors, not just as educators. As Prachi Srivastava (2019) writes, it is common in the literature on education provision in developing countries to 'vilify teachers,' without considering 'the conditions in which teachers in government schools are supposed to live, especially rural teachers.' Some recent work on Ethiopia has

[100] Student debt is another important and related issue, but one which I do not have space to address here.

[101] Although, as Michael Watts writes 'Boko Haram is not the term by which its adherents self-identify. Boko Haram (roughly "Western education is a sin") is a term deployed by residents who objected to their religious practice. Boko Harm certainly stand in opposition to the *yan boko* (the social class of what one might call young moderns)' (2017:484).

looked at the role of education and aspiration in migration decisions (Tesfaye and Cochrane 2019; Schewel and Fransen 2018). As the latter authors state, research on the role of aspiration in migration 'has recently come in vogue… largely because the concept extends our understanding of decision-making beyond the limitations of rational choice assumptions' (2018:557). In this chapter, I also want to extend the restricted focus on material and financial considerations to the intertwined social and relational issues that arise for rural teachers, and how these tangible factors intersect with intangible ideas about mobility and progress; in particular 'the ways in which physical movement pertains to upward and downward social mobility' (Sheller and Urry 2006:213).

Education and the Nation in Twentieth Century Ethiopia

State education in Ethiopia was initiated by Emperor Menelik II, who founded the first government school in Addis Ababa in 1908. In previous centuries, there had been two strands of educational provision, differing greatly in scale and longevity: traditional religious education and missionary schools. Traditional religious schooling was the sole source of education in Ethiopia from the fourth century AD, when schools developed alongside the spread of Christianity, until the early nineteenth century. Both indigenous Orthodox and Islamic traditional educational systems were well-established, 'sophisticated and highly-codified' (Marzagora 2016:30), and had extensive links with scholarship and institutions in North Africa, the Middle East and Europe. For example, the convent of San Stefano degli Abissini in the Vatican, established in the sixteenth century, was 'an important centre for the study of Ethiopian history and languages' (Bahru 2002:14).

Islamic schools were, and remain, widespread, especially in the lowland south and east, and along trade routes linking coastal towns with the highlands. The two most notable centres of pre-twentieth century Islamic learning were the city of Harar and the area of Wello in central Ethiopia (Hussein 1988), from where

many scholars travelled to al-Azhar University in Cairo. Classical Islamic education has two levels: the *tehaji* or Qu'ranic school, which focused on the learning of Arabic and the recitation of the Qu'ran; and higher level schools, in which interpretation and commentary were practised (Bahru 2002:22).

In the highlands, Orthodox church schools were the predominant centres of learning. They provided education for a small percentage of the population, almost exclusively boys, who were often the sons of priests or nobility. In a similar way to the traditional Muslim education system, there are different levels of learning in Orthodox schools, from the rote learning of the liturgical language, Ge'ez, to the composing of *qené,* a highly allusive and complex form of poetry. In the churches and monasteries where Orthodox education was carried out, Ge'ez retained its supremacy in church education, while the languages that derived from it, Amharic and Tigrinya, slowly developed into the secular spoken lingua francas of the highlands, and in the former case, the language of the imperial court. The court was itself another important centre of learning, recruiting those educated in church schools as civil servants responsible for administration, legal matters and as historian-scribes who produced the royal chronicles. In the mid-nineteenth century Emperor Tewodros II was the first ruler to decide that official state documents should be written in Amharic, and it was firmly established as the language of the state by the time Emperor Menelik II launched the first government-owned newspaper in 1901 (Marzagora 2016:30).

The second strand of pre-government education started in the early nineteenth century. Protestant and Catholic missionaries started opening schools in different locations around the country that educated a small number of Ethiopians. This group were nevertheless intellectually and politically influential disproportionately to their numbers, as Bahru Zewde (2002) writes about the early twentieth century, and played a significant part in shaping ideas about modernity in the Ethiopian context (Marzagora 2016; De Lorenzi 2013). The same could be said for the generations of intellectuals who were sent abroad to study at undergraduate and postgraduate levels throughout the early and mid-

twentieth century (Bahru 2002), although the importance of their role was somewhat diminished by the establishment of Addis Ababa University (initially called Haile Selassie University) in 1950.

The establishment of the first state school - the Francophone Menelik II school for boys in Addis Ababa - was in part a reaction to presence of the missionary schools as the only source of Westernised education. However, Bahru estimates that the number of students who passed through the school from 1908 until 1924 was only about three thousand (2002:24). For at least the first quarter of the twentieth century then, traditional religious schooling continued to provide the majority of education in the country, with missionary schools playing a secondary role. Furthermore, resistance to modern, secular education continued well into the century: Boylston writes about the opposition to attempts to build a government school in the 1940s in northern Amhara Region, 'on the grounds that it was antithetical to [the area's] tradition and the institutional autonomy of the church, and so the first school was not actually constructed until the 1960s' (2018:146).

The second government school for boys, Tafari Mekonnen School in Addis Ababa, taught in both French and English, was opened in 1925 under the aegis of Ras Tafari during his regency. In the years that followed, and especially after his coronation as Emperor Haile Selassie in 1930, there was a relatively rapid expansion of state schools, including Itegue Menen, the first school for girls, that opened in Addis Ababa in 1931. Members of the nobility also started to open schools outside the capital, both inspired and exhorted by Haile Selassie. By 1936, there were twenty-one government schools in the country in total, with 4,200 pupils enrolled (Marzagora 2016:33). The links between state education and the imperial court were direct. They were not only found in the opening and funding of schools by the nobility and the pre-eminence of students graduated from them as ministers and civil servants in the imperial government, but in the emotional and affective ties developed by pupils to their royal benefactors. For example, at

Itegue Menen school, Princess Menen was said to supervise the kitchen and watch 'her' students while they ate (Bahru 2002:26).

As part of his modernising aspirations and in the understanding they would open schools, Haile Selassie 'was directly responsible for a large influx of foreign missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant' (Malara 2017:49). The presence of missionary schools was extremely geographically uneven, however, as the country was divided 'between "Open Areas", where missionaries' evangelisation and development work was allowed, and "Closed Areas", where only the Orthodox Church was allowed to operate. Practical demarcation of these areas was entrusted to the Ministry of Education' (Fantini 2015:126). Southern and 'peripheral' areas, as well as Addis Ababa, were 'open'; the overwhelmingly Orthodox highlands were 'closed.' The highly asymmetrical influence of missionaries can be seen in contemporary statistics on religious identification in different regions: for example, Tigray (95.6 percent Orthodox) compared to SNNPR (55.5 percent Protestant) (Prunier and Ficquet 2015:xx). Peripheral lowland areas of Amhara, such as Ifat, also saw missionary presence, according to the discretion of the ministry. In the 1950s until the arrival of the Derg, there was a missionary school and clinic at Kedebura near Wesiso (now in Afar Region); something I first found out during a conversation with an older farmer in Kuré Beret, when he surprised me by suddenly bursting into a hymn in English in a high and quavering falsetto.

The language of instruction has long been a contentious issue in Ethiopia's multi-ethnic state. Although Amharic was established as the language of court and state by the very beginning of the twentieth century, for most of the twentieth century, the language of instruction was correlated with the heavy involvement of non-Ethiopians in the education system, especially at secondary and tertiary levels. According to Stefan Trines (2018), it was 'not until the early 1970s that the higher education system became more "Ethiopianised".' After the Francophone nature of the imperial court faded, and French was dropped as the language of instruction in 1935, British and then American influence was prominent in the

education system. English was used in state schools, as Eva Poluha writes, 'due to a lack of pedagogical materials... until the school year of 1963-4, when the national official language of education switched to Amharic' (2004:32).

During the Derg era, there was a massive expansion of education, especially primary education and adult literacy programmes that were in part carried out by the *zemecha* (Ahmed 2002). In the ten years from 1973, school intake increased fourfold, but the quality and relevance of the education delivered was questionable (Clapham 1990:150). Poluha, who was a teacher in Amhara Region from the end of Haile Selassie's reign and through the early years of the Derg, observed that 'a fairly good education for a relatively small number of children had under the Derg been transformed into quite a poor education for a much larger number of children' (2004:182). Furthermore, spending on higher levels of education plummeted, as budgets were diverted to the military, and violence and repression saw many intellectuals killed or exiled from the country, with especially serious and long-lasting impact on university level research and teaching (Tekeste 1996). This period is also notable for the decisive separation of church from state that the Derg enacted, bringing an end to the entanglement of the Orthodox church in governance, and ushering in a new era of secularisation, in education and otherwise.

Schooling has long been seen as central to the process of state formation; as Sam Kaplan writes, to 'the state consolidating its authority by laying claims over the subjectivities of citizens, beginning with the education of children' (2006:8). The aim of this section has been to trace the historical antecedents to the current education system in Ethiopia, and show its intertwining with evolving notions of state authority, modernity and progress. During the course of the twentieth century, schooling shifted from being provided mainly by religious authorities to being a primary concern of the state, which since the toppling of the imperial regime in the early 1970s has held an 'aggressively secular' position (Dereje 2013). The shift has been huge, but is far from absolute: although 'modern education and church knowledge were once thought incompatible' (Boylston 2018:146),

both traditional Orthodox and Islamic education continue to be important sources of knowledge for millions of students who simultaneously (or consecutively) attend government schools. 'Sunday school,' a new form of adult education for Orthodox Christians that was not a part of traditional church education, is an additional late twentieth century development. According to Diego Malara, this has arisen from the church's wish to assert its centrality to national identity and contribute to an Orthodox laity 'capable of contesting Protestants' erosive critiques of Orthodox tenets' (2017:53).

Expansion of Education in the EPRDF Era

Since the EPRDF's ascent to power in 1991, the expansion of state education that began under the Derg has increased exponentially. In the past decade Ethiopia has spent more on education than most other countries in Africa, and between 2000 and 2013 'almost doubled the share of its budget allocated to education, from 15 percent to 27 percent' (Gardner 2017). Statistics relating to enrolment, literacy and the establishment of new educational institutions are correspondingly impressive. Three times more primary schools came into existence between 1996 and 2015, with enrolment leaping from under three million to over eighteen million. Youth literacy rates went from just over a third in 2000 to just over half in 2011 (Gardner 2017). The proportion of children who had never been in school decreased from 67 percent in 2000 to 28 percent in 2011 (Hossain and Hickey 2019:6), and secondary enrolment almost quadrupled between 1996 and 2013 (Dom 2017a). The number of public universities has also rocketed upwards since 1991, from two to thirty-five (Weis 2016:6). The educational level of public sector employees has been dramatic; according to the World Bank 'the public sector has absorbed much of the increase in educated workers. The share of public employees who are graduates increased from 24 percent in 2003 to 62 percent in 2014' (2016:50).

Private education has also hugely expanded. Aside from the elite and extremely expensive 'international' schools in Addis Ababa, 'low-fee private schooling' (Srivastava 2019) from kindergarten level upwards has mushroomed in urban areas. At university level, sixty-one accredited private higher education institutions - which generally have lower entrance requirements than public universities - now account for approximately a quarter of undergraduate admissions; however, 'there is a noticeable sense of distrust amongst civil servants and ministers who sometimes categorise private universities and colleges as "diploma mills"' (Rayner and Ashcroft 2011). In 2010, then Prime Minister Meles accused private universities of 'practically just printing diplomas and certificates and handing them out' (quoted in Trines 2018).

For those whose grades are not high enough to join the preparatory level (grades 10 and 11) of secondary education, intended for students who plan to go to university, courses at Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges are an alternative route to gaining employable skills. There are five levels of TVET, two that do not require any qualifications, and three at the level of grade 10 or above, and there is supposed to be TVET provision in every *wereda*. However, research from across Ethiopia suggests that equipment, quality of teaching, and relevance of courses leads to low employment prospects post-graduation, and thus to only 'lukewarm interest' in TVET (Dom 2017a:22).

As chapter 1 describes, the EPRDF's political philosophy has retained a rural focus over its nearly thirty years in power. Ethiopia is an overwhelmingly rural country, in which 'agriculture still represents roughly half of GDP (46 percent, compared to a 12 percent average for sub-Saharan Africa)' (Lefort 2015:371). According to an African Development Bank report 'the contribution of off-farm income to total income in Ethiopia, especially in rural parts, is surprisingly low: 18 percent, exactly half the African average of 36 percent' (Monga et al. 2019:105). Under the rubric of 'agricultural-development led industrialisation,' education occupies a critical yet paradoxical position. With a development philosophy that rests on the assumption that the country will retain a rural majority, the purpose of

education becomes increasingly instrumental. Ex-World Bank chief economist Joseph Stiglitz, an admirer of Meles, writes that

> Meles Zenawi realised that even if [the government's] most ambitious development programmes succeed, most of the people going to rural schools today will still be farmers when they grow up, so it has been working to redirect the curriculum in order to make them better farmers. Education had been viewed as a way out, an opportunity to get a better job in the cities. Now it is also being viewed as a way up, enhancing income even for those who remain in the rural sector. Education can be used to promote health and the environment as well as to impart technical skills (2006:50).

This negation of the idea of education as a 'way out' is startling in its redrawing of horizons. The common view, from global rhetoric to local level, is of schooling as providing 'a route to greater mobility, improved economic opportunities and enhanced status,' and as bringing the 'end of the farming life,' as Martha Caddell found in Nepal (2005:78). In a context of low educational achievement and high unemployment, the teachers I am discussing have undoubtedly been successful in their educational careers. Success is always relative of course, and many of my teacher friends were embittered about their performance in the preparatory exam that funnelled them towards a teacher training college instead of university, especially when they were below the cut-off point by just a few marks. Success or failure in this exam was the decisive factor that steered a person's life back towards or away from the rural. In the rest of this chapter I will consider how this shift in the ethos of education - from providing a 'way out' of the rural to producing a 'way up' within the rural - relates to the teachers in Kuré Beret, and how it intersects with the model of progress provided by the presence of an evangelical NGO.

Government Schools, Church Money

Despite the explosion of access to education at all levels under the EPRDF, the backbone of educational provision in Ethiopia remains the rural government primary school. They are the physical locations where the majority of all

government employees work, and where the majority of the population will first encounter the state. In rural areas like Kuré Beret, secular private schooling is non-existent.[102] However, the operation of state schools is frequently intertwined with funding and influence of non-state actors, as I will show. This second part of the chapter will consider how teachers (and other public servants) are inserted into global networks in which states are increasingly not the only providers of public services. This means that, according to Gupta, 'to understand the state one has to position it within a field of other agencies that either compete with the state in the provision of services or complement it by performing functions that it is incapable of doing' (2012:38).

Across Africa and beyond, schools that are referred to as 'state,' 'public' or 'government' often have an element of non-state involvement, whether this is through formal public-private partnerships, for example academy schools in the UK (Kulz 2017), or through the informal participation of parents, community groups or local religious bodies. Gabriella Körling found in her research in peri-urban Niger that 'public education provision is to a certain extent co-produced by a diverse set of local actors and institutions' (2011:201). However, the most common way for the state and the non-state to be mingled in the educational sphere, especially in the global south, is through financial assistance, ongoing or one-off donations, by NGO development organisations, whether global or local, secular or religious. In Kuré Beret, the insertion of the non-state into the space of the government school happened through the involvement of a local evangelical or *P'enté* NGO.[103] It also played out in mundane everyday interactions between government teachers and the NGO, which were especially evident through their contrasting access to transport. I will argue that the banal material differences that marked out the NGO employees from government workers are indicative of

[102] There was no Orthodox church education in the *kebele;* Wesiso mosque provided Qu'ranic education, and is a historical centre of Islamic learning (Ahmed 1998).
[103] The term *P'enté* is commonly used to encompass all types of Protestant denominations in Ethiopia, from Baptist and Lutheran to Pentecostal and Evangelical. Under the Derg, when these churches were persecuted, it was used as a negative term but is no longer generally perceived to be disparaging (Fantini 2015; Haustein 2014).

links to external sources of power and legitimation that were a marker of contrast with public servants' unrealised aspirations.

In an analysis of scale dynamics in Ethiopia, Sabine Planel and Marie Bridonneau (2015) make the case that 'new institutions, new players and new values are emerging in local spaces' and that emerging sources of 'financial resources, standards and values' are being appropriated by new social categories, including tourism entrepreneurs, evangelical Christians, and the urban middle classes, who often bypass the local to appeal to higher levels of power within or beyond the state. As I will explain below, both NGOs and evangelical churches have seen exponential growth in Ethiopia since the beginning of the 1990s (Haustein 2014; Freeman 2012). As elsewhere, evangelicals 'cultivate an articulated relationship with the world of development NGOs' (Fantini 2015:131), with a particular history in the Ethiopian context arising from the EPRDF's institutionalised suspicion of civil society. However, importantly, they have not widely taken over state functions in Ethiopia in the same way as elsewhere in Africa. In Togo, Charles Piot found that 'new churches [act] as proxy for an eviscerated post-Cold War state, in part filling the gap left by the state in providing social services' (2012:113), while 'NGOs have in many ways become the new sovereign' (2012:124). Planel and Bridonneau suggest that local encounters with global forces have in many cases reinforced state control over Ethiopian space. My point here is that, even where *P'enté* attempts to convert local people have not (yet) been successful and NGOs play only a minor role in service provision, their very presence can have unexpected and destabilising effects on affective attitudes to government work.

Pentecostalism and Development

Aligning with trends elsewhere in Africa, the number of both NGOs and Pentecostal[104] Christians increased exponentially in Ethiopia from the 1990s

[104] Following Emanuele Fantini, I am using the terms Pentecostal and *P'enté* in the Ethiopian context for all forms of Protestant Christianity, while acknowledging the plurality within the label, 'because the charismatic turn influences the whole movement… and the term is increasingly

onwards. The number of NGOs 'grew from fewer than 60 at the end of the 1980s to nearly 2000 in 2007' (Freeman 2012:5). Those identifying as Protestant grew from 5.5 percent of the population in 1984 to 21 percent in 2011 (Fantini 2016:69), although, as I showed above, geographic distribution within the country is highly variable and largely follows historical patterns of missionary activity. The previous (Hailemariam Desalegn) and current Prime Ministers are both *P'enté* (although neither have brought their religious allegiance to the fore in public life). A vast body of literature (e.g. Freeman 2012 for an edited volume) covers the connections in Africa and beyond between Pentecostal and other evangelical forms of Christianity and NGOs, especially those concerned with market-based development; the 'elective affinity between the neoliberal turn and the ethic of Pentecostalism, reputed to promote a spiritual message and social practices particularly conducive to entrepreneurship, development and economic prosperity' (Fantini 2016:67). Much of this literature points to a situation in which 'the state has pulled back from social and developmental fields, and NGOs and churches have stepped into the void' (Piot 2010:5). This characterisation that does not hold true for Ethiopia, as I have already made clear. In fact, part of the particular intertwined history of *P'enté* churches and NGOs in Ethiopia is related to state regulation of civil society, in the form of the Charities and Societies Proclamation (FDRE 2009). This law, restricting the operation and funding of NGOs, was passed in the wake of the opening and swift closing of political space that arose from the violently contested 2005 elections. Michel Feher, Gaëlle Krikorian and Yates McKee (2007) remind us that non-governmental certainly does not mean non-political, and civil society can represent a complex variety of power interests; this position is one that the EPRDF had long held (Meles 2011), and was institutionalised with the 2009 law. One unintended consequence of the law, however, was that the responsibility for many development activities shifted to indigenous churches (Fantini 2015:143-4).

used as self-designation among Ethiopian Christians not belonging to the Orthodox or Catholic churches' (2016:69).

In Kuré Beret, there was one long-term entity involved in the broad field of development in the village. This was a local NGO linked to an indigenous *P'enté* church, Mulu Wengel, who concentrated on providing support for the main school. They were mainly funded by external child sponsorship donations, much of which came from diaspora Ethiopians in the USA. Other NGOs and donors, faith-based and secular, have come and gone from the *kebele*; for 'trainings' of the type I describe in chapter 4, or for short term projects. They leave their mark partly in the form of the boards and signs that litter the Ethiopian countryside, with the aim of eliciting recurring gratitude for their largesse. One such sign, painted onto the outside of the school in Kuré Beret, marks a donation given by an organisation called Glimmer of Hope, which I can only assume is meant to infer that there was no hope until this organisation provided some, albeit only a tiny bit. The dictionary definition of glimmer is 'shine faintly with a wavering light,' an excellent metaphor for the role that critics attribute to the partial and arbitrary way that NGOs provide services in Africa and elsewhere.

The Ethiopian Full Gospel Believers Church, abbreviated in Amharic as Mulu Wengel, 'became the first independent Pentecostal church in Ethiopia [in 1967] and still today represents the largest of the traditional Pentecostal denominations' (Fantini 2015:127). In an interview in 2014 with Ermias, a local Mulu Wengel employee, he told me that the church is less well-funded than others, due to its lack of direct relationships with non-Ethiopians. Other churches, he told me, have 'more money and more *faranj* [foreigners, white people]. That is why they do more Bible translation and have more presence in the south' [i.e. because that is where many different languages are spoken]. He placed Mulu Wengel's presence in Kewet within an overall church strategy of working in Orthodox Christian areas. There is more resistance, he said, so it is harder work but correspondingly more important compared to the south, where 'they just agree to everything.' Mulu Wengel's arrival specifically in Kuré Beret he told me was a response to the mass murder of twenty-seven Afar women in 2002 (see chapter 2); Ethiopian *P'enté* Christians in the US diaspora heard about the scandal and 'wanted to change things.'

Ermias was Mulu Wengel's main and mostly only employee in Kuré Beret between 2009 and 2016. He was from the nearby area, had a mild and diffident manner, and split his time between the village and Shewa Robit. In all that time, he had not managed to convert anyone, either Orthodox or Muslim, and was the only resident *P'enté* until 2013, when a fellow church employee came for a brief period to start a women's micro-credit and savings group. Mulu Wengel employees based in Shewa Robit also sporadically visited, as they had some limited involvement with agricultural programmes in Kuré Beret. They were particularly interested in *moringa*, a tree whose leaves are supposed to have many benefits when drunk as a tea, and whose transformative promise has been dubbed part of the 'miraculous side of development-oriented agronomy' (Sumberg and Andersson 2019).

Most of Mulu Wengel's work in Kuré Beret, however, was with the school. In an interview with Ermias in 2015, he told me there were seventy child sponsors (from around three hundred at the beginning), but 'now they [the children] have dropped out or gone to Jidda.' Support was in the form of school uniforms and football kit; books, stationery and pens; health check ups (by a government nurse, but not normally performed as standard), plus medicine or transport to a clinic in town if necessary. The small handful of children who continue to grade nine in the nearby town receive a stipend towards their living costs. The Mulu Wengel office in the village, built in 2014, abutted the school compound and contained records of the children who received help, according to Ermias's perception of need.

