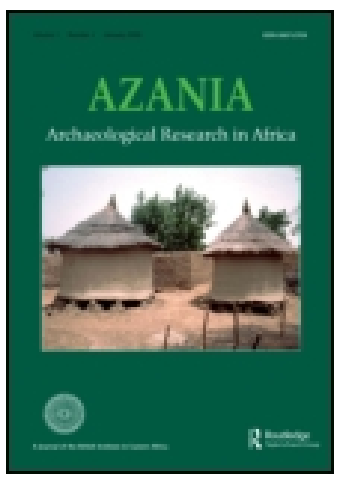

Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/raza20

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Published online: 03 Mar 2010.

To cite this article: Shimelis Bonsa (2001) A history of Kistane migration to 1974, Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa, 36-37:1, 172-186, DOI: 10.1080/00672700109511706

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00672700109511706

Azania XXXVI-XXXVII 2001-2002

A history of Kistane migration to