Mulu Wengel also paid teachers a small bonus for extra work as tutors for any children who wanted help preparing for exams on weekends. These payments were not anywhere near as much as the *abel* (per diems) that other government workers received from (especially foreign) NGOs for attending trainings. Teachers frequently compared their measly payment from Mulu Wengel to health extension workers, who were known to be the top of the *abel* scale. Low-level government workers' salaries are based on level of education, so health

extension workers, who were educated up to Grade 10 with one year of training, earned the least. However, both health and agriculture workers had more access to extra payments through the practice of paying *abel*, given out while attending training, along with lunch, snacks and sometimes hotel accommodation. Health extension workers were particularly in demand for training by NGOs, whose interest was in extending the health workers' responsibilities to cover their latest development priority (see chapter 4). However, access to training and the coveted *abel* was controlled by managers at *wereda* level, bringing personal relationships to the fore and making urban or peri-urban workers more likely to benefit, as people told me. In other words, government workers in rural areas became increasingly unable to manipulate their 'connections and social resources in order... to obtain the protections and benefits that power properly executed can offer' (Malara and Boylston 2016:40). This was one of the myriad of small ways in which a posting to a more remote rural area with limited access to transport precluded the advantages arising from social relationships, as I shall show below.

Both the state and Mulu Wengel link the schools with sources of authority and money beyond the local and the national; states are entangled in complicated power relationships with donors and connection with development discourse that have both diffuse and specific effects on education policy (Hickey and Hossain 2019; Caddell 2005). Mulu Wengel's connection of distant others - the individual child sponsors, and the board who coordinate them in California - with the space and people of Kuré Beret is also much more direct than the mediated ways in which the state education system connects to the global; for example, in the design of textbooks (Yamada 2012). Ermias communicates with child sponsors directly by email, including sending photos. He told me that 'they cry, the Americans, when they see pictures of the children fetching water by donkey.' Ermias's role as a personal conduit to the foreign world is a source of disquiet to some. When I first arrived one young man, the son-in-law of my landlady, was reluctant to speak to me or even sit near me. After some time I heard through an intermediary that he was wary because he thought I was *P'enté*.

He specifically did not want me to take a photo of him that I could send somewhere with the claim that he too was *P'enté*, as he assumed, quite possibly correctly, that Ermias did.

As this anecdote shows, although Ermias generally had friendly personal relations with local people and government workers alike, in part due to his gentle and softly spoken manner, occasional cracks would show tensions in local religious politics. Contrasting attitudes to accepting financial help from Mulu Wengel by the three schools introduced in the prologue are materialised in the stark contrast between the concrete buildings and satellite dish in Kuré Beret and the crumbling mud classrooms of the other schools. Via a *kebele* meeting, the school in the Muslim village of Wesiso had previously turned down funding from Mulu Wengel, a decision that some local parents told me they regretted and were reconsidering after seeing the improvements made in Kuré Beret. Voices of dissent about Ermias's 'state-like' role as benefactor for the school included Rahel, the head teacher in Kuré Beret, who resented having to ask him for financial help for items or projects that she, as the head, considered necessary. 'It's so hard to get money out of him!' she complained in frustration. The provision of the TV for the school (despite being a huge boon for the entertainment of government workers) was also questioned: 'wouldn't a computer have been more useful?' asked one teacher.

According to a 2008 directive from the Ministry of Education 'education shall be provided in a manner that is free from any religious influence; political partisanship or cultural prejudices' (quoted in Dereje 2013:36). Mulu Wengel, then, were officially and expressly forbidden from proselytising to or otherwise influencing school children or their teachers in their role as educators. As far as I could tell, Ermias had no overt influence over educational policy or content, and was very circumspect about talking about religion at all. He had good reason, as a few years before my first arrival one of their staff members had been made to leave after village representations to the *wereda* that they were not happy with his evangelising ways. This lack of direct influence on teaching content does not

mean that Mulu Wengel's presence made no difference to ideas and imaginaries about education.

Material differences, from the school buildings to the banal but important distinctions between state and Mulu Wengel employees, were evidence of links to external forms of power and influence. In this way *P'enté* churches were marked out as 'practitioners of a "business religion" that enjoys disproportionate economic support coming from a white elsewhere,' according to Diego Malara's Orthodox informants in Addis Ababa (2017:218). In Jimma Daniel Mains found that 'youth sought government work to transform themselves from one who gives rather than one who receives support' (2012:84). In Kuré Beret, government workers were beholden to Ermias to distribute the money that came from 'a white elsewhere' as he saw fit - even as they displayed some measure of resistance and disquiet.

Everyday Mobilities

While in Kuré Beret, in many ways Ermias's daily life was not conspicuously different from the government employees who were his main social group. He kept a small room in the same compound where I and three government workers lived, and he also had to cook and clean for himself. For a reason I cannot understand, his was also the only room, possibly in the whole village, to be free from the scourge of bedbugs. Even though his room was not fully enclosed as the wall partitions did not reach the ceiling, it was as if his room was protected by an invisible forcefield that stopped bedbugs entering from the neighbouring rooms, including mine, that were crawling with the noxious insects. Ermias, of course, claimed the power of prayer. As well as the bedbug-free room, there were other differences, both minor and more consequential, between the daily lives of Ermias and the public servants. His frequent trips to Addis Ababa - somewhere several of the government workers had never visited - and other cities for training; his ability, subsidised by Mulu Wengel, to study for a distance learning masters degree in business studies and entrepreneurship with a private college;

and his contacts with foreigners in the course of his work set him apart from the government workers. Everyday material differences and their impact came into focus most sharply in terms of the differential access to transport between Ermias and the government workers. Igor Kopytoff (1986) writes about how investigation of the 'cultural biography' of a car can reveal social worlds. In this case, it was the means by which Ermias had stayed in the village much longer than most of the government workers had or would do, but only for a few nights a week or less. This was made possible by his access to transport, in contrast to the public servants, who struggled to squeeze onto the bus.

With only occasional travel assistance from the wereda bureaux that employed them (there were a total of up to five government cars across all sectors for the whole wereda, and none specifically for education), government workers often had to attend meetings, training or evaluation sessions in town. They also travelled to visit their parents, relatives, friends and, in some cases, their spouses and children. To reach the village, wherever else their journey began, usually involved catching a bus in Shewa Robit to travel forty-five kilometres on the unpaved road. Zippy silver minibuses left the bus station for Addis Ababa and the zonal capital Debre Berhan every thirty minutes or so, while the hulking old bus heading for the rural hinterlands lurked in the corner for hours, filling up slowly until every seat was taken several times over. On the top: sacks of grain, corrugated iron sheets, plastic jerry cans, goats. Inside: farmers asleep on their forearms, prepared to wait as long as it takes, gusts of petrol and the distinctive thick smell of roasted grain eaten as a snack, stickers featuring St Gabriel and insurance companies. On the sides: white dust and streaks of vomit, because the road is rough and passengers returning from town were often drunk on *araki* (strong alcohol) or just travel-sick. Often there was a lengthy wait in the rural town of Abayat'ir to change or fill the bus, or sometimes - especially when it rained - it would stop there and the rest of the journey would have to be made on foot. It is hard to over-emphasise the physical discomfort of the average bus journey; the smells, heat, dust, jolting, noise, and extreme over-crowding.

For Ermias and his colleagues, the travel experience was quite different; nine times out of ten, a four-wheel-drive would take them to and from the village. Abeyot, the Mulu Wengel driver, set himself apart from rural life through his superior attitude and immaculate clothes, including the astounding feat of wearing white trainers without getting a speck of dirt on them, seemingly even after walking through a puddle of mud. I have a strong visual memory of those white trainers, and their contrast with my mental image of three teachers who had walked seven kilometres after a rain storm when the bus refused to travel any further, and whose shoes were caked in so much thick sticky mud they could barely stay upright.

Having nothing to do with the rackety space of the bus station and forbidden by organisational policy to pick up extra passengers, Abeyot's orientation was almost completely to Mulu Wengel employees and members, with limited relationships of reciprocity with others. He was the exception; the bus drivers and the drivers for the *wereda* bureaux were involved in dense networks of gift, favour and calculation with passengers, including government workers. Cultivating relationships with drivers was a crucial part of successfully accessing transport. The first step was to found out if and when a vehicle would come - not a given, as there was no guaranteed schedule. Rumours would spread via the people who had managed to speak directly to a driver and then be passed on, their content becoming increasingly uncertain and combined with guess-work, and also dependent on the social relationship between the knower and the seeker of information. This 'calculated vagueness,' part of the tendency towards ambiguity characterised as a typical Amhara trait (Levine 1965), can indicate closeness or be seen as allowing 'people to assert some control over the flow of information' (Boylston 2012:156). The latter is how I understood the obscurity of information about transport, secrecy about which might bring material advantage or could just be an indicator of the abstract power of 'knowing something.'

Some of the young female public servants cultivated friendships with the bus drivers and their *reddat* (assistants). They were *duriye* (disreputable) dusty sweat-soaked figures, smokers and *qat* chewers, often hoarse from shouting logistical negotiations over the grinding bus gears and ear-splitting noise of the radio until their mobile batteries died. The women's instrumental flirtatious interactions with the drivers might result in their getting a better seat at the front, but also sometimes led to uncomfortable situations that bordered on harassment.

Other government workers marshalled personal relationships with government drivers to try and finagle one of the few places in (or on the back of) a car. One woman, rumoured to be having an affair with a senior person in the *wereda*, was often to be found in a coveted position in the *gabina* (cabin), and was skilled in taking advantage of opportunities for travel; the uncertainty of transport encouraging both ruthless competitiveness and calculated cultivation of useful social relationships. She once left a group of us literally eating her dust in Abayat'ir, where we had travelled together, when she managed to find a single seat in a government car without telling anybody or saying goodbye. However, as I mentioned above, relationships with *wereda* staff and drivers were more difficult to sustain the longer one stayed in a rural area away from Shewa Robit. The most common situation was that government workers resigned themselves to uncertainty about when or if they would be able to travel; to jostling for a space alongside boisterous teenagers, drunk men and sharp-elbowed older women; and to interminable waiting that might mean they could not see their wife, parents or child that weekend.

In many ways, the service provided by the bus drivers and their associates was an immediate public good that was valued beyond anything provided by the government workers, and was sometimes in direct contrast to the ability of the state to offer vital services. It could be described as a reversal of the situation in which rural peoples' relations with local officials 'will mediate the access they enjoy to all of the resources and services the state has to offer' (Vaughan and

Tronvoll 2003:18). For example, there were only two ambulances available in the *wereda* at the time of my research, one operated by the town administration for Shewa Robit only, and the other by the Red Cross, which would come to rural areas, if available, in cases of very extreme emergencies.[105] Both were reserved only for pregnant or labouring women, and children under five; anyone else would have to pay. On one occasion when an ambulance did not arrive to transport a woman in her third day of difficult labour to the health centre, she was instead carried by a group of men on a wooden bed to Abayat'ir from where she was taken by bus to the town. On another occasion I was among the passengers turned off the bus for a similar reason. The women's families would be expected to pay, but the amount was not set, unlike a normal bus fare, and would depend on the family's relationship to the driver. If there was an existing relationship, it would often take the form of a 'gift': an expected payment that would nevertheless not be demanded up front. It would likely exceed the going rate if mother and baby were healthy; or be waived in the event of tragedy.

The state was also limited in its ability to enforce regulations. The bus drivers did not own the buses and were paid a salary for driving them, approximately at the level of a newly qualified teacher. However, it was well-known - and obvious to any passenger - that they would load the bus beyond maximum capacity and not tell the owners the truth about the number of passengers they had charged. The owners would sometimes try to counteract this cheating by employing a *reddat* who was their relative or close friend. Still, it was clear that the drivers made huge *tirf* (profit), and they often managed to buy their own vehicle after driving for someone else. The overloading and thus profit was made possible by the absence of traffic police on rural roads, in contrast to main roads where they frequently check and fine vehicles for violating the rules.

[105] Since 2017, there are supposed to be two government-run ambulances for each *wereda*. The Red Cross no longer operates an emergency ambulance service, but focuses on transporting donations to blood banks.

By focusing on their differential access to transport, I am not suggesting here that the government workers viewed Ermias, Abeyot and the Mulu Wengel car as the primary symbol of all that was modern and aspirational. For one thing, along with local farmers, many of them harboured attitudes ranging from ambivalence and suspicion to anger about *P'entés* and the presence of Ermias, even if they liked him personally. As Malara found in Addis Ababa 'Orthodox believers appear increasingly preoccupied with Protestantism's increasing influence in local politics and non-governmental sectors, as well as with the economic power that Protestants draw from their transnational connections' (2017:238). Ermias's predecessor had been made to leave in circumstances that were unclear to me, but seemed to be connected to over-eager evangelising, and when Ermias built his office, the owner of the neighbouring house took him to *wereda* court, saying he did not want a *P'enté bet* (house) next to his. The government workers were also regularly exposed to other sources of material gain that contrasted to their own meagre salaries. In particular, these encompassed the profits earned though the gendered labour migration to the middle east that many of their sisters, wives and girlfriends had engaged in, as well as the increasing number of flashy villa houses that now punctuated the urban landscape in Shewa Robit and Debre Berhan, attributed vaguely to success in 'business' and providing physical evidence of growing rural-urban inequality.

Rather my point is that the transport situation for the teachers was not only uncomfortable, wearying and stressful, but indicative of social relationships in which the government workers lacked the power and prestige usually imputed to them. As in so many other mundane aspects of daily life, they felt themselves at a disadvantage; in this case, because they needed to travel for personal and professional reasons more than local people, and at more specific times. Unlike the Mulu Wengel employees whose orientation was inwards, the government workers had to negotiate the relationships that allowed them to travel. They were not placed above or set apart from the local people, physically or socially, or distinguished in any beneficial way as 'those who have seen education' and 'those who have not seen education,' as Kaplan found in Turkey (2006:8). Rather their

need to move around on foot to and from and around the village (see chapter 2) was a factor in their low status, and related to cynicism about the efficacy of education to change lives for the better. Gupta describes how subaltern citizens employ tactics to contest the power of literate bureaucrats, including 'educat[ing] their children so that they can learn to employ the same tools as bureaucrats and perhaps even secure a state job' (2012:37). This was not the case in Kuré Beret. During a mobilisation campaign to boost school attendance, which involved a day of house-to-house visits by awkwardly shy teachers, one parent's brusque response to them was: 'why would I send him [my son] to school? Then he will end up like you, trekking around in the sun!'.[106]

The Dance of Frustration

As I have demonstrated, frustration and dissatisfaction were enduring leitmotifs of the government workers' lives. Tekle, who advised Yusuf to 'grin and bear it' in the prologue to this chapter was perhaps influenced in his response to his happily married friend by his openly expressed yearning to find at least a girlfriend, or better, a wife. He was not optimistic about his prospects, as he believed no one would be interested in someone like him: a teacher with a low income, who had moved several times to different rural schools and no doubt would move again in the future.

Tekle grew up poor in the countryside north of Shewa Robit, and had a troubled home life; his father killed, one brother in jail for avenging his father's death, another brother who moved to the south for work, followed by their mother, leaving Tekle to bring up his younger sisters with little support. While at teacher training college in Debre Berhan, he met and forged a close relationship with a priest and his wife. They took Tekle under their wing, providing food, shelter and

[106] A similar quote, focused on income, appears in a recent article about how aspirations towards migration interact with aspirations for education: 'When he [the teacher] asked him [a boy]: "Why aren't you interested in school?" Can you guess what the student said? You would never believe! He firmly replied to his teacher: "Why should I worry about education if studying hard and finishing college is to end up like you? I am sure I will see you teaching in the same school as poor as you are now when I get back home with a lot of cash!"' (Tesfaye and Cochrane 2019:7).

a strong bond of support and care. In return, Tekle was fiercely loyal to them and whenever he left the village, he went to their house rather than to his family. When one of these friends became ill in 2014, he stayed in town to look after her and by doing so, he missed five days of work. For this he was sanctioned by head teacher Rahel and her deputy Samuel, and as a result, some of his salary was withheld. Although according to the rules they were correct to punish him, Tekle was furious and appeared to feel deeply wronged that his claim to care for someone who was not technically kin was dismissed as nothing. It was also another example of the less-preferential treatment of teachers compared to the other government workers amongst whom absenteeism was prevalent, but did not carry the same consequences. Others - such as health extension worker, Miheret - were very often away without permission, but did not have their salary docked.

A few days after Tekle's return to the village, it was International Women's Day. After a 'programme' for the students had taken place during the school day (a quiz on women's rights, music and dancing in the classrooms), there was a coffee ceremony and speeches for the teachers on the subject of gender equality by Rahel, Samuel and Shimeles, the *wereda* cabinet member. The speeches were very boring, full of platitudes and 'government-speak,' and went on for far too long. Shimeles was the worst offender, and Tekle showed an unusually rebellious spirit by disregarding hierarchy and the usual standards of decorum to loudly interrupt him, telling him to hurry up and get on with it, to stifled amusement from his colleagues.

After the speeches there was a party in the staff room for all the government workers, involving music played on speakers that were part of the new television donated by Mulu Wengel. As a social group, the government workers were generally sedate. They were too self-conscious to dance much, and there was no alcohol to lubricate their shyness. There was much awkward giggling and some lacklustre shoulder wiggling, until Tekle took to the centre of the room alone, and started to dance as if a man possessed. He trotted and strutted like a jerky

horse, and thrust his hands in the air as if he were surrounded by a joyous crowd at a concert. The extreme physicality of his dance was totally unlike the listless attempts that preceded his startling performance.

His movements reminded me of an event I had witnessed at the Mesqel ceremony in Gonder many years before. It involved an older woman, dressed as a male farmer in shorts and boots, leading a group of young men in a trotting dance in front of a crowd of bemused tourists, of whom I was one. I found out afterwards that this woman was apparently demonstrating possession by *zar* spirits, and wondered if Tekle's socially-unsanctioned behaviour was an imitation of *zar* possession, whether overt or not. Although I never asked either him or anyone else - Tekle was a friend and I did not want to cause any bad feeling by mentioning something that should be unspoken - I later came to the conclusion that this performance was of a piece with his uncharacteristically rude interruption of Shimeles: an expression of his dissatisfaction, a dance of frustration. In the words of Tshikala Biaya, writing about the *shifta* (bandit, rebel) figure in Ethiopia, perhaps Tekle's 'wild leaps and howls [were] expressing a symbolic struggle against state violence, a way to reconcile the body and the social imaginary and exorcise disorder' (2005:217). Although Tekle, as a public servant who in some ways embodies the state, is far from a *shifta* in any conventional sense, my surmise is that his dance expressed his feeling of being 'an individual in revolt' (2005:218) against his constraints, and against injunctions to be a 'model for the people'; I read his wild dance as a symbol of rebellion in opposition to the life offered to him as a state employee.

A final point here: I am aware that using this episode as ethnographic data is questionable, given that I do not know what Tekle himself intended to achieve or demonstrate via this dance. While I might now, with the distance of time, feel I could ask him, I lost his phone number when my phone was stolen and have not been able to track him down via other friends. In fact, when I asked of another teacher who had been a daily companion of Tekle's if they were still in touch, he could barely recall him. '*Tekle ... man new? Ah sewyew, acharwa?* (Tekle... who is

that? Oh, that guy, the little one?)', he said, illustrating my point in the previous chapter about the often short-lived and instrumental nature of social relationships that formed between government workers.

Conclusion

The dissatisfied teachers I encountered in Kuré Beret are representative of national trends. According to education researcher Belay Hagos, 'they are teachers but they don't want to be called teachers: they are ashamed of it'(quoted in Gardner 2017). Despite their success in progressing through education and gaining stable government employment, in their own estimation and that of local people, the lives led by rural teachers showed they had neither found a 'way out' nor a 'way up' in life. Rather, after time spent in an urban area at university, teaching (and other state employment) is a 'way back' to the countryside where the majority of the government workers were brought up, but in conditions of uprootedness and material hardship. Unlike the expansive global visions of *P'enté* churches, represented in the village by Mulu Wengel, allied to prosperity and success, the future offered by government work is slow, unheralded and stretches into a rural future.

In order to minimise material hardship and in the hope of increasing proximity to urban areas, it also often involves teachers and their public servant colleagues in mobility of a type that is inimical to forming lasting social relationships. If in Ethiopia, as Daniel Mains puts it, 'progress and modernisation are conceived of specifically in terms of social relationships, and the social nature of progress supports a novel conception of time as relationships' (2012:68), rural teachers do not see themselves as advancing in life. Their mobility within government service has the effect of curtailing existing relationships and preventing new ones from forming, except temporarily.

Chapter 4: Feeding Babies, Making the State: Breastmilk as a Political Substance

Prologue: You Don't Put Tomatoes in Porridge!

One scalding hot June day I attended a meeting in the village health post about breastfeeding and nutrition for young children and nursing or pregnant women. It was organised by an international NGO with a head office in the UK, and run by a man who had previously been a regional-level government employee and was now the zonal coordinator for the NGO's nutrition programme; he had therefore gone down one rung in the governmental hierarchy, but no doubt up many salary grades. Middle-aged with a paternalistic manner and dressed in the palette of grey, beige and muted green favoured by the professional classes, Dibaba was well-versed in the modalities of such meetings, known as trainings (*silt'ena)*.[107] As on this occasion, they usually involved an outside expert, almost always male, lecturing groups of local people about what they should be doing to improve their lives, while they listened quietly without asking questions. This particular training had four messages: appropriate diets for pregnant women; feeding the newborn infant with colostrum (the nutrient-dense first milk); feeding from each breast consistently (so that the baby drinks both the thinner, thirst-quenching fore-milk and the richer, hunger-satisfying hind-milk); and, the main focus of this training, supplementing breast milk with porridge in the diets of children over the age of six months.[108] This last point was accompanied by a demonstration of porridge making in a borrowed pot by two government-employed nurses from a nearby health post, as per the 'Practical Cooking Demonstration Session' contained in the codified national targets for nutrition

[107] The verb 'to train' in Amharic (አሠልጠነ) can also be translated as 'to civilise.'
[108] Another message that is frequently given in the arena of child nutrition, but was not part of this specific training, is about exclusive breastfeeding for infants under the age of six months, or in other words, not to start weaning onto other foods until then (I note here that 'weaning' is an ambiguous term, which can mean either introducing other food alongside breastmilk, or ceasing breastfeeding altogether).

services for infants and young children aged six to twenty-four months (FDRE 2016c:3).

Standing in front of many breastfeeding women, Dibaba urged them to feed their children porridge and not sweets. 'You can also add many things to porridge to make it more nutritious,' he went on, giving the examples of tomatoes, eggs and cabbage. There were a handful of eagerly attentive women sitting at the front, including Amanshewa, a rotund businesswoman who rented rooms to government workers, among other enterprises. Reputed to be rich through her black market trading connections to Afar Region, she was a divorced Muslim mother of one with a formidable manner who frankly scared me, but turned to jelly around her gurgling baby grandson Sheikho. Another woman with dramatic red henna-ed hair who I did not know - she lived in Addis Ababa but was visiting relatives in the village - voluntarily joined in with the porridge demonstration, adding to my impression that there was some social cachet involved in displaying attentiveness to these novel ideas about how best to nourish children and their mothers.

From my position at the back, however, I could see that most of the women were unimpressed and overhear (not very quiet) comments such as 'you don't put tomatoes in porridge! *ay chewata!* (what a joke!).' One woman fished a dirty lollipop out of her pocket for her toddler while Dibaba was exhorting them not to feed children sugar, in what was either unthinking coincidence or deliberate defiance. When he advised a pregnant woman to eat papaya and avocado - neither of which were grown locally or sold at the local market - for her health and that of her baby, she openly scorned his suggestion.[109]

[109] This is analogous to Julianne Weis's study of maternity care in the reign of Haile Selassie, in which she writes 'while clinics across Ethiopia continually instructed mothers on the proper feeding of infants, the question of where the supplemental food should come from was hardly raised' (2015:137).

Training held at Kuré Beret Health Post, 2014.

When I asked Dibaba why the NGO had decided to bring the training to this particular village, he first responded that there had been five cases of child stunting reported in the neighbouring *kebele* in the last year. Although, from a population of over five thousand, this was very far below the forty-four percent

of children with stunted growth that he informed me was the national level,[110] he said it was nevertheless a cause for concern for the NGO. He also told me that this format of training had been successful in reducing under-nourishment in other communities, along with the provision of Plumpy'Nut sachets.[111] Dibaba had brought a box of Plumpy'Nut on this visit, although there was already a full box nearing its two-year expiry date in the village health post. (Miheret, the health extension worker, distributed the older sachets to her friends and I gratefully took some. It was rich, salty-sweet and, we all agreed, delicious. I was surprised the government workers had not so far been tempted to eat them). Dibaba did not expand on the rationale for intervening to correct the way women practiced breastfeeding or ate while pregnant, but it was clear from the training that it was partly based on disapproval of 'harmful traditional practices.' As written into national policy, these practices are said to 'contribute… to the poor nutritional status of the majority of infants, young children and women in Ethiopia' (FDRE 2016b:69). In Kuré Beret, these apparently included the belief that pregnant women should not eat bananas, milk or *gunfo* (porridge) in the last trimester of pregnancy, as they are too heavy for the unborn baby and can cause obstructed delivery. I should note that this belief was only ever reported to me by government and NGO workers, not by local women themselves.

Later in the day, however, Dibaba gave me another reason - the main one, he said - for the appearance of the training in Kuré Beret and the neighbouring *kebele* of Sefí Beret, where the stunting had been reported: the negligence of the health extension workers in addressing the issue of breastfeeding and child nutrition. The lack of interest that local women showed in forming 1-5 groups to discuss these issues had shown up as an absence of activity in the reports that village-

[110] According to government data, at national level 'the prevalence of stunting decreased by 31 percent (from 58 percent to 40 percent) between 2000 and 2014' (FDRE 2016b:11-13).
[111] Plumpy'Nut is a 'Ready-to-use Therapeutic Food' manufactured by companies in countries with food insecure populations (Ethiopia has a Plumpy'Nut factory) under license to a French company. It is used to treat severe acute malnutrition, mainly in children, and consists of peanuts, powdered milk, oil, sugar and other added nutrients. Products like Plumpy'Nut have been described as part of a 'new range of "silver bullets" designed to "solve" the problem of infant and child malnutrition by providing highly processed baby foods and ready-to-use therapeutic foods… and have emerged from the new public-private partnerships between industry, UN agencies and large NGOs that implement child feeding programs' (Van Esterik 2015:xxi-xxii).

level government workers were required to send to the *wereda* every week. If the health extension workers had been doing their work properly, according to Dibaba, the evidence would be in the reports, and the training would not have materialised. This was a black mark for the health extension workers, who were then criticised in a *gimgema* (evaluation session) by other government workers.

*

In the next few years following this training, I went on to have two of my own children while living in both Britain and Ethiopia, and thus personally experienced the politics of breastfeeding from different perspectives. In Ethiopia women angrily hissed at me '*t'ut'* (breast), *inde*! (an expression of surprise, often disapproving)' when I failed to placate my crying toddler son on a rural bus trip a long time after I had stopped breastfeeding him for good. In Britain, there was plenty of NHS material available to encourage me to breastfeed, but no one showed me how to make porridge, with or without tomatoes. Unlike in (rural) Ethiopia, multiple varieties of formula milk are sold everywhere, including miniature ready-to-drink bottles, and public facilities for babies are marked with the symbol of a bottle. It was also easy to visibly identify the significant differences in the rate of breastfeeding between middle- and working-class women (Oakley et al. 2013; Avishai 2007). The way that breastfeeding in public could act as a subtle marker of class privilege, and lingering elements of shame - in a rare case of direct disapproval, a family friend told me he found it 'disgusting' - were aspects of my breastfeeding experience in Britain that I found entirely absent in Ethiopia. Similarly, while breastfeeding my daughter in the corridors at the American Anthropological Association meeting in Washington, DC, in 2017, several female attendees verbally toasted me as they walked past with 'great job mommy!,' a level of attention and approval that casts breastfeeding as a moral act rather than, as in Ethiopia, a literally unremarkable one.

Introduction

Researching the daily lives of government workers inevitably involved me attending very many meetings, about which I felt varying levels of excitement. When I heard that an NGO was coming to deliver training on the topic of breastfeeding (the event described above), I was more than usually interested. This was because DMI, the British NGO whose agreement to act as a collaborative partner for my PhD had helped me to get research council funding (see introduction), had asked me to produce a report about breastfeeding practices in rural Ethiopia, and how or if the topic was covered in the media. As an organisation that produces media content on health-related issues for African countries, they were putting together a bid for funding for a breastfeeding promotion campaign in response to a call in circulation by a donor agency. The free-floating need to 'promote breastfeeding' in places where such organisations work - the invitation to bid did not specify a country - struck me at the time as strange. 'Don't all Ethiopian mothers breastfeed? And do they not in other African countries?' was my initial reaction. From my observations in North Shewa and around the country, Ethiopian mothers - rural and urban, Muslim and Christian - very nearly all breastfeed their children until they can walk and beyond, very often until a younger sibling is born. One recent large-scale global study found that over 97 percent of Ethiopian women with a one-year-old baby were still breastfeeding (quoted in BBC 2016: see table on p. 208 below). As such, of all the potential issues that may attract outside intervention in the name of development, breastfeeding is not an obvious choice. This chapter will consider how infant feeding did become a subject for state and non-state involvement in my research site and beyond, and how this played out in my research area through the lives and work practices of state employees.

My overall aim is to show how, as Charlotte Faircloth puts it 'breastmilk is a substance that translates across many domains' (2013:54). Breastfeeding is an intensely personal bodily act - or 'technique of the body' (Mauss [1935] 1973) -

between mother and infant, with a role in forming individual and group maternal identities. It is also an act of 'mothercraft' that is subject to scrutiny and judgement by national and international policy-makers. Breastmilk[112] creates and sustains relatedness in a variety of scales, not limited to the biologically related dyad of mother and child. In Islamic jurisprudence 'milk kinship' creates relations between those who have consumed and supplied breastmilk that are analogous to 'blood' relations, including sexual prohibitions, and which are codified in national law (Wellman 2017). Similarly in pre-Christian Europe Aristotle thought that breastmilk was 'a purified refinement of a woman's uterine blood. Breastmilk and and natal blood were therefore conceptually equated as consubstantial' (Parkes 2004:590).

Here I want to show how 'trainings,' such as the one I described above, and the wider health extension programme implemented through the 1-5 structure, bring breastmilk and child nutrition into the purview of the state; how they play a part in constituting proper responsible citizens and extending capillary state power. This is not, however, another story of how the intrusive state, in concert with the apparatus of international development, coerces citizens into unwanted and unnecessary programmes, or foments new forms of biopolitical self-governance among the population. Mothers in Kuré Beret already breastfed their children, and will continue to do so, while for the most part ignoring irrelevant or impractical advice. I am interested in how this process of making infant feeding a state concern is experienced especially in the lives and through the bodies of the health extension workers themselves.

[112] I agree with Penny Van Esterik who has suggested the term 'human milk': 'after all we don't call cows' milk udder milk - why stress the container over the species?' (2015:xv), but as it has yet to catch on, I will continue to refer to breastmilk.

Breastfeeding: Between Nature and Culture

Breastfeeding is to some extent circumscribed by biology: the presence of the breast,[113] the milk and the baby's hunger remain the same in all possible permutations of the act. However, nursing a baby is far from a straightforward 'natural' process, unaffected by the wider cultural or social world of the mother and child. Characterising it, in the words of Richard O'Connor and Penny Van Esterik, as 'an island of practice-refined custom set apart from - and sometimes against - its surrounding cultural sea' (2012:13) helps to situate breastfeeding as neither an entirely physical activity, nor a learned cultural script. As Vanessa Maher succinctly puts it 'women's infant feeding choices are limited, enhanced, or oriented by the circumstances in which they live' (2015:188).

The instrumental view of breastmilk as primarily linked to health outcomes - a 'product-based' rather than 'process-based' view, as Van Esterik (2015:) calls it - that is evident in development narratives neglects its affective and relational qualities. Breastmilk plays a distinct and incommensurable role in, as Janet Carsten writes 'the long process of becoming a person and participating fully in social relations' (1995:223). I will provide here an overview of anthropological explorations of breastfeeding as an act of love and a learned act, both biologically natural and culturally informed, and how this tension interacts with questions about breastfeeding and women's participation in the workforce. I will then move onto a discussion of understandings of care and relatedness in an Orthodox Christian Amhara context, and the importance of bodily substances in not only marking but producing relationships.

Breastfeeding as an Act of Love

Humans, as Martha Nussbaum writes, 'spend our infancy in a state of physical powerlessness that is virtually unparalleled in animal species' (2004:36). Feeding

[113] At least as the original producer of the milk: the baby and the breast do not need to be co-present if the milk is pumped.

a child then, especially with breastmilk, is the ultimate act of 'vertical love' (Malara and Boylston 2016). The infant child's growth and survival is totally dependent on parental - and if breastfed, exclusively maternal - willingness to provide the necessary nourishment based solely on their love for the child; a gift that does not expect return. To be nursed, as James Ferguson writes, is to be in 'receipt of unconditional and unearned distribution and care' (2015:45). While there may be expectations of reciprocity in the broader sense of building familial structures that will shape future life for both parents and children (Carsten 1995), breastfeeding is a potent symbol of selfless love and care in human relationships. Asked about the work he was planning to make based on a Renaissance painting of a breastfeeding woman, artist Danh Vo responded 'breastfeeding is pure charity… it's a voluptuous charity, and that's maybe why I want to combine it [the painting] with condensed milk' (quoted in Tomkins 2018:53). The absolute power that parents have over young children, and especially mothers over infants, is asymmetrical in a way that places (maternal) love at the centre of human understandings of moral goodness. But the dependence of a suckling child on its mother can also be characterised as emasculating weakness: in 2010 US Senator Alan Simpson called the national social security system 'a cow with 310 million tits'; as Ferguson comments, this is 'an old man's phobic vision of a nation tragically sapped of its virility via the unlikely mechanism of being overwhelmed by hundreds of millions of tits' (2015:44).

Although some scholars have (controversially) questioned the omniscient idea of the selfless maternal instinct as mythical (e.g. Scheper-Hughes 1992), the association of mother's milk and life-giving love seems to be fairly universal across cultures at the level of symbolism, even where actual breastfeeding rates are low. Three other characteristics of an infant's early life - care towards the new mother; seclusion of mother and baby; and the distinct, ritualised nature of the post partum period (O'Connor and Van Esterik 2012) - are also widespread, although some argue that the practice of seclusion and 'cocooning' of mother and infant is more often an ideal than a practice (Mabilia 2012). However, there are distinct regional patterns in breastfeeding complexes (aside from the massive

variations in global breastfeeding rates, as I will discuss below). In a review of the ethnographic literature, O'Connor and Van Esterik suggest that the overall pattern of African breastfeeding can be characterised as governed by restrictive taboos, especially on sex, that embed breastfeeding in an 'intense micro-politics of sexuality and gendered subsistence strategies,' and one in which mother-infant oneness competes with lineage as society's symbolic core (2012:15).

In some countries, including Ethiopia, feeding another woman's infant with breastmilk can be a way of building kin-like relations (or strengthening distant ones) between families. Frehiwot writes about the Oromo custom of *luka* (known as *t'ut' mat'abat* in Amharic) that through the mechanism of

> the kinship tie she [an Amhara woman from Wello who had migrated to an Oromo area of Ifat] established through the institution of *luka*, her family will be assimilated into that particular Oromo clan. The Oromo had the tradition of elaborate system of adoption of non-Oromo children [which] helped the process by which the Oromo assimilated non-Oromo into their population (1998:227).

In Islam 'milk kinship' is a legally-constituted mechanism of relatedness that affects marriage relations (although not property inheritance) between a baby and the lineal kin of a woman who fed him or her[114], in Iran's legal code, as long as the breastfeeding occurred more than fifteen times. Aside from this legal definition of a type of foster-parentage, Iranians and Shi'i Muslims more generally, believe that a 'person is formed by milk,' inheriting 'personal characteristics from the women who nursed them, [whether] they are their mother or not,' and that breast milk has 'the capacity to transmit or accrue qualities such as purity, emotion, faith, or corruption across generations' (Wellman 2014:16-17).[115] In northern Pakistan, Peter Parkes (2001) describes a 'milk-connected polity,' in which 'milk-kinship' helped to create networks of allegiance that would allow people to access scarce resources. Informal milk sharing, as a conscious contribution to the agenda of 'de-medicalising' breastfeeding, is also seen as building affective kin relations beyond the label of

[114] For a personal experience of milk kinship in Darfur, see El Tom (2015).
[115] Page numbers from unpublished manuscript.

'donor,' as this quote from a woman in the USA shows: 'I currently donate to a baby girl with special needs; she, as her mom calls her, is my milk daughter and their family is now a part of ours' (Palmquist 2015:40).

Conversely, the intersection of political and economic interests with the expression of maternal love that nursing a child embodies can cause public shock and outcry. Breastfeeding was more than usually newsworthy in 2018, with two stories that foregrounded the contrast between breastfeeding as a life-giving (and -saving) act of love and care, and profit-driven or anti-immigrant politics. In May 2018, the US government blocked the passage of a World Health Organisation resolution, which would have restricted the advertising of formula milk and explicitly committed to promoting breastfeeding as superior to formula feeding. This was allegedly as a result of ties to infant formula manufacturers afraid of the effect on their profits (Khazan 2018; Prashad 2018). Secondly, over the summer of 2018 migrant children crossing the border from Mexico to the USA were separated from their parents. The US Department of Homeland Security denied media reports that breastfeeding infants had been kept apart from their mothers. The Centre for Investigative Reporting confirmed that it had happened in at least one case: a five-month old Guatemalan baby, who spent a month in a different detention centre from his mother. When they were reunited by a District Court injunction, the mother's milk supply had dried up and she could no longer breastfeed her son (Srinivasan 2018).

Breastfeeding as Mothercraft

Women everywhere have always learned about breastfeeding from other women around them. In rural settings anthropologists, such as Mara Mabilia (2006) who describes the prolonged breastfeeding among Wagogo women in Tanzania, have found nursing to be part of an integrated social and cultural system, often one in which infant feeding is inseparable from adult sexuality. However, widespread and longterm breastfeeding is not confined to settings in which there is a

uniformity of cultural and historical norms. In multi-ethnic urban settings, such as the informal settlement in Mali described by Katherine Dettwyler (1988), women also arrive at shared norms through the common presence of publicly breastfeeding mothers, which led other women to expect and believe they will also successfully breastfeed.

Interventions by external actors designed to alter women's infant feeding behaviour have a long history, and the massive variation in breastfeeding advice over the centuries shows clearly that there is no biological bedrock against which to standardise or stabilise feeding practices. Colonial rulers in Africa sought to modify the way women fed their children by instructing their subjects in the 'correct' methods, using books such as *A Mothercraft Manual for Senior Girls and Newly Married Women in Africa*, published in London in 1929 (Weis 2015). These manuals were designed to counter harmful techniques, such as 'the constant carrying of infants to let them breastfeed whenever they need - a practice thought to promote overfeeding and improper digestion' (Weis 2015:40). In the same vein, the highly medicalised child care manuals that gained traction among middle class western women from the late nineteenth century recommended babies feed on a strict timetable and with precise amounts of milk, a feat much easier to achieve with the formula milk that had started to be manufactured during the same time period. During this time, in the Western world 'breastfeeding and human milk came to be viewed as imperfect and unable to achieve the level of quality that could be achieved in artificial substitutes. As stated in one early twentieth-century medical publication… "it is easier to control cows than women"' (Koerber 2013:16).

Breastfeeding and Work

The common thread in the long history of breastfeeding advocacy, including in interventions such as the training with which I introduced this chapter, is their failure to address the fact that breastfeeding is powerfully affected by external

and structural circumstances, as the anthropological literature on breastfeeding shows (e.g. Cassidy and El Tom 2015; Maher 1992). From the late nineteenth century in the western world, according to historical analysis of the process 'all the customs that once supported breastfeeding collapsed before rapid social change and an intolerant ideology of progress' (O'Connor and Van Esterik 2012:16). The most prominent changes were the availability of powdered milk, associated with aspirations for modernity, and its intersection with evolving norms about gender roles and the division of labour.

Historically for some women, breastfeeding was work. In Europe wet nursing was 'a highly organised industry, organised by the state as early as the thirteenth century' (Matthews-Grieco 1991:17), while in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries wet nurses were hired as low status employees by medical institutions under the control of (almost entirely) male doctors (Maher 2015). Unlike the nature of relatedness that suckling another's child produced in Iran - where, as Rose Wellman shows 'sharing breast milk meant sharing sacred qualities between mother and child' (2017:177) - European wet nurses were working class women with few employment options, whose own children were left motherless while the women's bodies were used as a 'technology' for richer women and their families (Sherwood 2010). They were often not trusted by the mothers whose babies they were feeding; were subject to control over their diet, hygiene, and sexual behaviour; and generally invoked a 'fear of the contamination of one social category by another' (Maher 2015:198).

As well as directly in the case of wet nurses, breastfeeding has an intrinsic connection with the nature of women's work. The ability to breastfeed is linked to the co-presence of the mother and baby, usually in the domestic space, whether or not paid work is taking place. Various mechanisms of support, encompassing the structural (state and/ or company policy on flexible work), financial (paid maternity leave) and technological (breast pumping machines and fridges to store the pumped milk), also have effects on the incidence of breastfeeding in a country, although these are hard to measure in isolation. What

is clear however, is that women in formal employment, even with support, find it more difficult to continue breastfeeding their babies than rural women, such as those in my research area, whose work is in and around their home (Cassidy and El Tom 2015). Conversely, women who prioritise breastfeeding as an integral part of raising children may find it difficult to achieve the same career progression as their male counterparts if they opt for an extended period in which they work part-time or not at all. For example, the 'attachment mothers' who were Charlotte Faircloth's interlocutors in London received from advocates of longterm breastfeeding 'an implicit message that work is best avoided' (2013:92) or were asked directly 'could you possibly afford not to work?' (2015:73).

On the other hand, in France short periods of maternity leave and heavily state-subsidised childcare co-exist with a prevalent attitude that longterm breastfeeding is anti-feminist; that it hearkens back to a naturalised view of women as nurturers, of biology-as-destiny. Faircloth found 'a pervasive worry about mothers being enslaved to their children (*esclavage*), who could easily become infant kings (*l'enfant-roi*)' (2013:199), and an undesirability in being, or being seen as, a *mère fusionelle,* a mother who can't be separated from her child. This is a contrast to Anglo-American parenting culture, with its strong moral emphasis on 'breast is best.' Epitomised by the twin poles of the originally Catholic La Leche League and the counter-cultural 'women's health' movement and spreading more widely into mainstream norms in Britain and North America, this current of thought categorises formula feeding as anti-feminist. The aim to reclaim women's breasts for the purpose of feeding babies from the sexualised and medicalised male gaze has, for some, occluded the effect of breastfeeding on women's careers. As Hanna Rosin, a rare (middle class) dissenting voice on the centrality of breastfeeding to good motherhood, puts it:

> In Betty Friedan's day, feminists felt shackled to domesticity - a vacuum cleaner being the obligatory prop for the "happy housewife heroine," as Friedan sardonically called her. When I looked at the picture on the cover of *Sears's Breastfeeding Book* - a lady lying down, gently smiling at her baby and still in her robe, *although the sun is well up* - the scales fell from my eyes: it was not the

vacuum that was keeping me and my 21st-century sisters down, but another sucking sound (2009, emphasis in original).

Whether women in different national contexts make choices or compromises around breastfeeding willingly, accept them as a fait accompli, or feel them as a source of distress is a question I cannot address here. My interest is in pointing to way in which the larger structural forces that affect women's breastfeeding practices are subsumed under the powerful rhetoric about the health benefits of breastmilk.[116]

Breastfeeding in Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity

Reducing infant feeding practices to a biological process - to the transfer of nutrition from mother to baby - avoids engaging with the contradictions inherent in the fact that 'conditions that fully support mothers and infants often challenge gender hierarchies and basic capitalist principles' (Van Esterik 2015:xxii). Viewing breastfeeding through a medicalised lens also ignores the complex ways in which breastfeeding contributes to forming and cementing (gendered) social and 'physio-sacred' (Wellman 2017) relationships in specific locations. The importance of both bodily substances (Boylston 2018; Malara 2017; Hannig 2013) and food (Malara 2018; Boylston 2013) in marking boundaries[117] and mediating between the sacred and worldly realms has been highlighted in recent anthropological work on Ethiopian Orthodoxy, the majority religion in Kuré Beret. Ethiopian Orthodox norms about the act of breastfeeding and breastmilk, 'the ultimate incommensurable substance' (Van Esterik 2015:xv) that is uniquely both a bodily substance and a food, are clearly important to its almost universal practice.

[116] The magnitude of the claimed health benefits is also questioned in Faircloth (2013), alongside questions about the nature of scientific authority in breastfeeding advocacy.
[117] Outside the realm of religion, in his study of Ethiopian athletes, Michael Crawley discusses the way in which protein-rich food and drink, especially milk, was crucial to maintaining physical 'condition' and beneficial in other ways too; 'by creating a feeling of superiority and separation from other athletes' (2018:74).

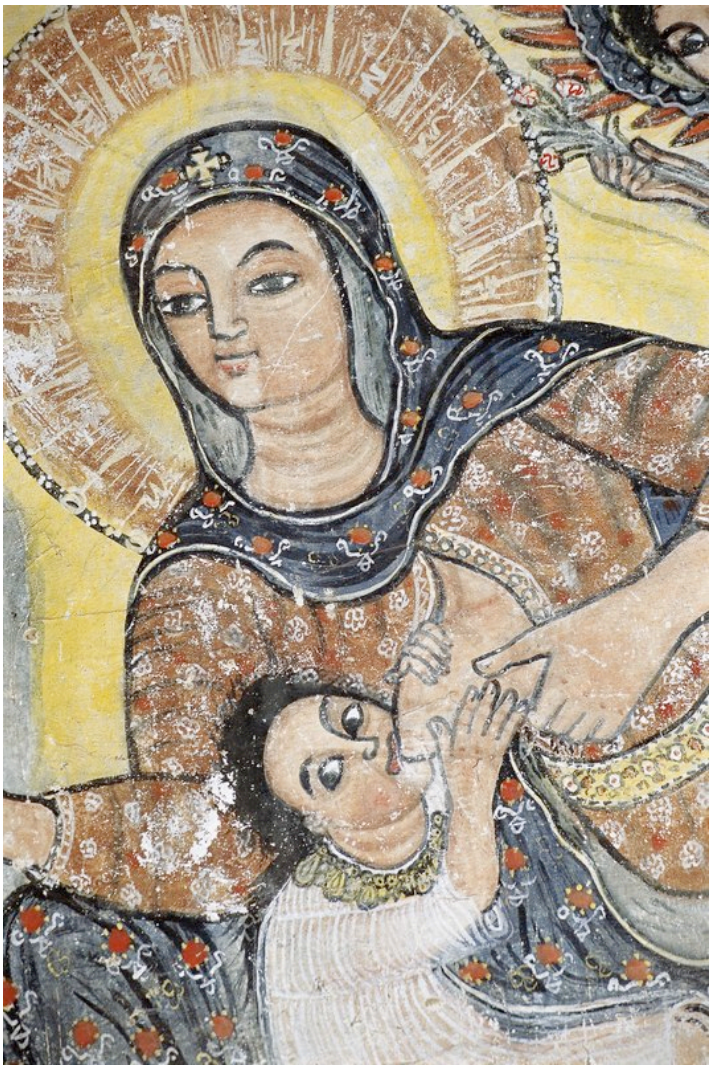
In Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity the separation of the sacred realm from the secular or worldly is of central importance, and this separation makes mediation a central concern of Orthodoxy (Boylston 2018). Alongside priests and saints, Maryam (Mary) is a crucial figure in mediating Ethiopian Orthodox Christians' relationship with the divine, that which is too sacred to be approached directly. Mary acts as a universal maternal protector and provider; she is known as *yefikir enat* (the mother of love). As a hospital patient interviewed by Anita Hannig in Amhara Region described:

> Maryam is my mother. She protects me. She isn't only my mother, but she is everyone's mother. . . . She is our guardian. Would your mother be mean to you? It is like that; she would never be mean to us. When our Lord is about to punish us, we have to appeal to Maryam (2013:321).

Ethiopian Orthodox ideals of purity are said to strictly interdict any form of contact between bodily substances (indicating an 'open' body) and sacred space, echoing Mary Douglas's ([1966] 2002) famous insights on purity as wholeness and danger as uncontainment. As Boylston writes 'the real, bodily presence of God does not mix well with the domains of sexuality, feeding, or reproduction, and particularly with bodily fluids' (2018:56). Menstruating women, anyone who has recently had sex, or even has a runny nose are prohibited from taking communion or entering church ground, indicating the 'anxieties about permeability and practices of containment central to Orthodox experiences of bodiliness and personhood' (Malara 2017:137). The *aras bet,* or seclusion of post-partum women between the birth and baptism of her baby (after forty days for a boy and eighty for a girl), is part of 'distinct models of maternal care, safety, and danger' (Hannig 2014:312) related to the 'open' nature of mother and child.[118] The period of *aras bet,* during which women do not leave the compound or do any housework and are fed rich food, is an opportunity for mothers to establish a pattern of breastfeeding, when 'particularly in the early weeks, a breastfeeding woman must feed her infant on demand and around the clock' (Rudzik 2015:12).

[118] The lack of seclusion in medical facilities, and the attendant expectations of danger to mother and child, is one reason for the low rate of childbirth outside the home. See Hannig (2014) and Weis (2015) for more details.

However, after the *aras bet* period, breastmilk appears to be an exception to the ideas about wholeness and containment for all women, including *yefikir enat*. Mary is a figure of purity; her 'physical incorruption contrasts with the leaky and endlessly mutable bodies of regular people' (Boylston 2018:13); however, although she is said not to have menstruated, she did breastfeed. Church frescoes that show Mary nursing the infant Jesus (see below) represent the nexus between divine love and material nourishment. Breastfeeding women are exempt from the restrictions that are attached to other bodily fluids, and nurse their children in any public situation, including in church and in front of priests.



Eighteenth Century Nursing Madonna Fresco, Church of Narga Selassie, Lake Tana, Amhara Region.

As well as breastmilk's exception from religious precepts about bodily substances, norms about bodily exposure are also suspended, marking an absolute distinction between the 'erotic body' and the 'maternal body' (Faircloth 2015). In general 'in northern and central Ethiopia, public displays of nudity[119] are commonly associated either with mental disability or spirit possession' (Hannig 2018:127), and are one of the ways in which Amhara people distinguish themselves from other ethnicities they consider 'less civilised.' In Kuré Beret this was especially evident, as women from neighbouring Afar Region traditionally cover their heads but not their breasts: a fact that would almost invariably come up in discussion of Afar people by government workers as an example of their 'low level of progress.' However, norms about bodily modesty did not apply to mothers of young children in my research area: whether in private or public, breastfeeding women make no attempt to cover their breasts from view while feeding their babies.[120] In a domestic space in particular, it was common for a woman not to pull her dress back up after feeding and sit fully topless while, for example, making coffee. As children continue to breastfeed long after they are fully mobile, they would often take out and play with their mother's breast like a toy, with no reprimand from her or anyone else.

Infant Feeding, Development and the State

As I have shown, educating African mothers in the 'proper' management of their children has a long history as a tool of reform by colonial powers (e.g. Boddy 1997; Janzen 1978), and in Ethiopia by Haile Selassie's modernising imperial government (Weis 2015), related to a wider logic that sees culture and tradition as barriers to progress and modernity. In the twenty-first century, the constellation of knowledge, power and money that coalesces under the label 'development' come together to make women in the Global South - who are

[119] See chapter 5 for an example of nudity as a 'shaming' punishment.
[120] Another example in which norms around nudity are suspended is during mourning. As I wrote in fieldnotes in March 2015: 'we came across a huge *luqso* of a woman who had died in childbirth. There were many hundreds, even a thousand, of deeply grieving people - all weeping, (not as usual just at the front of the crowd), with bare breasted women as their *gabis* slipped while they mourned by raising their arms and hanging forward.'

many magnitudes more likely to breastfeed anyway - an object of intervention. Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan sum up the situation well; this is an example of 'a particular form of public policy that [is] designed, managed and financed from outside a country but implemented within it with the direct or indirect support and instrumental use (and sometimes resistance) of national public actors' (2014:49). These interventions are characterised by a designation of current infant feeding practices as affected by 'bad culture,' while simultaneously ignoring other factors related to poverty and access to services, as well as the 'good culture' that encourages the practice of breastfeeding, such as the distinct and ritualised nature of the post partum period (O'Connor and Van Esterik 2012) that is found in *aras bet*.

Global standards on infant nutrition, codified by the World Health Organisation (2017) and minimally adapted by the Ethiopian government (FDRE 2016a; 2016b) place the emphasis on women and families to alter their behaviour and adopt nutritional practices that will form healthy and modern citizens, rather than those that lead to 'sub-optimal productivity in adults and reduced economic growth for the nation' (FDRE 2016a:6). These standardised interventions or 'travelling models' (Olivier de Sardan, Diarra and Moha 2017) are common to the field of public health, as well as development more generally. In this case they are derived from an 'evidence-based' paradigm that focuses on the health-giving benefits of breastmilk (and other foods, such as the unappealing but undeniably healthy tomato porridge), while ignoring contextual factors - including, in this case, the crucial fact that the vast majority of Ethiopian women already breastfeed. Furthermore, as in Dibaba's advice above to a pregnant woman to eat healthy fruits that are unavailable to her, nutritional and breastfeeding guidance follows a pattern in which questions of poverty and access are neglected in favour of an idealised and individualised behaviour change that it falls on women to enact. Shifting the focus away from the structural issues that impact on the health of children and their mothers in village - foremost among them, the poorly equipped health post and lack of transport - breastmilk becomes the subject of moral injunctions for self-improvement.

My argument here, however, is that the low-level government employees responsible for this particular expansion of the state's reach into the lives of ordinary people are the ones most affected by the process of attempting to reform local practices. Toni Weis writes that 'between 2005 and 2012… "mobilisation for development" became an explicit expectation of the Ethiopian state vis- à-vis its subjects' (2016:309). Although much commentary has been expended on the potential of this mobilisation 'to coerce and force the peasants' (Pausewang 2002:90), much less attention has been paid to the lives and positions of those responsible for carrying out the mobilising. Health extension workers are limited in their ability to enforce women's participation in the 1-5 scheme and other efforts to regulate the way they fed their children: the women who attend trainings such as Dibaba's were mainly indifferent, scornful or mildly interested at best, even if the 1-5 leaders in particular may have felt some level of compulsion to attend the training (by no means all mothers of young children in the village did attend). In an inversion of the belief that Stacey Pigg describes in Nepal, that 'it is better to deliver development than be its target' (1996:173), the effects of non-participation are minimal for local women, while they have complex material, emotional, affective and socio-economic effects in the lives of government workers. Furthermore, the global political and economic systems of value and power that underlie corrective interventions into women's lives - in part premised on a pathologised view of non-Western women as needing 'saving' from their own bad culture - present women's empowerment as arising when the restrictive ties of kinship and tradition are loosened, allowing women to start working outside the home. In this case, the health extension workers' success in gaining employment had serious consequences for their own roles as mothers.

The Problem of Culture

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, I was asked by DMI to produce a report as part of their planned bid for funding for a breastfeeding promotion project. From my own position in the hierarchy of those producing

development knowledge (in the hope that some paid work would materialise), I did write a report for them. During my research, out of interest, I looked up breastfeeding rates in Britain and was shocked to find the UK at the very bottom of a global league table for continued breastfeeding at twelve months, at just half of one percent. Saudi Arabia is next on the list at two percent, with the joint fifth bottom countries leaping up to nine percent. Ethiopia is in the all-African top five of the league table, with 97.3 percent of mothers continuing to breastfeed their year-old babies. Furthermore, in the UK 'by six months 75 percent of children were totally weaned off breastmilk, and only 2 percent of women breastfed exclusively for the recommended six months' (Faircloth 2015:61).

Bottom five countries after 12 months	Top five countries after 12 months
UK (0.5%)	Senegal (99.4%)
Saudi Arabia (2%)	The Gambia (98.7)
Denmark (3%)	Malawi (98.3%)
Greece (6%)	Guinea-Bissau (97.8%)
Canada and France (both 9%)	Ethiopia (97.3%)

Continued Breastfeeding after 12 Months (BBC 2016)

These statistics were the impetus for me to think about the issues that underlie this chapter. Even within the biomedical paradigm, there is no doubt that the health benefits of being breastfed for at least a year considerably outweigh the practice of rejecting the early milk, known as colostrum[121] - the practice of which

[121] 'There is a long history associated with conflicts surrounding colostrum itself, which medical evidence now suggests is a form of perfect food and medicine, but yet many cultures have advocated discarding due to cultural constructions that this often-yellow substance is "bad

is anyway anecdotal - or the slim possibility that Ethiopian mothers do not realise their child's hunger will be unsatisfied if they continually switch breasts to feed. The fact that there were potentially funds available in a country that has exceptionally poor rates of breastfeeding to promote or modify practices around breastfeeding in a country where women almost universally breastfeed already is indicative of the global structural inequalities that structure development planning and practice. If breastfeeding is globally acknowledged to be a public health good, it is Ethiopian mothers who should be advising the population of the UK on their achievements in longterm breastfeeding. The fact that this is a laughable idea - not least because they would never be granted visas to enter the country - shows the enduring strength of global hierarchies of knowledge and value.

During research for the report, I arranged to meet a friend of a friend in Addis Ababa. She worked for another British media NGO that, in partnership with a global corporation, promoted the empowerment of girls in Ethiopia. As well as barriers to education, early marriage and gender-based violence, she mentioned that one of the issues they wanted to address was social isolation, mentioning a report that found a third of Ethiopian girls and young women in rural areas to be socially isolated (Erulkar et al. 2010:15). I found this conclusion baffling and entirely counter to my experience, which chimed with that of Boylston, who concluded that 'to be alone is always bad, and much of village life revolves around making sure to show others that you are present to them, in life and in death' (2018:122). I assumed that the report had just come up in conversation fairly randomly, but later found that the 'friendless girl' statistic from the report was used in media coverage as one of the reasons for the existence of this multi-million pound programme (e.g. Spera 2018). This glossing of women and girls as suffering the fate of social non-personhood is of course not specific to Ethiopia. Neither is the move from diagnosing the place of women in society to the prescription of interventions to solve the problem (Hickel 2014). In her work on

quality," with some arguing (incorrectly) that it is even harmful to infants' (Cassidy and El Tom 2015:2).

the aid industry in Afghanistan, Julie Billaud writes that 'the international community's interference into states' affairs, especially in Third World countries, has historically coalesced around a state's treatment of the "other" half of its population, namely women' (2015:6).

The idea that problematic culture hinders development, that poverty can be explained partially through people being too enmeshed with social and cultural norms to achieve their potential as individuals, also has a flipside. Culture, broadly, is also pathologised for excluding and rejecting those deemed less worthy, who then must turn to outsiders for assistance. This is the narrative about (Ethiopian) women with fistula, which assumes that their bodily leakages mean they are shunned by their families and neighbours, that they will have 'no social networks to tap into once they went home - that their lives were devoid of husbands, kin, and communal succour' (Hannig 2018:191), a narrative that Hannig comprehensively shows to be a projection rather than a reality. This portrayal of cultural pathology is also common in justifications for international adoption, where Ethiopian mothers are frequently described as lacking 'natural' attachment to their children, 'not naming babies at birth or nursing them at arm's length,' as one evangelical adoption agency employee described it (quoted in Joyce 2013:146).

The Amhara Orthodox (and wider Ethiopian) 'breastfeeding complex,' with its emphasis on early seclusion and nurturing of the mother and infant, and the suspension of exclusionary norms around bodily fluids and modesty, plays a part in the extremely high national levels of breastfeeding. However, interventions around breastfeeding and infant feeding, through the entangled efforts of international organisations and the state, instead concentrate on modifying practices relating to infant nutrition that arise from 'bad culture,' such as rejecting colostrum or eating practices for pregnant women, seen as based on superstition rather than science. Narratives about women and girls as socially isolated, as devalued in a patriarchal society and subjected to a heavy burden of rural work that hinders their school attendance (e.g. Erulkar et al. 2010), also

contribute to assumptions about Ethiopian mothers, such as that illiterate rural women lack the education to understand that they can, in fact, eat bananas when pregnant.

Health Extension Workers

Interventions such as the training I described above are imbricated in a variety of scales, from the free-floating global development funding available to encourage African women to breastfeed, to community level 1-5 cells, who are managed by health extension workers. As I described in the first chapter, 1-5, also known as the 'development army,' is a sub-state structure of Ethiopian governance that plans to 'ultimately incorporate the vast majority (up to 90 percent) of the adult women living in Ethiopia's countryside' (Maes et al. 2018). There is obvious potential for 1-5 to act as a political tool, a means of wielding power down the lowest level of the population, whether or not in combination with *hiwas* (party cell) membership or participation in any of the other structures I discussed in chapter 1. This is widely noted in literature on the topic, ranging from fairly neutral observations that 'there are now lines of communication as well as of control extending to the household level' (Dessalegn 2009:194), to seeing 1-5 as central to the surveilling and coercing of the rural population (HRW 2010; Emmenegger et al. 2011) and one of the means by which 'the ruling party extended its institutional authority over all the collective structures in the *kebele*' (Lefort 2012:692). Development literature tends to be silent about its authoritarian potential, but very positive about its effects on health and education indicators. The appointment of Dr Tedros Adhanom from Minister of Health to Director-General of the World Health Organisation in 2017, the first ever African in the role, is in part based on his championing of the 'development army' model (Østebø, Cogburn and Mandani 2018:267), which has been heavily supported by international NGOs and multilateral bodies (Østebø et al. 2018:260). What is missing from both praise and critique, I suggest, is a close

consideration of the ways in which organising, managing and implementing 1-5 has effects in the lives of the health extension workers.

In Kuré Beret, 1-5 activity was most evident in three areas.[122] The first, which I have not covered in this thesis, was fertiliser use and land conservation, led by the agricultural extension workers (see: Chinigò and Fantini 2015; Planel 2014; Lefort 2012; Segers et al. 2008; Kassa 2003). The second and third were latrine building (see chapter 5), and advice for pregnant women and mothers of young children, both led by health extension workers, the backbone of the 'health development army.' They were described to me by one senior UN official in Addis Ababa as 'like donkeys,' in that they carried an ever heavier load of development responsibilities, constantly expanded by new plans and policies emanating from the offices of Addis Ababa, Geneva, Washington, DC, and beyond.

As part of a wider movement in global health to prioritise community-level intervention that was affirmed by the Alma Ata Declaration of the World Health Organisation in 1978, the Derg regime set up a programme to train Community Health Workers in the 1970s. The scheme was underfunded and eventually abandoned (Maes and Kalofonos 2013); after a hiatus following the change in government, it was revived in 2003 - going national in 2005 - as the health extension programme. By 2010, around thirty-three thousand extension workers had been deployed around the country (Østebø et al. 2018:60). There was a major difference in this new programme from the previous model: its workers are in salaried, full-time government employment. The health extension workers are supported by (and responsible for recruiting) the 1-5 leaders, who receive no pay or incentives except occasional T-shirts or *abel* (per diems) for attending training, and who Maes et al. (2018) call voluntary Community Health Workers. Although 1-5 was in part designed to reduce the burden on the health extension workers by using the unpaid 1-5 heads for outreach in fulfilling their responsibilities (Maes et al. 2018), my health extension informants found the

[122] 1-5 nominally existed in the main school, but remained more of an intention than a reality.

extra burden of cajoling women to participate (with no money on offer), then monitoring and supervising them, more troublesome than helpful.

Health extension workers are all female and educated to Grade Ten, with one extra year of training (they must have at least ten years of education overall). Unlike their doctor, nurse, laboratory technician and midwife colleagues, whose usual site of operation is the clinical space of hospital or clinic, health extension workers are supposed to go to the people rather than the people coming to them. Every *kebele* in the country should have two resident extension workers, based in village health posts or town health centres. The 'package' (the English word is used) of work that health extension workers are expected to fulfil is designed at the federal level, led by the Ministry of Health with significant input from international NGOs, multilateral agencies and consultants. Donor priorities are thus filtered down through layers of authority to reach these two young women, who will ultimately take responsibility for delivering these messages to the population of each *kebele*. Echoing the 'donkey' comment, Hanna, the health extension manager in the *wereda* town told me that priorities have shifted in the last few years, from promoting latrines to preventing home births, but the package is only ever added to, nothing is taken out. The contents of the package are extremely detailed, both about the information that needs to be imparted and the method for doing so. I witnessed one discussion about information for pregnant and lactating mothers between Miheret and a nurse who had come to assist her with vaccinations in the village of Enbuwaybad. A booklet containing forty-eight messages, most but not all accompanied by pictures, had three empty boxes on the page next to each message. The health extension worker was supposed to explain the messages to a 1-5 leader, who would in turn recount them to her team. The nurse pointed out that the boxes were supposed to indicate that each message needed to be explained three times before the task was counted as complete (which was confirmed by the booklet's introduction), an idea that Miheret found ridiculous. Fatigue with repeating the same messages over and over again was a complaint I heard many times from the health extension workers and Hanna, an ex- extension worker herself, succinctly

diagnosed the main complaints with the job as 'first, boredom; second, overload of work.'

There have been several health extension workers assigned to Kuré Beret since my first visit in 2010. Throughout Kewet, attrition was high, mainly through marriage, migration, leaving government work for the private sector, or some combination of those factors. For example, after complaining of no pay rise for several years, Wudassie went to Dubai to work as a maid. Sadly she was cheated from her savings by a no-good boyfriend on her return, and ended up selling clothes by the side of the road. Some of those who did not leave the work altogether eventually succeeded in changing locations from the villages where they were posted. Alemitu had a chronic illness, rumoured to be HIV, and was transferred to the town. Through connections of her husband's, Miheret managed to get a transfer to a *kebele* with easier transport to the town. By 2016 Kuré Beret had no health extension workers, although nurses working on a short-term contract were a partial replacement. Hanna told me that the performance and motivation of contract workers was not satisfactory (and it was more expensive), but that the *wereda* had no choice: from thirty-eight permanent health extension workers at the beginning of the programme, only eleven remained.

Health extension work has serious physical, social and emotional repercussions for state employees 'who are required to "care" even at substantial personal cost' (Hampshire et al. 2017:34). Recent studies have found that levels of food and water insecurity are on average lower among health extension workers than community health workers (Maes et al. 2018; Dynes et al. 2014); so although their salaries are low, extension workers are not experiencing extreme poverty. However, health extension workers are exposed to circumstances that are not covered by these surveys and do not apply to the rural 1-5 leaders, women who are in their home villages (whether through birth or marriage). Health extension workers in rural areas such as Kuré Beret are often living away from their families, sometimes leaving their children with others for weeks at a time while

they work; a situation compounded by the difficulty in accessing reliable transport (see chapter 3). Especially while conducting the house-to-house visits that are crucial to their work, they experience disrespect and harassment (as I described in chapter 2), as well as hard physical graft. One health extension worker in the *wereda* believed an arduous trip to a remote village - similar to the journey to Werq Amba that I described in the prologue - had caused her to miscarry a baby.

Before her transfer, Miheret, was brisk and efficient with practical tasks when present, but she was often missing from the village for weeks at a time. This was because, like other female government workers, she had young children living in Shewa Robit. Her children were mostly looked after by her parents and husband, when he was not travelling for his work. Being away from both her family and her work for stretches of time brought about two different issues for Miheret. Firstly, her absence from the meetings at which the government workers presented the results of their work led to the lack of reports showing 1-5 activity. As Dibaba reported, this lack of documentary evidence in turn led to the child nutrition training with which I opened this chapter. Miheret also received a negative assessment of her work in a *gimgema* by her government worker colleagues, who frequently complained about her unauthorised absences anyway. Secondly, in a cruel irony, Miheret - responsible for promoting officially approved forms of maternal and child nutrition to other women - was stymied in her own desire to breastfeed her child for as long as she would have wanted, as staying in the village had left her with no milk when she returned to town. Her achievement of steady government employment was therefore a barrier to her aspirations for breastfeeding her child in the way she was responsible for advising others to do.

Conclusion

> Since childhood (and before that infancy) always precedes adulthood, the slogan of a distributive radical politics might be this: before a man can produce, he must be nursed - that is, the receipt of unconditional and unearned distribution and care must always precede any productive labour. Suckling, that is, rather than producing could be seen as the primal human act, and distribution might be quite plausibly posed as the foundation of production (rather than the reverse) (Ferguson 2015:45-6).

While suckling may be 'primal,' the practice of breastfeeding certainly is not, as I have shown in this chapter. The process of supplying (distributing) the 'unearned care' that is breastfeeding is interwoven with a multitude of factors. These factors include structural ones, such as women's participation in formal labour and the availability of alternative infant food sources, and the various religious and socio-cultural attitudes and beliefs that combined make up the 'breastfeeding complex' found in a particular place or group of people.

In her work on 'attachment mothers' who practice longterm breastfeeding in the UK and France, Charlotte Faircloth (2013) looked at breastfeeding as a way of not only producing relatedness, but as 'identity work' for mothers, who were self-consciously engaged in constructing a breastfeeding self, the 'militant lactivist' referred to in the title of the study. Mothers in Kuré Beret - and across rural (Amhara, Orthodox) Ethiopia - also have a strong sense of maternal identity, and providing breastmilk for their children is an important part of their loving and caring role; one which is normalised and naturalised as unremarkable and unproblematic. Local beliefs and practices, from the exemption of religious taboos on nudity and bodily fluids, to the postpartum seclusion and nurturing of mothers and infants, are supportive of longterm breastfeeding, as are socio-economic conditions that mean most women do not go anywhere without their children until they have stopped breastfeeding.

The focus on breastfeeding, and infant nutrition more generally, as a potential site for management and correction arises through the intervention of the state

and its international counterparts, part of a long history of the insertion of biomedical norms into African women's lives through a colonial discourse of 'civilising the natives.' Although Ethiopia was not colonised, and as such, the imperial modernising paradigm that reached its apogee under Emperor Haile Selassie was both distinct from and inflected by Western notions of modernity (Marzagora 2016), nevertheless, the history of public health interventions in Ethiopia shows the belief that 'with sufficient re-education of overly "traditional" Ethiopian families, the entire nation could be "modernised"' (Weis 2015:v).

The intersection of breastfeeding and the state that this chapter has explored speaks to wider ideas about the political domain, and shows, as Van Esterik describes in the context of shared milk, the 'power of human milk to connect people across time and space' (2015:xxi). The substance of breastmilk is critical to producing relatedness between kin, but can also be a means by which other forms of relation are brought into being. Mothers are entwined in the myriad structures through which the Ethiopian state enacts its development goals, with the health extension workers playing a pivotal role. Echoing the modernising impulses of Haile Selassie and the *zemecha* of the Derg that I discussed in chapter 1, the health extension workers who manage the structures of participation such as 1-5 are the instruments through which to impart 'mothercraft' to rural women, even if the women are uninterested in or resistant to their efforts.

My aim in this chapter has been to explore how such interventions play out in the lives of those charged with implementing them, although separating those doing the implementing from those being targeted is not straightforward, when the 1-5 programme plans to cover ninety percent of all rural women. Many observers of rural Ethiopia see such outreach programmes as the means by which state power is extended to ever greater numbers of the population and as a way of extracting unpaid labour from rural people, especially women. My point here has been that effects on local women, including those involved in 1-5 to whatever degree, are minimal compared to the burden felt in and through the bodies, families and

relationships of the health extension workers. From everyday frustration to terrible tragedy, the weight of their work as 'donkeys' loaded with developmental responsibilities is reflected in their frequent decisions to exit state employment.

Chapter 5: Counting Fake Latrines: Shit, Shame and the State

Introduction: The Illusion of Toilets and the Legibility of the State

Shit is a powerfully affective substance that (almost) universally[123] provokes disgust and is seen as polluting and fundamentally anti-social matter. Following Mary Douglas ([1966] 2002), Yael Navaro-Yashin writes that 'filth is read as constitutive of society. It is against filth that society is formed by defining and identifying that which should be excluded' (2012:148-9). As a 'politically efficacious emotion' (Ngai 2005:354), disgust has historically been mobilised by states to designate certain populations as unclean and through this reasoning to exclude them by spatially segregated cities and countries (e.g. Hickel 2015; Chalfin 2014; Campkin and Cox 2007; Anderson 1995).

Contemporary sanitation programmes, such as the one that is the focus of this chapter, community-led total sanitation (CLTS), aim to govern communal behaviour through invoking disgust in order to provoke shame. CLTS has its origins in the emancipatory philosophy of radical educationalist Paulo Freire (1970). However, in its hybrid form as I witnessed in Kuré Beret and in the same way as Labzaé described *gimgema* (2019; see chapter 1), CLTS is an example of the plasticity of governing techniques. Participatory 'bottom-up' action was compatible with both neoliberal development models (in its placing of the responsibility for managing human shit with individuals rather than with states), and with Ethiopian governance practices (in its emphasise on the role of the vanguard state in directing citizens to participate in their developmental duties). One of the core ideas of CLTS is that providing any kind of financial or material support dampens true 'ownership' of toilets; instead, it assumes (individual) disgust and (communal) shame will 'provoke urgent collective local action' (Kar and Chambers 2008:7) and lead to inevitable change. Once these emotions - assumed to be immanent within all people and social groups - have been

[123] See section below for different perspectives on the disgust provoked by shit.

'triggered,' people will leap up and seize their shovels to start digging latrine pits (Kar 2010). Unsurprisingly to anyone familiar with the voluminous anthropological literature on development failure (e.g. Mosse 2006; Ferguson 1990), in Kuré Beret change did not 'just happen' - or, not in the way the model supposes.

As I described in the prologue, I did actually witness farmers in one village seize shovels and start digging when local government officials came to call. All involved knew, however, that this was a performance of compliance, 'fake digging' in the same vein as the 'fake latrines' that stud the landscape of the *kebele*, as I will describe below. The appearance of government workers in that remote place was also in some ways a performance of the state, as was the producing and disseminating of the illusory statistics that followed the visit, as demanded by both the government and its international development partners. To some extent state legitimacy rests on these statistics, even if they are widely understood as imaginary, as a representation of the reach of the government into the remotest of rural areas, rather than an empirical reflection of reality. As Navaro-Yashin writes 'statistics actually and concretely generate (and not only reflect) social practices' (2012:29).

In the same way as the breastfeeding and child nutrition intervention that I described in chapter 4, CLTS[124] and its hybrids have complex antecedents before they materialise in a rural area as policies that have to be 'made legible' in Scott's term (1998). Mathur's critique of Scott is that his thesis starts at the point where legibility has been achieved, through a 'profound misrepresentation of complexity' (2016:3) and in the process of enacting these damaging simplifications. Following Mathur and Das (2004), I want to show how the daily

[124] To avoid drowning in an alphabet soup of acronyms, I will use CLTS in this chapter as a blanket term to refer to all interventions that are influenced or related to the CLTS methodology, whether or not the acronym corresponds with an individual programme or project's exact name. For example, the World Bank-led intervention in Kewet (and Amhara Region more widely) was officially called Community-Led Total Behaviour Change in Hygiene and Sanitation (CLTBCHS). In 2008 Unicef tried to introduce the term Community Approaches for Total Sanitation (CATS) to encompass CLTS and all its related variants (Mehta and Bongartz 2009:5), but it did not catch on.

labour of low level public servants was expended on 'making it appear *as if* the illegibilities have been overcome, *as if* orders have been followed' (Mathur 2016:3, emphasis in original). This labour took place on and through paper, through audit techniques and production of documents, but also through the physical and sensory realms; through the movement of their bodies around the space of the *kebele,* up mountains, into households, and into latrines themselves, to see and smell peoples' shit.

Writing Reports, Kuré Beret, 2014.

I will describe the frustration of public servants in promoting latrine construction and 'proper usage' among the local people (even if their cynicism was tempered with a commitment to improve public health). What had emerged as a high priority at meetings held in Geneva, Washington, DC, and Addis Ababa was not at all a priority among a rural population with ample open fields in which to shit. Furthermore, a full latrine pit within a household compound is dangerous, disgusting and difficult to deal with. Various social, political and religious dynamics contributed to the adoption, resistance or subversion of the CLTS intervention and the public servants' exhortations to build latrines in Kuré Beret. These included the fake latrines and fake digging; explicitly political rejection by both Derg-era *birokrasi* and landless young men; and the intertwining of gender, Islam and purity that contributed to Wesiso's well-built and cared-for latrines. This chapter traces the history of sanitation in Kuré Beret *kebele,* from the short-lived period of 'pure' CLTS, implemented by the World Bank, to its morphing into a state-led sanitation programme, as a way of examining the complex ways in which the state is in part constituted through its management of shit.

The History of Shit and State

Following my discussion of breastmilk in the previous chapter, the life-giving substance that embodies love and care, this chapter will concentrate on a bodily substance that has the opposite connotations. Shit is seen as polluting and fundamentally anti-social matter that is - or should be - a private matter and a source of shame and disgust. Its similarity to breastmilk, however, lies in the way it has also been subject to heavily moralised regulation. As Kaplan writes 'hygiene, and public health become yardsticks with which the state diagnoses, monitors, and structures society; they also become the stakes by which citizens can claim differential rights over state resources' (2006:17). The management of excrement has been seen across historical eras and geographical areas, according to Brenda Chalfin, as 'the arbiter of civility and incivility, the social and the primal' (2014:93). The technical, scientific, economic and social challenges

involved in containing and disposing of human waste started to become pressing as cities across the globe grew in population and density. Dominique Laporte ([1978] 2002) traces the contestation of the responsibility for the management of shit between the public and individual realms in France, starting from the Royal Edict of Villers-Cotteret of 1539. 'To each his own shit,' the edict read, thus configuring the issue as domestic, private and, in Laporte's reading, tying it to the development of bourgeois family life and the modern subject.

The pragmatic reasons that the concern with human waste management have historically largely focused on urban areas are clear. Rural areas such as my research area are after all surrounded by the open spaces that cities lack, mitigating issues of privacy, unpleasant smells and a dangerous concentration of excrement leaking into the water supply. While in the city shit is always 'matter out of place' (Douglas [1966] 2002), in a field it can be a positive and productive benefit. This point was in fact the origin of Mary Douglas's foundational phrase, via Lord Palmerston and as traced by Richard Fardon:[125] during London's 'Great Stink' of 1858, when the River Thames, fetid with human waste, became so unbearable during a heatwave that Parliament was unable to sit in session. Palmerston said that 'dirt was only matter in the wrong place' (quoted in Fardon 2013:25) and that, instead of being in the city, it should be productively used as fertiliser by farmers.[126] The less urgent nature of rural sanitation, then, even more than in urban areas, reveals a concern with making certain types of citizen-subjects: clean, modern, civilised.

Anthropologists and historians have long shown how the classification of lives and places as dirty and disorderly has resulted in violence against the poor and

[125] However, see also Sjaak van der Geest: 'In a personal message (2/12/2003) Mary Douglas "confessed" to me that she took the idea of "matter out of place" from a book of quotations. She probably referred to the following quotation from John Chipman Gray's collection: "Dirt is only matter out of place; and what is a blot on the escutcheon of the Common Law may be a jewel in the crown of the Social Republic"' (2007b:394).

[126] This concern has been taken up by those who advocate for composting toilets or 'ecological sanitation' (ecosan). In the mainstream water and sanitation field, it is a minor element (although with some powerful backers, including the Gates Foundation). It is also a consciously countercultural practice; for example, among the 'hippies and drop-outs' in Hawai'i described by Lucy Pickering, who reframe shit as 'generative and life-giving matter' (2010:34).

disadvantaged (e.g. Lewis 1966). Extending the bodily discipline involved in 'properly' managing one's own shit to the discipline of populations as a whole, and the equation of cleanliness with morality, were key nodes in the discourse of colonial power, as Alison Bashford (2004) illustrated with her discussion of 'imperial hygiene.' Colonial powers found 'human scatological evolution' (Chalfin 2014:93) to be lacking in subject populations, and this was an instrumental node in the spatial division of cities based on racial schema (Hickel 2015; Swanson 1977); the validation of medicalised approaches to the discipline of black bodies (Comaroff 1993); and the designation of entire populations as lacking in 'decency' and 'civic virtue' (Doron and Raja 2015; Anderson 1995). Norbert Elias ([1939] 1994) describes how intimate bodily functions are linked to notions of civility and thereby, to citizenship. This connection is often made explicit in justifications for imperial domination, such as those made by Mussolini in his attack of Ethiopia that was sanctioned by the League of Nations. As historian of fascist Italy Ruth Ben-Ghiat writes 'even as [Mussolini] ordered gas attacks on the Ethiopians, he lashed out at the League's unjust punishment of Italians who, he claimed, were merely trying to "bring civilisation to backward lands, build roads and schools [and] diffuse the hygiene and progress of our time"' (2001:126).

The colonial form of 'sanitation syndrome' (Swanson 1977), according to Jean Comaroff, was 'influenced by nineteenth century European sanitary reform and discipline imposed - primarily upon indigent urban underclasses - at home' (1993:321). The relationship between physical dirt and social disorder was also crucial to racialised discourses that followed migrant populations into the spaces of metropoles in Europe and North America (e.g. Watt 2007). In Britain, Edwin Chadwick's activism led to the Sanitary Commissions and Public Health Act of 1848, which attempted to provide urban labourers with a regulated, disciplinary environment. Criminality, disease and poverty were co-located, perceived to threaten civic order and eradicated, often through slum clearance for the purposes of drainage. Laissez faire social policy gave way to social regulation in the field of public health, but 'this transformation did not occur simply because of the growth of humanitarian sentiment or of a social conscience,' as George

Rosen points out ([1958] 1993:202). Rather politicians and reformers realised the general public boon resulting from improved sanitation for industrial workers, including the cost savings from support to the sick, widowed and orphaned. During this process improved hygiene became explicitly linked with improving the moral standards of the urban poor: as David Inglis writes 'in the hygienic sense, the proletariat was felt to be a ripe source of diseases. In the moral sense, the proletariat was filthy in that it was seen to be (at least potentially) disorderly, unruly, and failing to correspond to the conditions of a disciplined workforce' (2002:217). The association between morality and hygiene was also paradoxically deployed to resist sanitary improvements that had the potential to act as dangerously socially levelling. Concerns about the management of human waste in Victorian London (driven by the 'Great Stink') saw sections of the bourgeoisie resisting the introduction of waterborne sewage systems as an attack on domestic autonomy; they understood the new technology as a potentially transgressive form of connection between social classes, thus threatening valuable order and hierarchy (Allen 2002).

Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS): Origins and Methods

Concern with water and sanitation - the euphemistic term used to refer to the disposal of human shit - in the field of international development, especially in rural areas, can be dated to the 1980s, which the UN declared the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation decade (1981-1990). As Synne Movik and Lyla Mehta (2010) point out, this decade coincided with both the advent of structural adjustment programmes and an emphasis on self-reliance and community-based approaches, influenced by Freire (1970) and Ernst Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* (1973). However, attention to sanitation in particular started to gain momentum in earnest in the 2000s, after a long period in which it was sidelined in favour of the importance of clean water in water and sanitation programmes (Black and Fawcett 2008:71). Some development practitioners believe this was due to the prevalence of engineers in the field,

whose interest and expertise was in the 'hardware' of pipes, drainage and technical designs, and who were reluctant to engage with the 'soft' social field of latrine use and management (Deak 2008:31), overlooking the obvious point that 'dirty water is usually dirtied by faeces' (George 2008:81).

Community-led total sanitation (CLTS) is an approach to promoting rural latrine use that began in Bangladesh in 1999. It has its origins in previous participatory approaches, most notably Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRA) and Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation (PHAST) that spread in Africa and South Asia in the 1990s, and '[drew] heavily on the idea of change through conscientisation developed by Freire' (Movik and Mehta 2010:2). The founder of CLTS, Kamal Kar, an Indian agriculturalist, was trained in PRA and has worked closely with Robert Chambers, an major figure in participatory approaches to development. CLTS was an innovation in its concentration on a single issue (although as it spread, greater claims were made for its ability to spark wider social change: see below), and in its willingness to use confrontation and even conflict, compared to the focus on facilitation found in PRA and similar methods (Deak 2008:21). CLTS spread rapidly in the 2000s, and was touted as a global development success story, as 'a radical alternative to conventional top-down approaches to sanitation' (Movik and Mehta 2010:1).

The main aim of CLTS is to provoke communal shame and disgust at the idea of defecating outside. These emotions should be strong enough to make people willing to build their own latrines without external help, and to devise their own sanctions or punishments for those who do not comply. Identifying 'natural leaders' through the initial 'triggering' event to act as catalysts for others in the community is also an important part of the CLTS process. Provoking individual and collective disgust and resultant shame - usually described as 'triggering' or 'igniting' - is thus the central plank of the CLTS methodology.

CLTS manuals and handbooks (e.g. Kar and Chambers 2008; IIED 2010; Kar 2010) provide many methods through which to trigger communities into action, most

of which are centred on telling people that they are eating each others' shit (using popular or crude words equivalent to 'shit' in local languages is part of the technique). Methods include 'defecation area transect walk,' or 'walk of shame,' which involves walking around the neighbourhood to see where people shit. Advice on this method is to 'spend as much time there as possible… asking questions, while people inhale the smell of their shit and feel uncomfortable at having brought an outsider there' (IIED 2010:185). 'Calculation of shit,' is another key method, in which 'members of the community discuss and calculate the average amount of shit one person produces per day and multiply that amount by the number of members in the family [then community as a whole]… by week, month and year, which they write on a flip chart' (Kar 2010:9). Other methods include: 'diagramming faecal-oral contamination route'; 'water and shit' (involving a hair dipped in shit and then in a glass of water, which people are asked if they would drink); and 'food and shit.' In this last method, 'facilitators collect raw shit [and] a plate of food is kept next to the shit quietly. Fresh food and raw shit quickly attract flies, which start moving between the two… often reactions lead to women spitting profusely or even vomiting' (Kar 2010:10). Many other creative tools for inciting shame are listed in the literature. I will just mention one more, from Zimbabwe, labelled 'Your wife is known':

> I tell the community that on my way to the meeting, I met a man who claims to "know" all the women from the village. Locally, "knowing a woman" means having been intimate with her. Since no man would want his woman to be seen naked by another man, this message shocks the men. I then ask the villagers how it is possible that the man got to know all the women in the village, and it becomes clear that the women were seen defecating in the open. This encourages the men to "protect their women" by constructing latrines (IIED 2010:69-70).

CLTS, then, is not a technology, but a technique. In its lack of material form, it is unlike 'Peepoos,' another sanitation innovation described by Peter Redfield (2012). Peepoos are biodegradeable plastic bags coated with a pathogen-neutralising substance, designed to stop the use of 'flying toilets' (normal plastic bags, used to dispose of shit in urban slums). There is a similarity between CLTS and Peepoos, however, in the valorisation of action and responsibility to be taken

not by the state, but by individuals (in the case of the Peepoo) and some judicious combination of individual, household and community (in the case of CLTS). The CLTS method was explicitly designed in reaction to decades of development projects that saw state and non-state actors (or, often, a combination of both) build or supply toilets for households and communities that went unused, were co-opted for storage or as animal byres, or were eventually abandoned (Mehta and Bongartz 2009). The idea of CLTS is to instead 'ignite' the desire for toilets that is understood to be latent in everyone; a desire that is supposedly smothered by the provision of the actual items themselves. A paper co-written by Kar, the founder of CLTS, presents a binary choice between two options: 'subsidy or self-respect?' (Kar and Pasteur 2005).

A central pillar of CLTS is therefore that no financial or material support should be given to those whose desire for a toilet has been awakened, even to the very poorest households. Those with no resources are supposed to start with the construction of a basic pit latrine, the first step on the 'sanitation ladder' (see Kar and Chambers 2008:68). The most basic type of latrine involves digging a hole in the ground and building a superstructure from mud, wood, stones, or whatever locally available materials people can find. In this, they are acting as 'barefoot innovators' according to the CLTS literature (Mehta and Bongartz 2009:1). These latrines, designated as 'unimproved,' were the vast majority of those found in Kewet, and in the country as a whole. In 2014, an employee from the WASH section of Unicef Ethiopia told me that from four categories - improved toilet, unimproved toilet, shared toilet, no toilet - his greatest professional challenge was in trying to move households from category two to category one; the latter of which, he said, was only four percent of all toilets in Ethiopia.[127]

In the CLTS model, the myriad benefits of being a latrine-user should spur aspirations for the even greater benefits, especially increased social status, that would arise from improvements to the latrine. This is supposed to happen in

[127] Figures from a large-scale household survey in 2011 say that 8.3 percent of households in the country used an improved, non-shared toilet (FDRE 2012:16).

concert with the household becoming more financially successful, in part through circumventing the medical expenses that were the result of not having a toilet (Kar and Chambers 2008:33). In this way, the household will ascend the ladder towards the end point of a pour-flush toilet, via a sceptic tank or biogas digester. Steven Robins describes community activists from Khayelitsha hurling (full) portable toilets into Cape Town's public spaces in protest at the government's 'providing shack dwellers with portable rather than "proper" permanent, modern flush toilets' (2014:1). In the sanitation ladder used in the CLTS literature, plumbed flushable toilets are not even at the top of the ladder, an ideal too far for rural people to even aspire towards. A sceptic tank or biogas digester may be used by more than one household, but they remain localised forms of shit disposal, unlike, as Margaret Morgan writes, a plumbing system that 'literally, physically, link[s] the individual home with the larger state' (2002:185).

Despite the genesis of CLTS, with its roots in Freirian participatory action and emancipatory claims about its potential for sparking grassroots social transformation beyond the single issue of latrines, its methods and assumptions are in accord with neoliberal injunctions for market-based solutions. They are also compatible with the cultivation of individualised responsibility through what Chalfin, following Foucault, calls 'biopolitical proscription': the 'interiorisation of sanitation and bodily waste as fundamental to individual well-being and to a broader project of societal improvement' (2014:93). Costs and responsibility have been shifted from supplier to 'consumer': one NGO reported that they 'used to spend US$25 per latrine for sanplat [sanitary platform] provision alone; with CLTS, costs amount to the equivalent of less than US$1 per latrine, as all labour and materials are being covered by the communities themselves' (Mehta and Bongartz 2009:18).

As Piot writes about Togo, in order to survive NGOs become

> attuned to the times, enacting a development version of neoliberalism's political philosophy. They aimed to bypass the "corrupt" state and go straight to the "grass roots"... promising responsiveness to local needs and insisting upon local participation. Again reflecting the zeitgeist of these neoliberal times, they were against "handouts," expecting locals to match any gift of aid with their own contribution of money or labour (2010:139).

CLTS interventions see the shifting of the physical and financial costs of sanitation downwards to 'barefoot innovators,' accompanied by the 'discipline of individual bodies and... [the] emergence of self-regulating private citizens,' as Chalfin describes interventions designed to manage excreta (2014:93). But this is not the end point of the story. CLTS was introduced in various locations in Ethiopia, including Kewet *wereda*, following and then hybridised with state sanitation programmes. In Kewet, the lack of subsidy or provision, central to CLTS, was retained; the more extreme elements of the triggering methodologies I described above were watered down; and the 'community-led' approach - in which local people were supposed to be convinced to take action only through 'ignition' - was jettisoned in favour of state-led exhortations and threats of fines. This shift was achieved through the labour of public servants, negotiating competing demands - for participation, for ever-improving statistics, and in some cases, actually for latrines - and managing resistance, in order to interpret an 'illegible' policy.

CLTS in Ethiopia

The push for universal sanitation in Ethiopia began with an initiative in the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) Health Bureau in 2003. By 2007, government statistics showed latrine construction in SNNPR as leaping up from seventeen percent to eighty percent (Mehta and Bongartz 2009:21). Similar to CLTS in that it aimed at 100 percent latrine coverage with no subsidies, the difference was that the SNNPR programme made latrines compulsory. Enforcement was through state structures - salaried health

extension workers (from 2004/05) and community health volunteers - and linked to political mobilisation around the 2005 elections (Mehta and Bongartz 2009:18). CLTS itself was introduced in Ethiopia in 2006 through a training workshop run by Kamal Kar, and initially disseminated by an Irish and a British NGO in the south of the country. As other NGOs, bilateral and multilateral organisations were drawn in through workshops and meetings, the SNNP regional health bureau's state-driven approach was gradually subsumed under the CLTS label. By 2008, the Ministry of Health had designated CLTS as the key to achieving national goals on sanitation and hygiene (Mehta and Bongartz 2009:v). In Amhara Region, the Water and Sanitation Programme of the World Bank and USAID were leading its spread (USAID HIP 2011), with some NGOs using CLTS in selected other areas around the country, including Save the Children, Plan International and WaterAid.

The introduction of CLTS in Ethiopia was a process that I witnessed, when living in Addis Ababa from 2005 to 2008 and working as a freelance writer and researcher for many different organisations. I was a regular attendee at the weekly meeting of a national network, WASH Ethiopia. Members consisted of local and international NGOs, multilateral agencies and government bodies (mostly from Ethiopian ministries and other state bodies, as well as representatives from foreign embassies) and at the national workshops and training sessions they organised. Through these interactions, via the language and norms of international development agencies, CLTS became the dominant framework for national sanitation activities. As I observed, the end results of discussions over direction, priorities, or specific wording of documents during WASH meetings and other events would eventually defer to those with access to budgets, who were mostly Europeans or North Americans at management level. Representatives of local NGOs in particular were keenly aware of how, as Jeremy Gould writes 'the incentive to perform according to an aesthetic pattern is largely linked to national and multinational public and private aid agencies, to recognition and funding' (2005:79). Annalise Riles (2001) shows how the routines and formalities of the textual and aesthetic dimensions of their work became a

mode of action critical to the operation of a network of women's organisations in the Pacific Region. This was a dynamic I recognised in WASH meetings; the endless stream of documents that emerged (including those I wrote or edited) had quite different textual, linguistic and aesthetic qualities than those produced by government employees. There was discussion of the substantive issues underlying a move from a state-led model to a 'community-led' model of sanitation promotion. For example, in minutes from a WASH meeting I attended in late 2007, those present questioned why there should not be subsidies, especially for the poorest, and also, how it could be described as 'community-led' when it was in fact led by international NGOs. On other occasions, I recall disquiet over the incompatibility of the CLTS model with ecological sanitation; if people are convinced that shit is shameful, they will not be open to using composting toilets. In the end, though, the textual and interpersonal production of CLTS was in accord with those with the power to fund projects, and it gained ascendency over previous or alternative models - at least in name.

Some of the modes of action recommended in the CLTS training literature were directly opposed to both local norms and government policy. The most obvious contradiction is in the use of statistics. CLTS is explicitly designed to 'discourage target-oriented approaches which degenerate into counting latrines and meeting targets for their construction' (Kar and Chambers 2008:9). Meanwhile, especially post-2005, the Ethiopian state mobilised statistical knowledge to build their capacity for economic planning in support of their developmental agenda. As Weis writes 'to improve the quality of data available to planners, the Central Statistical Agency [was]… targeted for expansion; under a five-year (2009-14) capacity-building strategy additional staff were recruited, methods and equipment upgraded, and statistics units created within the different line ministries' (2016:289).

Another example of conflicting principles concerns the sanctions for non-compliance. CLTS trainers advised that communities devise their own punishments for those who were not 'ignited' into building and using a latrine.

Examples quoted approvingly in the official CLTS international handbook (Kar and Chambers 2008) include encouraging children - who are described as particularly appropriate vehicles for administering humiliating punishments - to yell, scream or blow whistles to draw attention to anyone shitting outside. Another suggestion is to plant flags with the offending person's name written on them in piles of shit. Examples from Ethiopia describe even more extreme forms of vigilante-style humiliation: a case study from the south of the country in one report describes how 'open defecation has gradually become a "taboo" and a "triple punishment" being doled out to offenders. For example, villagers come to see the offender in the nude, make him pick up his shit with bare hands and scoop it into a latrine' (Mehta and Bongartz 2009:18). When I described how these demeaning punishments were recommended as part of a policy adopted by the government, health workers in Kewet were shocked and denied that it could possibly be the case. People are not allowed to make up their own punishments, they insisted; only the government can punish people by law.

The discrepancy between methods mentioned in the (voluminous) CLTS literature,[128] and my own experience is the reason why this chapter is the only portion of my thesis to focus on 'an excremental approach to citizenship' (Chalfin 2014:98), rather than being central to my PhD research as I had initially conceived it. The proud claims by CLTS experts of outlandish instances of public humiliation were the initial motivation that led me to write a research proposal for my PhD centred on exploring ideas of dirt, shame and disgust in the CLTS process, and their intersection with local governance norms. My interest was especially piqued when Ethiopian colleagues who worked for an international NGO came back to Addis Ababa from a rural area with reports of nearly being physically attacked when they had tried to stage a CLTS triggering event. Shaken, they recounted that the local people had been perturbed by the language and subject matter of the event, and then become intensely angry to the point of threatening violence when the NGO workers tried to introduce some physical

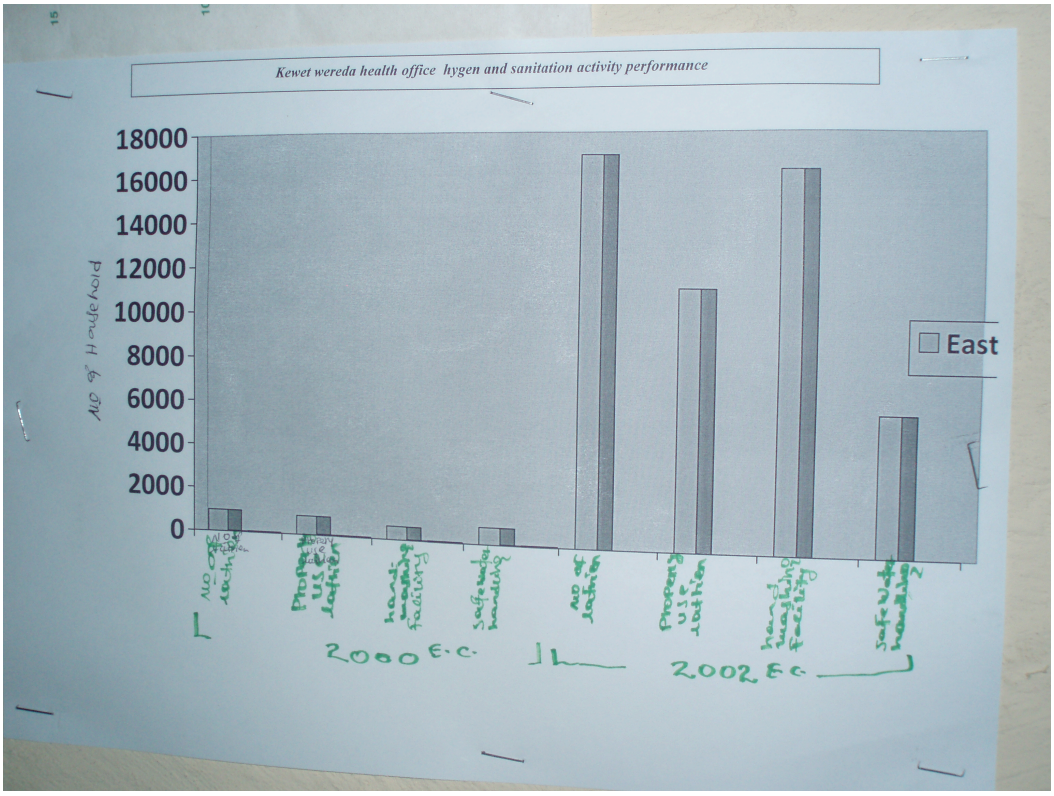
[128] Much of which is compiled on the website www.communityledtotalsanitation.org (accessed 12 February 2018).

shit into the proceedings, as per the CLTS guidelines. However, once I started my research in Kewet, my perceptions changed. Adjusting my interests according to the (in hindsight, fairly predictable) realities I found in my research area - namely, that CLTS triggering events were a forgotten or fleeting incident in most people's lives, even those most directly involved - I realised that I found the everyday social and work lives of government employees a much richer source of insight into the workings of the state than one narrow project. I nevertheless still find CLTS and sanitation promotion fascinating and worthy of (one chapter of) attention.

Latrine Promotion in Kewet: Toilets as Relational Objects

In 2007, prior to the planned arrival in Kewet *wereda* of the World Bank-led CLTS project, local health officials based in Shewa Robit told me that they counted all the latrines in the *wereda*. They arrived at a figure of 979 latrines, for a total population of nearly 18,500 people. As the chart (see below)[129] from the health office wall shows, by the beginning of 2010, after the World Bank intervention, the number of latrines had apparently shot up to seventeen thousand - nearly one for every man, woman and child resident, and enough for the *kebele* to be designated 'ODF' or 'open defecation free'.[130] Organised around the principle of 'igniting' feelings of shame and disgust about open defecation, the programme had obviously been a stunning success, bringing about 'a cultural transformation' (Amhara Health Bureau 2008:iii) and echoing wider 'evidence of a "spreading revolution"' (Deak 2008:10) in attitudes to disposal of human shit.

[129] Dates in the chart are given in the Ethiopian calendar, which runs seven to eight years behind the Gregorian calendar.
[130] There was also a trachoma control programme covering the whole of Amhara Region by 2007, one element of which was the promotion of latrine building. Research on the trachoma programme for a Masters thesis, conducted in 2010 with a sample size of 422 households, found the latrine coverage rate in Kewet *wereda* to be 56.2 percent (Ross 2011).



Kewet *Wereda* Latrine Statistics, 2007-08.

Or could there be more to the story? No one with even passing acquaintance with development projects will be surprised to hear that the reality diverges significantly from this narrative of success. In fact, the more 'cultural intimacy' (Herzfeld 2005) someone has with the world of international development, the more likely they are to recognise such claims as an inherent part of a system in which success, as David Mosse writes, involves making sure 'the gap between policy and practice [is] constantly negotiated away,' and failure is merely 'failure of interpretation' (2006:940). Following the voluminous literature in the anthropology of development that examines development failure, whether in its own terms, through unintended consequences, or as hard-baked into the system, (e.g. Dolan and Rajak 2016; Englund 2006; Piot 2010; Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1990), I aim to trace in this section how the long history of concern by states about the defecatory habits of their citizens played out in Kewet *wereda* through and beyond the story of the World Bank intervention. Ferguson writes that the question to ask about a development intervention is 'not so much what it fails to do, but what it does do,' concluding that the overall 'instrument-effects' are

twofold: the institutional effect of the expansion of bureaucratic state power, and the ideological effect of 'de-politicising' both poverty and the state (1990:256). My aim here is to address the means by which such bureaucratic power is exercised at the very lowest levels of the state, as well as the ways in which toilets in my research site intersected with core political questions of land, labour and resistance to the government.

'Who is Ahmed? Is He Above Us?': Open Resistance

Ahmed, a middle-aged farmer from Wesiso with a friendly but authoritative manner, had attended the CLTS event organised in Kuré Beret by the World Bank in 2009. He had subsequently became a community health volunteer, (later known as a 1-5 leader), part of the 'massive unpaid community health workforce intended to improve population health and modernise the country' (Maes et al. 2018), who assisted the salaried health extension workers. [131] As it was clear someone would have to volunteer, his neighbours pushed him forward as a suitably respected person to take on the role. But in addition, Ahmed said he had his own motivations for stepping up. He wrinkled up his face and looked pained when he remembered the methods employed at the 2009 event: he found especially disgusting (*bet'am yastelal*) the calculation of how many *quintals* (100 kg) of shit were deposited in the open spaces around the village every year due to the lack of latrines. After the event, during the *shintabet gizé*, Ahmed tried his best to persuade his neighbours to build latrines. There were immediate adopters, like him, who built latrines straight away, and some who yielded to his persuasion over time (especially in Wesiso). Others, however, simply would not comply, no matter how hard he tried. He summed up their attitude like this:

> They assume that – you know, who is Ahmed? Is he something good, is he above us? … He is just the same as us, he isn't anything special, so if Ahmed orders me, why should I do it? That's the question for them… Because I live in a *got'* [hamlet] and I just plough my land, I am not anything above them, so they won't

[131] See the previous chapter for more about the health extension programme and community health workers/ volunteers.

give me any respect… They count themselves as knowledgeable and they have money, they have land. They are too full of pride, so they put themselves above me and won't accept my advice.

In Kuré Beret *kebele* as a whole, these resisters were largely in two groups. The first were young landless men, those who have been described by René Lefort as 'suspended in the air' (2007:262).[132] Still counted as part of their parents' household while waiting for periodic land distribution, even if they lived separately with a family of their own and rented land, they paid no land tax in their own names. This meant they could not be members of the *kebele* and were thus cut off from formal participation in political structures. Often these young men were among those who illegally migrated to the middle east, and post-2014 were a large proportion of those deported from Saudi Arabia (see chapter 2). They were also more likely to be (suspected) opposition supporters, given their invisibility to the state. As one young man told me 'the government knows people by their land. Unless he gives tax for the government by his land, no one knows whether he's alive or not.' Their inability to achieve fully adult status that led to their exclusion from the public realm made them resistant to any influence on domestic autonomy, as pressure to build a latrine was perceived. Additionally, many lived in rented houses and so were doubly unwilling to invest their own money in improving someone else's house by building a latrine.

The second group to resist were the *birokrasi*, those who had held local government positions under the previous Derg regime (see chapter 1). Along with the pre-revolutionary 'feudal remnants,' the *birokrasi* were the group who had lost the most land in the 1997 land distribution in Amhara Region (Ege 1997). Despite their vilification in the 1990s, the *birokrasi* have generally managed to maintain or even expand their social and economic status - attributed by Lefort to a better level of education and a more secular outlook fostered under the Derg (2010:439) - and they played a key role in rural opposition in the 2005 elections

[132] Women are also affected by access to land, but differently: most girls in Kewet married in their teens and became part of their husband's household. If they divorced, which was common, most would either return to their father's household, remarry or migrate abroad. In this sense, they are not a political constituency in the same way as young men.

(Lefort 2007). In Kewet, they articulated their opposition through lack of respect for health extension workers and their allies, as Ahmed expressed above, and through scorning the latrine programme, not on its merits or otherwise, but as an overt form of dissent. The *birokrasi*'s attitude can be compared to resistance to sanitary reforms found in Victorian London; summed up by the belief that 'government intervention in matters of health and cleanliness represented a violation of privacy and domestic autonomy… sanitary legislation not only encouraged but required government interference in private life and that once this precedent was established, it would be impossible to limit the government's sphere of action' (Allen 2002:388). In the same vein, an 1854 *Times* newspaper editorial dissented from the introduction of a waterborne sewage system, with the statement: 'we prefer to take our chance of cholera and the rest than be bullied into health' (quoted in Rosen [1958] 1993:200).

Rather than obfuscating or objecting on practical grounds to latrines, both young landless men and the *birokrasi* perceived all state intervention as political, as 'government interference in private life.' They refused the relation with the state that acceding to persuasion, threat or order to build a latrine by those representing the government would have implied. Elsewhere in North Shewa, these groups explicitly mobilised the 'politics of shit' (Laporte 2000). I was told by a *wereda*-level health official that in the violent aftermath of the 2005 elections, a group of young men in a nearby *wereda* had destroyed all the latrines that had recently been built at the urging of local government workers as symbols of the illegitimate and intrusive power of the state.

Fake Latrines: Performing Obedience

Another day, another round of latrine inspections. Woldeab, the *wereda* health officer whom I introduced in the prologue, was posted to Kuré Beret for a month in 2011 in order to oversee the progress of latrine building and report back to his managers in the health bureau with the expected outcome of 'Open Defecation

Free' or 100 percent latrine coverage. 'Or I will be sent to court to answer why,' he half-joked, referring to the *gimgema* evaluation of his progress in meeting targets. Full sanitation coverage was a target for the whole of Amhara Region and pressure to achieve the target was amplified by its being 'benchmarked as a performance indicator for elected *wereda* and *kebele* officials' (USAID HIP 2008:1): a position that was obviously incompatible with the CLTS position not to 'push for or demand action' (Kar and Chambers 2008:10).

Accompanying him, alone or with a health extension worker, I learned that pausing outside each compound to shout '*ezih bet*? (is anyone home?)' was partly social decorum, and partly a means of ascertaining if there was a snarling dog in wait behind the gate. On entering, Woldeab would exchange perfunctory greetings and then ask to inspect the family latrine, so he could evaluate the structure and maintenance of the latrine, and check whether there was water and soap for hand-washing. In some households he would poke his head inside the latrine, suppressing any reaction to the smell or sight of shit and urine.

Most compounds had some form of pit latrine - just over half, according to research in Kewet *wereda* (Ross 2011) - with huge differences in quality and 'reality'. The structure in which the latrine was housed could be made from wattle and daub, stone, grass, or wood. A small minority of latrines had a wooden or stone 'sanplat' (sanitary platform) on which to squat over the hole, to minimise the smell and flies to some extent, and to prevent small children and chickens from falling in the pit. Pit latrines were susceptible to flooding in the rainy season and often abandoned once the pit was full, without a replacement being built. In 2011, there were two latrines with concrete sanplats in corrugated iron structures, in the school and the government *gibbí*, but they were not managed by anybody and never cleaned. They became unbearably filthy and by 2015 were rarely used. By 2015 a handful of richer households in Kuré Beret (including the one where I rented a room) had also built concrete latrines, as had the school in Wesiso.

Woldeab, a graduate in health sciences, was not cynical or sceptical about the benefits increased latrine usage would bring to the people of the area. He couched them in terms of decreased disease prevalence, especially for children, but also as a means of progress towards a new, modern way of life. He told me that 'the people have moved one step forward, because now they are using latrines. We can say that in the future their health will be kept in a good way. The hygiene and sanitation coverage will bring them into modern life.' However, he also acknowledged that latrine-building was not a priority for most people, who did not really see why they should stop using the surrounding fields. Others told him they found latrines disgusting: one woman said her sister lives in a town north of Shewa Robit, 'but I avoid visiting her because I hate using her latrine, as the smell is so terrible.' Another frequent complaint - echoing advocates for ecological sanitation and those who sought to reframe human waste as 'life-giving matter' (Pickering 2010:34) - was that building a latrine would remove shit and urine as sources of fertiliser for their crops.

People's unwillingness to change their habits was also something Woldeab associated with the neighbouring Afar. As he saw it, they were both influenced to resist modern development by the Afar's 'bad nomadic culture,' and distracted by the pervasive insecurity of Amhara-Afar conflict, because 'if you have some disturbance in your family, you will not plan anything good for the future.' Furthermore, he believed people had rational economic reasons for not wanting to invest in a latrine. They may be involved in a conflict that would force them to move house, or, more prosaically, as tenants in rented houses be unwilling to invest in a landlord's property.

Still, he persisted in his rounds. If there was no latrine, he might return three or four times to the same household, eventually threatening the residents with a fine if they did not comply. Although they were not officially allowed, small fines of 25 to 50 Birr were occasionally imposed on those without toilets (as well as parents who did not send their children to school). They were not used for the

poorest or those in rented houses, but for those who the government workers felt were most intransigent, which often meant the *birokrasi*.

To get around the threat of a fine - or just to stop the boredom and annoyance of visits by Woldeab and his colleagues - many household latrines were of the 'fake' variety. These shallow pits, sometimes barely ankle deep, surrounded by leaning piles of grass or bamboo (see photo), were visibly unused and cheerfully acknowledged to be quickly built 'for the report' - so that they could be counted as existing and fend off further intrusion. As one man told Woldeab 'my neighbours, everyone here has a latrine, everyone. But I am dead sure that no one uses it. You people [government workers] watch every home, you see the latrines. But you don't see when they go to shit!'

Writing about a highland area of North Shewa, Harald Aspen says that, despite massive changes in ruling power 'the most rational peasant strategy in their encounters with the state has not changed fundamentally- it is still to minimise the contact with the state by obeying only the inescapable demands it imposes on the peasantry, and otherwise to ignore it' (2002:69). Although there was open resistance carried out by landless young men and the *birokrasi*, the strategy of dealing with state demands described by Aspen - ignoring or obeying only under duress - was adopted by most people in the *kebele* when it came to latrines (and other interventions). The fake latrines of Kuré Beret and the fake digging in Werq Amba were part of fending off state intrusion into the domestic domain, in a show of obedience that all sides acknowledged to be a performance.

'Fake Latrine,' Kuré Beret, 2011.

Disgust and Shame

From Immanuel Kant onwards, philosophical attention to disgust has been concerned with diagnosing whether disgust is an emotion provoked by a natural - visceral, physiological - reaction, and therefore unrepresentable in aesthetic terms. In *The Critique of Judgement,* Kant wrote that disgust is a 'singular sensation'; that 'there is only one kind of ugliness which cannot be represented in accordance with nature without destroying all aesthetical satisfaction, and consequently artificial beauty, viz. that which excites *disgust*' (quoted in Ngai 2005:334, emphasis in original). Investigation into the biological function of disgust has also been interested in whether it is an innate function that relates to safety in the face of potentially deadly disease (Curtis and Biran 2001). As epidemiologist Valerie Curtis theorises 'humans experience disgust… because it keeps them alive': in the same way that people are programmed to take flight from predators that can eat humans from the outside, they 'probably have an

innate ability to avoid things that can eat you from the inside' (quoted in George 2008:213-4).

Of all the substances that excite disgust, human shit must be near the top of the list. It is surprising then that anthropology, as a discipline founded on an interest in the nature/ culture distinction, has been so little concerned with close ethnographic attention to practices and beliefs around shit in order to scrutinise whether human excrement is universally found disgusting in all human societies. One explanation for this lack of attention to the subject of shit in anthropology is the social or professional pressure faced by those would address the issue, but fear others will scorn the topic as silly, prurient or just gross. With reason, as the editors of a special edition of *Postcolonial Studies* reported hostility when they issued a call for papers on the subject of toilets. Angry readers described the topic as 'trivial and male' and said that 'there is no need to take [the subject] seriously in any way' (Dutton, Seth and Gandhi 2002:139). In the same vein, after writing an article on shit and its disposal, Rose George found an online comment asking whether the author is 'a scat freak? Is this all some giant experiment to see if we have no sense of class or dignity?' (2008:7).

Following Douglas's seminal insights into the social ordering functions of dirt ([1966] 2002), there have been a limited number of anthropologists who have directly addressed the subject of the substance of shit.[133] Sjaak van der Geest (2007b) reviews the extant anthropological literature on cross-cultural attitudes to shit, and concludes that faeces does have a 'natural dirtiness' due to its physical qualities, especially its smell, but that disgust must be at least partly acquired rather than inherent, given the fascination that infants have with their own shit. Nor is all faeces equal in its capacity to incite disgust. Reactions vary based on its producer: he says that the shit of someone known but not intimate is much more disgusting than one's own or one's children's. The ethnographic evidence described by van der Geest - from example, from mothers in Cameroon

[133] For example: Chalfin (2014); Pickering (2010); van der Geest (2007a, 2007b, 1998); Lea (2001, 1999); Hadolt (1999); Aretxaga (1995); Sapir (1977); Loudon (1975); Panoff (1970).

who said that 'the *cacas* of their babies did not smell and were not at all repulsive to them' (2007b:387) - are backed up by a study that found mothers ranked their own baby's shit as less disgusting than others when presented with unmarked dirty nappies (Case, Repacholi and Stevenson 2006). Different reactions to shit also depend upon species (animal faeces is seen as less offensive than human, with gradations between animals: dog shit is much more offensive than a cow-pat); and place (as Lord Palmerston recognised, by distinguishing between urban and rural shit).

Writing about Orthodox Christian Amhara women with obstetric fistula - a medical condition usually caused by prolonged labour that leads to the uncontrollable leaking of urine and/ or faeces from the body - Anita Hannig (2013) explores how the women maintain their moral identities as Orthodox subjects in the context of the spiritual significance of the purity and integrity of the body. She shows how their adherence to modes of self-discipline within the corporal limits of their injury allows them to retain an ethical self-position. I am interested here in her idea of self-discipline as means of transcending disgust, suggesting - as per van der Geest - that the physical substance of faeces is not always and equally disgusting. In Hannig's ethnography, self-discipline can provide a social and moral identity that surpasses the uncontrollability of nature.

In the case of rural women with no latrines, self-discipline is required for them to limit their need to defecate to the hours of darkness - one reason sometimes given by sanitation promotion programmes such as CLTS to explain the pressing need for latrines (e.g. Kar and Chambers 2008), and alleviate this 'bad culture.' Darkness, however, does not necessarily designate an individual or private experience. In Kuré Beret, one woman told me 'we like to go together [to shit]. It's more fun with your friends.' Several others told me that it was not shameful to go out to the fields at night for defecation, even if others saw or knew your purpose, or even saw you while shitting. 'How could it be shameful' one woman asked 'when it is a habit that everyone has?' Urination was even less of a concern. As women invariably wore long dresses or skirts, there was nothing untoward

about seeing a woman crouch on the ground surrounded by her clothes before getting up again, leaving a wet patch in the earth. And, as I mentioned above, these bodily substances were seen as a productive source of natural fertiliser. Here we see that it is not the bodily substance itself that causes disgust, but rather the lack of bodily discipline and therefore social competence that defecating in the daytime would indicate. Hannig writes that 'among Amhara the careful management of orifices is linked to cleanliness, self-control, food consumption, procreation, disease prevention, and, more broadly, sociality' (2013:309), evident through private forms of self-discipline integral to Ethiopian Orthodoxy. In this context, disgust is less an innate and individual response to a physical substance than instrumental to constructing social relationships through a display of admirable self-regulation.

In her theoretical writings Martha Nussbaum, contra Kant, claims that disgust is not natural but rather created by social prohibitions, and its direction towards 'the body and its products has collaborated with the maintenance of injurious social hierarchies' (2004:117). Nussbaum's assertion is that disgust is a fundamentally immoral emotion 'whose cognitive content is more likely than not to be false or distorted, and linked with self-deception' (2001:453-4). This is part of an attempt to build a moral theory of emotions, especially in the legal sphere, a central component of which lies in the actuating of sympathetic identification or tolerance, emotions blocked by disgust (Ngai 2005:340). According to this line of thought, the methods of CLTS paradoxically try to build 'sympathetic identification' within communities by and through provoking disgust with each other: 'if I shit outside, you will eat my shit' is the ultimate message of the 'triggering' methods. The proponents of CLTS would argue that the disgust is intended to be directed at the material substance of the shit itself, not at those who produce it in the wrong place, but the endorsement of vigilante-style punishment and humiliation suggests differently.

The disgust engendered by the CLTS methods mentioned above is supposed to have physical and visceral effects on individual bodies; spitting and being sick are

mentioned as evidence of successful triggering, and the CLTS literature contains many photographs of people looking disgusted and as if they feel nauseous (e.g. IIED 2010:67; a picture captioned 'A woman who has just finished vomiting during a triggering session using "Whose shit is this?"'). The next step is for the individual physical evocation of disgust to transform into the social emotion of shame. Shame is fundamentally a relational emotion; it is evoked when we imagine or experience the judgement of others about something we have done, and as such, it has a close relationship with extant social norms and assumptions. In her writing about disgust and the law, Nussbaum writes that 'shaming penalties are frequently defended as valuable expressions of social norms by political theorists whose general position might be described as communitarian, in the sense that it favours a robust role for strong and relatively homogeneous social norms' (2006:3).

The method mentioned above labelled 'Your wife is known' is a clear example of how shame about women's bodies and bodily functions can be co-opted into CLTS. The gendered moral valency of shame was also evident in the village of Wesiso, the only wholly Muslim village in the *kebele*, which had a markedly more positive attitude to latrines than anywhere else. Despite Ahmed's complaints that some of his neighbours turned a deaf ear to him when he urged them to build latrines, the quantity and quality of latrines in Wesiso was much higher than anywhere else. While the school latrine in Kuré Beret was unspeakably dirty, the latrines in Wesiso school were kept scrupulously clean, and the majority of household latrines were well-built and maintained. The residents of Wesiso explicitly linked their desire for high quality latrines to the importance of cleanliness and modesty, especially for women, in Islam. Women I talked to mentioned the shame they felt if they came across men when using a common defecation area, and men talked specifically about protecting the dignity of their daughters: language that I didn't hear outside Wesiso.

The Political Efficacy of Disgust

The feelings of disgust and shame brought up by CLTS methodologies are conceptualised in the literature as so powerful that they can catalyse further collective action beyond the construction of latrines. The 'natural leaders' identified through the CLTS process are thought to be capable of activating other ambitious social goods, for example 'no hunger or starvation in the village'; 'no children without school enrolment and all going to school'; and 'equal wages for all labours and reduced inequality of men's and women's labour' (Kar and Chambers 2008:9). Writing about urban Ghana, Chalfin says that 'effecting an inscription of biopolitical subjectivity typical of both the imperial and the neo-imperial project… the promotion of sanitation and hygiene was key to reckoning the relationship between state authorities and residents' (2014:97-98). Chalfin's point is to show how an urban underclass is produced through the establishment and then monetisation of sanitary infrastructure. Waste management acts as a way to engender collective political praxis that 'simultaneously exceeds, subsumes, and rejects the state nexus' to become 'an insistent part of the public sphere' (2014:101). The Mang toilet that provides impetus to further social mobilisation exemplifies the wish of CLTS for 'the right(s) to shit [to] underwrite the pursuit and realisation of other rights' (2014:102). Similarly in Mumbai, Arjun Appadurai (2001) found that alliances forged around toilets were extended to national and transnational spheres, and that 'faecal politics' were able to create a 'deep democracy.'

I should be clear here that the difference between urban and rural here is crucial: as Appadurai puts it 'rural defecation is managed through a completely different economy of space, water, visibility and custom from that prevailing in cities' (2001:37). The collective political action that Chalfin and Appadurai describe in cities are nevertheless cases of what CLTS and similar programmes aim to 'trigger' in rural communities; that sanitary concerns become 'an insistent part of the public sphere.' In my research area, however, a private household latrine,

while theoretically more desirable than a (dirty) public or shared toilet, was not able to create around it 'a politics of shit' (although in Wesiso, latrines were intertwined with other forms of identity). As the woman I quoted above said, private toilets were circumscribing quotidian participation in public life: she preferred the daily experience of shitting with others. This is echoed in urban Ethiopia by Diego Malara, who quoted an interlocutor in Addis Ababa on the anti-social effects of toilets reserved for just one family:

> Now we don't have to share toilets with five other families anymore, as in the compound houses. But the neighbour is a stranger, who just moved there and lives his life without sharing, just like in Europe… OK, you have a private toilet, but what have you lost? (2017:62).

Conclusion

In Kewet *wereda*, by 2015, the 'special events' - the triggering interventions such as 'walk of shame,' 'calculation of shit' and so on - of the CLTS campaign had long ceased, since the World Bank project had run its course in 2010. Hanna, the *wereda*-level health extension manager, told me that there was now not even one ODF *kebele* in Kewet. The health extension workers were thoroughly tired of the whole subject: 'they complain "we have nothing new to say: just 'build a latrine, build a latrine' over and over again".' The ODF celebration in Kuré Beret that was overseen by Woldeab, indicating every household in the *kebele* had a latrine, was a distant memory. Kuré Beret was now 'the worst on the scale,' according to Hanna - 'and how many times can we declare 100 percent anyway? It has become a joke!' The boredom and frustration expressed by health workers and local people alike on the topic of latrines was echoed at national and international level. *Shintabet gizé* (the time of the toilets) was over; the development train had moved on, and maternal and child health was the new fashion (as chapter 4 showed). 'ODF is so difficult, because it involves the whole community,' Hanna

said. 'Now we are concentrating on HDF - home-delivery free[134] - as we can target expectant mothers better. And it is well-funded.'

The idea that building latrines would be led by communities had been dropped even as a pretence, and low-level public servants were the ones enforcing and reporting on latrine building (as in fact, they had been all along). Under programmes that championed CLTS, government workers, especially health extension workers, had been described as 'important hygiene and sanitation change agents in the rural communities of Amhara' (USAID HIP 2011:4). However in the 'key attitudes and behaviours' encouraged by CLTS they were not supposed to 'educate, lecture or tell people what to do; tell people what is good and bad; push for, or demand action; be in charge' (Kar and Chambers 2008:10). Despite discussion in the practitioner literature about the difficulties faced by the poorest households in building latrines (e.g. USAID HIP 2011:49), there were still no subsidies for anyone. By 2015, health extension workers and *wereda* health officers, working with 1-5 teams, were responsible for sixteen 'packages' of work, seven of which focused on sanitation and hygiene; work for which they were upwardly accountable through the auditing and documentation of latrine numbers. Although a central emphasis of CLTS is its opposition to 'counting latrines,' especially in order to fulfil targets, it is unclear how the emphasis on latrine usage rather than mere construction is supposed to be measured. Although government workers do perform the intimate work of entering and checking latrines, as the young man told Woldeab 'you don't see us when we go to shit.'

The importance of 'audit cultures' as a technique of governance in neoliberal (Strathern 2000), post-socialist (Kipnis 2008) and international development (Green 2010; Ferguson and Gupta 2002) contexts has been well covered. As recent ethnographies of the state have made abundantly clear, generating paperwork that enumerates and documents people, things and practices is central to what states do (e.g. Mathur 2016; M. Hull 2012), often in conjunction

[134] In other words, all women should give birth in a medical facility.

with, and influenced by, other bureaucracies, such as those in NGOs and multilateral institutions (Hetherington 2011). In Kewet, the statistics that I mentioned above - the jump from less than a thousand to seventeen thousand latrines inscribed into statistical records following the CLTS intervention - led to the desired endpoint of 'open defecation free' status. The statistics that were reported upwards to the *wereda* and beyond are in some ways a pre-ordained ritual, a continuation of the production quotas under the military-socialist Derg government. As Zhao Shukai writes about rural China, the objective of grassroots government should be to provide 'goods and services to the wider public,' but instead local administrations 'concentrate on providing higher-level governments with one good: audits... One county party secretary acknowledged: "Today government administration is even more of a planned economy than the planned economy"' (quoted in Kipnis 2008:279). Despite this performative dimension, the reporting of such statistics involves real work; the numbers conceal the labour required by government workers to bring them into existence.

Evaluations suggested that sanitation programmes in Ethiopia 'may rely more on sanctions and official fines than the bottom up focus of CLTS which emphasises self analysis, local mobilisation and "empowerment"' (Mehta and Bongartz 2009:22). I would suggest that this outcome was inevitable in the face of the incompatible motivations inherent in the programme. Galvanising a community-led process of change (but without being in charge or telling anyone what to do, or providing any material help), while also meeting targets measured through auditing and evaluation processes put the government workers in an impossible position in the face of an illegible policy. As Mathur writes 'crucially, this struggle with illegibilities emerges not from some deficiency in the capacity of subaltern staff to comprehend law, but rather from the very practice of making a law real' (2016:2-3).

A postscript: I found this chapter especially difficult to write. While seeking a wider perspective on questions of shit and state, it was hard to extricate myself from my previous professional experience working with organisations dedicated

to improving water and sanitation conditions in Ethiopia. When I started writing about this topic from a position as an anthropology researcher rather than an employee of a development organisation, one contact at a multilateral organisation told me that the number of children dying as a result of inadequate hygiene and sanitation is equivalent to a daily aeroplane crash. He said that any critique that did not contribute to improving the situation - or, as Tania Li writes about development in general 'frame problems in terms amenable to technical solutions' (2007:2) - was complicit in the deaths of those children. In contrast, an academic who reviewed my PhD proposal found it too focused on empirical 'development' questions and told me that I should be ashamed of submitting a proposal to an anthropology department that was 'just not anthropology.' Her concerns with academic boundary maintenance brought to mind Sarah Pink's writing about the characterisation of applied anthropology as 'not only "un-theoretical" [but] even "parasitical" and "polluting" to the discipline' (2006:7). In my attempts to navigate between these disparate forms of disapproval, I have encountered one of anthropology's formative debates about the 'uncomfortable intimacy' (Ferguson 1997:152) between anthropology and development writ small.

Chapter 6: 'Until You Get the Work You Want, Like the Work You Have!' Searching for Satisfaction in Government Work and Beyond

Introduction

This chapter will introduce Tomas, whom I first met in 2010 when he was living in Kuré Beret and working as a teacher in Enbuwaybad school. Although I would describe him as remarkably intelligent, Tomas's life has otherwise - and so far - been fairly unremarkable. Tomas grew up in rural *kebele* near Shewa Robit. From the outside he had made a success of his life: educated far beyond the level of anyone else in his family, recently married to his long term girlfriend and with a stable government job. But in 2014 while reflecting on his life as a teacher, Tomas told me that he felt stuck and unhappy with his situation. Under democracy, he said, it was not supposed to be this way. He told me that, according to the constitution 'everyone should do as they want,' exactly reproducing a quote from an informant in southern Ethiopia that Ellison (2006) used as the title of an article. Intersecting with the massive rise in migration of Ethiopians to the middle east in the mid-2010s (see chapter 2), through money earned by his sister, Tomas and his wife decided that private enterprise might provide them with both material improvement and the opportunity to live in an urban area. The failure of this strategy left Tomas cynical and depressed and coincided with his conversion to evangelical Christianity, an act of self-making that has had profound implications for his current life. As he approaches the age of forty (or so it seems, as I will explain below), Tomas still sees himself as in a state of 'waithood,' in Honwana's phrase (2012) for a generation in Africa who are unable to achieve an unambiguous socially recognised adulthood. However, this extension of youth is usually characterised in the literature as involuntary and largely due to structural labour conditions in a neoliberal age. Jørgen Carling writes about the 'broad historical commonalities' that 'contribute to shared experiences of waithood: a

tradition of gerontocracy, an expansion and subsequent contraction of state-driven routes to adulthood based on education and public-sector employment, and more recent uneven growth that has raised aspirations more than opportunities' (2015:2). As I have shown in previous chapters, the first two of these characterisations do not hold true in the Ethiopian context, and the last - according to received wisdom - does not pertain to Tomas, whose government job was supposed to be one of the opportunities to which people aspire. Neither socially marginal, uneducated nor unemployed, nevertheless Tomas (along with many of his peers) rejected a steady state job and the chance of a family life in favour of a precarious existence.

I have chosen to recount his life story in this final chapter as it touches on many of the themes that I have explored so far: rejection of state employment, education and aspirations for progress, migration, development and shifting religious identities. Including his individual history is an attempt to counter the prevalence of writing and theorising that treats the state as an abstraction, or that characterise government employees first and foremost as agents of the state acting to further its, and their own, powers. Instead, I aim here to give an impression of Tomas's lived experience that encompasses his social world, background and individual personality, with his own distinct characteristics and aspirations. This is an account of one person's aspirations for a better life and his disillusionment with the options open to him as they overlapped with his particular circumstances. In the rest of this chapter I will describe the course of his life as he has described it to me in many hours of conversation in order to explore how his 'capacity to aspire' (Appadurai 2004) has been shaped by forces both within and outside of his control. Using one person's experience, in João Biehl's apt words, I hope to 'identify the many networks and relations… in which regimes of normalcy and ways of being are fashioned and, thus, capture both the densities of localities and the rawness of uniqueness' (2004:478).

Early Life

Short, light brown - or *qey* (red) as they describe it in Amharic - and nowadays with a small but noticeable belly, Tomas has white flecks in the hair around his temples that belie his official age. His identity card states that he was born in 1989, but he knows this date to be inaccurate. The reality is hard to pin down, between the confusion of two calendars,[135] a familial - and common - indifference to specifically dating events, and an element of shame that poverty prevented him from attending school until later than other children. Early childhood memories show that he was probably born around 1980, during the military-communist Derg rule. He recalls the effects of the severe famine of 1984, when all of his eight older siblings were sent away to find work or stay with relatives who lived in areas less affected by crop failure. In one of his earliest memories, he said 'I remember when my brother came back from Menz [a neighbouring highland district], with his *kuncho*[136] and too-big shorts with his skinny legs sticking out.' Tomas remained at home with his widowed mother, younger sister and older sister's daughter: he recalls being locked in the house with the two girls while his mother travelled to find food, and that she came back with *kita* (a type of bread), which they had not eaten for long time.

He also has clear memories of the 'villageisation' programme, which resettled his family from their house in one of many scattered hamlets to an 'ideal state village' (Scott 1998:247) set out in a grid structure and intended to aid improved state coordination of farmers' activities. Scott calls villageisation 'one of the worst tragedies of the twentieth century,' that had effects 'far beyond the standard reports of starvation, executions, deforestation, and failed crops. The new settlements nearly always failed their inhabitants as human communities and as units of food production' (1998:250). Although forced resettlement was undoubtably disastrous for many, especially over long distances (e.g. Pankhurst

[135] The Ethiopian calendar, which is also the liturgical calendar for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, is seven to eight years behind the Gregorian calendar.
[136] A children's hairstyle, where the whole head is shaved except one bunch at the front, some say so that angels will be able to pull the child up to heaven if he or she dies.

1992), Tomas's memories indicate there were also less dramatic incidences of villageisation. Although at the time he was too young to understand much about the reasons behind the move, he does remember the journey: he had to walk the ten kilometres or so from the old house carrying a jug and a ceramic pot, while the two younger girls were carried by others, and he recalls being proud that people commented on his strength despite his young age. As an adult, he thought settling people in one place was a sensible idea, and expressed pride that his home village still retains the grid layout of its original design, and support for continuing regulation of new buildings, that should not be constructed outside the straight lines of the plan.

His siblings returned as the famine abated, but the family were poor despite a great-uncle's position as a Derg official. Tomas herded their animals - 'just one or two cattle, and they were skinny' - and did not go to school until he was eight or nine. He described his mother as 'strong like a man: that's why she never remarried.' She also apparently prevented him from being adopted by foreigners, reputed to be missionaries, by hiding him under the bed; this was a favourite story that he retold often. I met his mother only once at Tomas's mother-in-law's house. Now elderly with health problems, she held the attention of the crowded room with her gleeful feistiness, declaring on the topic of potential land redistribution to shocked laughter: 'they will never take my land, never! Even if they have nine hanging balls and I only a slit!'

Love and Education

Once at school, Tomas's academic ability helped him to quickly pass through each grade. He progressed to high school in the nearest town and from there to teacher training college in Debre Berhan. His educational experience was both enhanced and (as he saw it later) hampered by meeting his future wife Yeshi at school. Although she was only fourteen when she started a relationship with Tomas, Yeshi had already been engaged, before splitting up with her fiancé due

to tensions with her prospective sisters-in-law. Yeshi's parents were not happy about her relationship with Tomas, fearing she would drop out of school. They did not want Yeshi to follow in the path of her mother, Bizunesh, who had become involved with Yeshi's father, Gizaw, when Bizunesh was a student and Gizaw a teacher. Bizunesh dropped out of school in eighth grade and had three children with Gizaw, before divorcing him when she was in her early twenties. Now Bizunesh works selling vegetables in Shewa Robit market that she brings by public transport from the large market in Debre Berhan: hard scrabble work that she did not want to be Yeshi's future. Furthermore, as the son of a rural widow, Tomas did not have wealth or connections that could potentially bring benefits to their daughter.

By 2011, many years, trials and tribulations later, Tomas and Yeshi were still together, clearly in love and both working as teachers. Bizunesh and Gizaw were now big fans of their son-in-law, especially Bizunesh. '*Bet'am t'iru sew new, kemanm belay* (he is a very good person, there is no one better)' she told me once. By this time, which was when I first met her, Yeshi was an attractively plump and highly competent motherly figure: dependable, known to be a good cook and adept at economising. In fact she was known as *Angliz* (English) because of her thriftiness. She liked to dress in bright colours and, along with millions of others, loved the sentimental Hindi soap operas that had just started to be dubbed into Amharic. She and Tomas were also sentimental about each other. If he was sick, she would cry; they said they could not sleep without each other; and she was saved into his phone as 'sweet love.'

Although Yeshi also had a primary education diploma that was ostensibly taught and tested in English, in reality she could barely understand, speak or read it beyond a few words, and was not interested in further study. Her lack of academic ability was the cause of one of the resentments that Tomas frequently returned to in periods of frustration: his complaint was that he had done all the work for her, starting in high school, which meant that his own results had suffered. She would not have passed her preparatory college exams or the

diploma itself without him, he claimed - and if he had not been doing two people's work, he could have gone to university and graduated with a full degree, instead of teacher training college with a diploma. Compounding this, after graduation he applied for and was offered a job at a private school in Addis Ababa, thanks to his unusually good ability in English that was very far above the standard of his peers, but turned it down because Yeshi did not want to leave her home town.

Life as a Teacher

Instead of a new life in Addis Ababa, they were both eventually posted to the village where I met them, her one year after him. Tomas was first assigned to Werq Amba school, the most remote in the *kebele,* an unequipped single room where he would be the only teacher for first and second grades (see prologue). He absolutely refused to take up the position and was eventually reassigned after much arguing with *wereda* education officials. In the end, Yeshi taught the youngest children in Kuré Beret school, while Tomas was assigned to the satellite school in Enbuwaybad, where he was one of two teachers for grades one to four in a dark and half-built wooden hut that had only a few non-broken chairs. They lived together in a tiny room in Kuré Beret, papered with hand-written (by Tomas) aphorisms in English and Amharic: one read (in English): 'Half the World Laughs the Other Half.'

Along with the majority of other public servants sent to the *kebele*, they were not happy to be so far from the town with no clean water, electricity or reliable transport. Like everyone else, they also complained about their low salaries and lack of opportunity to earn more, apart from a tiny amount from Ermias for extra coaching at the weekend. There was plenty of grousing and grumbling in government worker conversation, but overall most bore the situation with patience if not equanimity, summed up by graffiti in the staffroom of Kuré Beret school that read '*yemetewedawn sera iskematagegn yemetserawut sera wedede*!

(until you get the work you want, like the work you have!)' While most of the government workers seemed able to abide by this self-penned injunction to stoicism, for others dissatisfaction was manifested in a variety of ways. Yeshi's unhappiness came out in frequent attacks of *zar* - an ambiguous type of spirit possession, associated with Orthodox saints - and jealous accusations to Tomas of infidelity with other women. Tomas started his teaching career with gusto, producing a remarkably detailed book on English grammatical rules that he meticulously copied out in long hand several times (by kerosene lamplight) until it was perfect, and for which he received a commendation from the *wereda*. After a year of hard graft in Enbuwaybad, however, his enthusiasm was gone and he and his friend Wonde in particular chafed against the teachers' lot.

Tomas and Wonde had both been politically active in college, Wonde to a much greater extent, until the violence surrounding the 2005 elections made opposition activism a serious danger. Handsome, charming and impatient, Wonde was the only teacher in a farther flung satellite school from where he walked four hours every Friday to spend the weekend in the 'downtown' of Kuré Beret with Tomas, Yeshi and the other government workers. This posting, Wonde believed, was punishment for his political activities, and he was easily the most outspoken of the government workers, most of whom were mildly supportive of EPRDF or just bored by the whole subject. While Tomas would still occasionally voice tentative anti-government sentiments, his brush with politics had left him feeling cynical about the whole process. He frequently referred to the constitution, and how all political actors past and present had failed to live up to its standards. 'Who will make it practical? This is the question,' he would ask.

A New Life?

The opportunity to escape the life of a rural teacher that Wonde, Tomas and Yeshi found onerous and unfulfilling came after a few years. While it could take up to ten years of steady work for a teacher to be posted to an urban school by

the *wereda* education bureau, they took another route. Wonde left himself, on foot to South Africa, although he eventually ended up in Juba before the civil war in South Sudan forced his return. After a succession of hair-raising episodes that included crocodiles, violent robbery, and sleeping in the streets, he brought back enough money from Juba to set up as a grain merchant and, last I heard, was financially thriving.

Tomas and Yeshi were able to start a new life in Shewa Robit thanks to his niece, Wintana, the baby with whom he had been locked in the house during the difficult period of the early 1980s. Leaving her own baby with the child's fierce great-grandmother, Wintana had migrated illegally to the middle east in her late teens and stayed for five years working as a domestic servant in a series of households in three different countries. She saved some money and decided to invest in a *bajaj*, a small three passenger vehicle imported from India, for Tomas to drive. With this new form of income in hand, Yeshi also resigned from teaching and set up a small cafe and dairy business, with some assistance from a small government loan for female-headed households (she lied about being married). The premises for her new venture was a shipping container, a common sight in urban areas; once a vehicle for the physical movement of goods around the globe, the containers were transformed into stationary vehicles for the advancement of an entrepreneurial ethos.

The container was near Yeshi's mother Bizunesh's small *kebele* house in an area off the main road in Shewa Robit known as Katanga,[137] where homemade alcohol, dancing and paid-for sex were freely available. Houses were small and packed together and the atmosphere was often rowdy, but the area was also full of families. Children played in the alleys and neighbours would pop round frequently to buy a few potatoes or a handful of greens for dinner from the

[137] I cannot find any reference to confirm this, but it seems that this informal name for a chaotic area where fights are likely to break out is derived from the 1962 deployment of Ethiopian troops as part of the United Nations peacekeeping force in the breakaway Republic of Katanga, now part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. A similar area in Addis Ababa is known as Chichinia, supposedly after the conflict in the Chechen Republic.

vegetables Bizunesh kept under the bed. Tomas hated the area, and was worried that Yeshi's reputation would be damaged through serving customers in the container; to help preserve respectability, they decided not to sell *t'ella* (homebrewed beer). They also had the idea that Bizunesh's much younger sister Mimi could act as server, while Yeshi stayed behind the scenes, preparing the food in Bizunesh's tiny backyard onto which the container backed. Mimi had left her farmer husband and young child in the rural town of Abayat'ir to work in Saudi Arabia. She was sent back along as part of the mass deportation of undocumented workers in 2013 and when I met her was disconsolately killing time until she could find a broker and return to 'Jidda'; she had no intention of going back to life as a rural housewife. Beautiful and confident with a penchant for pink lipstick and an already compromised reputation because of her returnee status, Mimi, they presumed, would have brought (male) business to the container cafe. But she started an affair with a married man and disappeared for a while, so Yeshi ran the container alone. After investing in a fridge, she sourced butter through rural relatives, as well as serving hot meals and drinks, and the container started to attract business.

As was the case for Tomas, the acquisition of a *bajaj* was frequently enabled through the migration for domestic labour of a female relative, wife or girlfriend. It was one of the main ways through which male government workers felt able to leave formal state employment: very many of the *bajaj* drivers in Shewa Robit had previously been employed by the state. After a few initial good years, however, *bajajs* did not supply the basis for a decent living, due to lack of regulation, coupled with the poor condition of rural roads that confined them to town and the main road. For Tomas, as for others, while the *bajaj* initially made enough money, there were soon so many *bajajs* in town that the drivers sat idle most of the day and takings dropped below subsistence level. Then, to counter the conflict caused by the excess of drivers for the available passengers, in 2014 the town authorities instituted a queuing system which stopped fights but further depressed takings. On top of this, frequent local or national fuel shortages meant that *bajaj* drivers were forced to rely on their social connections to black market

sources of fuel, with the less adept at utilising their networks losing out. The *bajaj* - often paid for through heavy physical and emotional sacrifices by female loved ones - thus became a symbol of state weakness. The bad roads, over-concentration of transport in the town and fuel shortages left the *bajaj* drivers dispirited, morose or angry.

Although migration did involve sacrifice and was often very dangerous, it also was a means of fulfilling aspirations for modernity and change, especially for women. Meanwhile, men such as Tomas spent their days in familiar towns, frustrated and earning little. During this period, Tomas's level of motivation seriously declined and he would sleep in or spend hours washing his clothes. I diagnosed him as bored; other mutual friends less generously started describing him as a *werenya* and *zewari* – someone prone to gossip and lazy loitering. Tensions between Tomas and Wintana flared repeatedly when she was also deported from Saudi Arabia, as Mimi had been. He found his debt to her galling and in the end unbearable, especially in conjunction with the drunken and abusive boyfriend she acquired on return. Wintana would often phone Tomas and ask for money at short notice, which Tomas and Yeshi suspected was destined to be spent in bars and *qat bets* (places where *qat* is chewed), but which was difficult to refuse when she had been the means by which they had acquired the *bajaj.* Mimi was clearly unhappy and treated badly by her boyfriend; she also seemed to find ways to foment tension in Tomas and Yeshi's relationship around money and debt.

Meanwhile Yeshi's container cafe business was also failing. Most of her customers were friends or family, who she did on the whole charge for their food and coffee (even Tomas mostly had to pay), but after making a small profit initially, she hired a bashful young rural girl as an assistant and started staying at home more. Muna came from a nearby village and looked young, perhaps fourteen; she wore a headscarf and was very shy. She slept on the floor of the container at night and earned a minuscule salary, although she worked every day. Yeshi started to leave her there alone frequently, but Muna was not a good cook, did not keep the place

clean and was not chatty, leave alone flirtatious. People stopped coming for Yeshi's company and well-cooked food; then Tomas found a cockroach in his eggs one day, causing more arguments over Yeshi's commitment to the business. Another, and related, tension in their relationship was her eagerness to start a family, while Tomas thought they should wait until they were more financially stable.

*

In 2014 a new hotel opened in Shewa Robit. With five stories of clean rooms and a large compound where tame dik-diks wandered and wooden cabanas were popular with *qat* chewers, it was far above the standard of the existing hotels. The owner was a local merchant who split his time between the town and Saudi Arabia, and whose religious principles were such that the hotel served no alcohol and couples could not share a room without showing a marriage certificate. Despite having no taste for alcohol (or prostitutes), and in contrast to the generally warm relations between Muslims and Christians, Tomas echoed others in the town by complaining about these supposedly exclusionary practices: 'why should the town give this man cheap land to build a hotel for Muslims only?' he asked.

In the summer of 2014 the second floor of the new hotel was set aside for a group of new arrivals: Turkish engineers and project managers began to appear regularly in the town, the vanguard of a massive new railway construction project. The new 390km railway line between Awash (joining the existing Addis Ababa-Djibouti route), Kombolcha and Hara Gebaya has been contracted to the Turkish company Yapı Merkezi at a cost of approximately 1.7 billion USD.[138] The Turkish people spoke no Amharic and only a few spoke English or Arabic, with the senior engineers in their fifties and sixties mostly monolingual in Turkish. Although the drivers of their hired cars, who were from tourist agencies in Addis

[138] Awash-Hara Gebeya Railway Project website. Available at: http://akhrailway.com/index.php/accordion-b (accessed 4 November 2017).

Ababa, could translate from English in a pinch, they appeared to be in urgent need of permanent translators with local knowledge.

Through going to the hotel to use their (useless) internet, I met several of the Turkish new arrivals. They were very kind to me, giving me a lift to the village on several occasions and once allowing me to accompany them on an exploratory visit to Afar Region, sharing the canned food they had brought with them from Istanbul for a picnic lunch in a dry riverbed. Partly promoted by me, as I thought my recommendation might help, Tomas believed he had grounds to hope that they would employ him a translator. At first they did make encouraging overtures, before disclosing that salaries even for graduates were set by the company at a lower level than local daily labourers and that the work would involve living in a dormitory in the railway camp several kilometre out of town for six days of each week. One of the managers, with whom Tomas thought he had struck up a good relationship, expected him to carry out tasks for no payment while treating him like a friend, and in the end the potential opportunity came to nothing.

Conversion and Divorce

Disappointed, bored, in conflict with both his wife and sister, and intellectually under-stimulated; it was in this situation that Tomas started becoming increasingly interested in evangelical Christianity. Although mindful of the presumption of imputing a link between his circumstances and his conversion where Tomas would certainly credit divine intervention, as a close observer and confidante at the time it was my observation that Tomas was experiencing a crisis of belief in previous models of progress, both personally and more widely. Education; political activism; engagement in the state model of development through teaching; private enterprise; migration as experienced by his sister: none had fulfilled the promise of a better future.

Neither Tomas nor Yeshi was a fervent Orthodox Christians in practice, if not belief: unusually among their peers, they did not always fast (refrain from meat and dairy) on Wednesdays and Fridays, the requisite fasting days for Orthodox Christians. In line with a steep upward trend of conversion to various forms of evangelical or *P'enté* faith (see chapter 3), in early 2015 Tomas started attending Bible study evenings and film screenings at a nearby *P'enté* church. Soon afterwards church members started to accompany him home to evangelise Yeshi and pray over her while she slept: a practice which unsurprisingly she did not like at all.

Through his new church, in mid-2015 Tomas worked for two weeks as a translator for a party of American missionaries. Unlike those who apparently tried to take him for adoption in the 1980s, their focus was on evangelising adults, including the risky practice of going to Muslim areas of town and preaching in public. As with the Turkish railway workers, Tomas hoped he had built relationships with the missionaries that would result in future opportunities, so when they ignored his emails after returning home to the US, he was bitter but resigned.

Although they still professed love for each other, Tomas and Yeshi's relationship could not withstand the friction his move towards conversion caused on top of their existing issues, and by the end of the year the background on Tomas's phone had changed from a photo of Yeshi surrounded by love hearts to the words 'Jesus Saves.' Whatever the dimension of his life contributed to his conversion, the personal cost was high. The slow and painful process of their splitting up is perfectly summed up by Don Seeman who wrote about Ethiopian Israelis converting from Judaism to evangelical Christianity; 'the halting existential valences of religious conversion and the way… [they] sometimes map onto preexisting fault lines in the dense emotional architectonics of family life' (2015:736).

After Tomas and Yeshi finally separated, Tomas sold the *bajaj*, and paid back his debt to Wintana - who quickly spent the money in conjunction with her awful boyfriend and re-migrated illegally to Kuwait. Tomas moved to Addis Ababa to work as a teacher again, but this time in a private evangelical school. He found the salary to be lower than he expected, the children spoilt, and the work overly strictly regulated, including fines for being even a minute late, when Addis Ababa traffic is heavy and unpredictable. He lived in one room with his younger sister who worked as a security guard in a bank. In 2016, he told me that he saw no future for himself. If he finds a place to live alone in the burgeoning and extremely expensive city, all his salary will go on rent. He still pines after Yeshi and fluctuates between thinking there is a chance they could get back together and that their relationship is permanently over. He visits Shewa Robit fairly regularly and does not preclude moving back, but also has talked about migrating illegally on foot through Yemen to 'work in any job I can find, even cleaning toilets, it doesn't matter.'

Conclusion

The urban hustlers who were Di Nunzio's interlocutors in Addis Ababa he describes as managing to live with uncertainty as a terrain of possibility, without constantly evaluating their life trajectories against an ideal of a stable and salaried family life (2017). While disadvantaged young men in Addis and the historically despised hereditary craft workers in Konso described by Ellison (2006) were able to reconfigure their marginalisation through reworking idioms of progress to their own advantage, Tomas had voluntarily left behind (supposed) status and security to chase ideas of progress that did not turn out how he expected or desired. His return to 'waithood' is not related to the contraction of the state, but has multiple and indeterminate roots in wider ideological currents and in his own individual situation. While his decision was not unusual, most of the government workers that I met were able to manage their expectations of modernity to fit their circumstances and were at least resigned, if not entirely

happy (for example, Yusuf and Isra in chapter 3). Some - such as Wonde - had struck out for adventure and returned to a life more to their liking than the one they left behind, despite encountering danger and privation along the way. Tomas, however, in his own estimation and despite the consolation of his new faith, is unhappy with his current situation, full of regrets about the past, and does not hold out much hope for his future prospects.

Using a schema taken from Markus Poschke, a recent World Bank report on employment in Ethiopia describes 'three types in urban labour markets' (2016:32). The first type, those with low levels of education, use a strategy described as determining that 'they are better not searching for work as it is costly and the wages would not compensate the cost. They choose self-employment,' (2016:32) resulting in 'necessity self-employment' such as petty trade. The second group, with secondary and tertiary education, are characterised as either employed in blue or white collar jobs, or as unemployed and searching for such jobs: 'in 2003, 4 percent of the unemployed had a post-secondary degree… this increased to 13 percent in 2014' (2016:34). The third group of entrepreneurs are not differentiated by education level or initial access to capital, but rather by their 'entrepreneurial ability' that has turned them into successful owners of businesses and employers of others. There is no room in this schema for individuals such as Tomas - educated to tertiary level, previously securely employed - who are nevertheless in the same position as those in what Poschke characterises as 'necessity self-employment.'

As I have shown throughout this thesis, Tomas's trajectory - from supposedly aspirational state employment to 'necessity self-employment' that was not actually driven by necessity - was far from an anomaly. Shewa Robit was full of ex-government workers in flight from the rural. University graduates were serving *yejebena buna* (coffee brewed from scratch, as I describe in chapter 2) for a few Birr per cup. They were found idling in *bajajs*, watching the world go by from phone accessory shops, or behind cosmetics counters, selling the occasional lipstick. In the chapters that preceded this one, I have described some of the

factors that led to this surprising situation: the diminishing status of government employment; the way that success in education can lead to an undesirable rural future; the tough material conditions encountered with little social support; the difficult labour of implementing illegible programmes, and their physical, emotional and affective consequences for public servants. But each public servant - and person - has their own distinct history, and I agree with Elizabeth Cooper and David Pratten when they write that 'the need for open-ended life analysis is apparent, else our informants are presented as either victims of structural constraints or unfettered vanguards of their own destinies' (2015:13). I hope Tomas's life story can contribute a rounded subjective, agentive and relational perspective to debates around employment, aspiration and the state, even if it is - so far - not an uplifting one.

Conclusion

The Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP), the Ethiopian government's five-year strategy for 2010-2015 (more or less covering the period of this research), was massively ambitious. As one EPRDF official described it, Ethiopia is on '"on a negative time-scale" and had to do in twenty years what other countries had done in two hundred' (in Weis 2016:293). The urgency of the transformation that the government sought to implement - the 'single-minded pursuit of accelerated development' (Meles 2011:169) - in the end depends for its delivery on rural government workers, some of whose lives I have attempted to describe in this thesis: the millions of public servants at the bottom of the pyramid of an expanding state apparatus. Scrutiny of their 'capacity' to deliver the GTP - and 'development' more generally - is the subject of endless analysis; attention to their social positions and daily lives as state workers much less so. I hope this thesis can a play a small part in contributing to a greater attentiveness to the complex relational, quotidian and contingent ways in which state work is actually enacted; the 'illegibility' of the programmes they are responsible for delivering; and how these interact with the aspirations for progress of state workers that cause them to engage in different kinds of precarious mobility.

I began with a description of public servants walking up a mountain to encourage local people to build latrines; a performance of the state that was on all sides acknowledged to be so. Local people feigned enthusiasm and government workers pretended that their trip had been successful, in part through the production of statistics that did not reflect reality, but were both required and prohibited in the policies state employees were supposed to follow. Despite the performative nature of such activities, real labour was involved and this labour had its most tangible effects, I have argued, in the lives and bodies of the government workers. Such policies have unforeseen, and often unacknowledged, effects on the government workers themselves; the 'donkeys,' as one UN staff member called extension workers, onto whom all the latest development aims

are loaded. Following calls to concentrate on 'doing the state,' at its core rather than at its margins (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2015), I have also considered imaginaries and materialities of the state as experienced by and in the persons of the teachers, extension workers and administrators who are the means by which the majority of Ethiopians encounter the state.

Usually painted as the instrument by which an authoritarian state asserts coercive forms of control, discipline and surveillance over its citizens, I found that local people often ignore, resist or are indifferent to government programmes. Meanwhile the young low-level bureaucrats in my research area, far from being figures of domination, were generally isolated, vulnerable and reliant on local people for the most basic of goods. Through close attention to their life-worlds, I have questioned the ubiquitous characterisation of state-society relationships as taking place within a strictly vertical hierarchical framework. Based on the historical patterns of landholding originally found in the Amhara highlands, this notion of hierarchy does not suppose ontologically different categories of person (with some exceptions), but rather a fluctuating and competitive form of social differentiation. Government workers are not able to place themselves apart from or above rural people; for example, as they circulate the village on foot or compete for space on public transport. Although they attempt to construct government worker-only social groups, in part through coffee drinking, this is more in mitigation of their vulnerability than an assertion of social superiority. They are not able to build long-term relations of reciprocity and trust, due to their frequency with which they change jobs, or, often, to deliver public goods that people value. All these factors, combined with other markers of status - age, gender, financial position - are diminishing the desirability of government work in rural areas, among both local people and state employees themselves, and suggest a new perspective on the actual quotidian functioning of Ethiopia's expanding developmental state.

Mobility and the Desirability of State Work

In Ethiopia, as elsewhere across Africa, state employment is usually seen as highly desirable; in a context where uncertainty is an omnipresent condition of everyday life (Cooper and Pratten 2015), a stable, salaried, formal job is surely a prize and a great achievement. To give just one example, in South Africa Deborah James writes that 'reliance on, or at least the eventual expectation of, state employment is ubiquitous for young women. It is a means, perhaps the only means, to realise the upward mobility to which they aspire' (2015:42). In this thesis, I have been interested in why government work was not seen as aspirational or a means of achieving progress, and why many, like Tomas, Yeshi and Wonde in my final chapter, choose to leave state employment for more unstable and (mostly) less well-paid work.

Mobility is one of the central concerns of the twenty-first century. Understanding why and how people move is a pressing issue for people across the political spectrum, from open borders activists to anti-gentrification movements to white nationalists, and is playing an important role in shaping global events in every corner of the world. The 'new mobilities paradigm' or 'mobility turn' (Sheller and Urry 2006) aims to recover the neglected importance of movement within a broad spectrum of the social sciences. It challenges a normative vision of 'sedentarism' - the assumption that people should and would prefer to stay in one place, loosely based on Heidegger's notion of 'dwelling' - and its concomitant designation of 'states as containers for societies' (Sheller and Urry 2006:210). It also calls attention to how the celebration of movement as freedom from confinement, as in Zygmunt Baumann's account of 'liquid modernity' (2000), can conceal zones of exclusion and disconnection. This paradigm has been taken up, for example, by Gina Porter et al. (2017) in order to examine the daily mobilities of young people in Africa, and how variations in the ease of movement can create or sustain inequalities. However, in the vast body of literature on mobility and migration, whether across or within state borders, attention to government

workers is missing. As Singh points out, the focus is on 'officials as attempting to direct or restrict the mobility of others,' neglecting 'the idea that officials themselves may be mobile subjects' (2011:220). Their particular form of circulation, which sees public servants assigned by the state to positions in places not of their choosing, is not easy to characterise as either a privileged or cosmopolitan form of fluidity, or as arising from desperation allied to structural exclusion.

In this thesis I have added another dimension to the idea of officials as mobile subjects, by demonstrating how public servants' aspirations for a better life drive them to frequent movement in a quest towards the urban. The difficulty that government workers experienced in physically moving around and in accessing transport also had social consequences, especially in contrast to the material advantages allied to imaginaries of progress provided, in this case, by an evangelical NGO. I discussed the entanglement of mobilities in the context of education, the universal public good that is supposed to lead to social mobility, but instead extracts state employees from rural forms of solidarity (where they grew up) only to insert them into a kind of rural alienation and isolation (in the villages where they are unwillingly and temporarily posted). In their desire to escape a slow rural future, their precarious mobility within and outside government employment is both cause and consequence of their inability to cement social ties and build the 'entangled sociability of long-term obligations' (James 2015:236). Theirs is not primarily a material precarity - although their salaries are low and conditions tough - but a social precarity. In an inversion of those who find the productive potential in the inherent and structural uncertainty of marginalisation (Di Nunzio 2015), in this case public servants are rejecting the undesirable certainty of rural state work in favour of a precarious - but future-oriented - uncertainty.

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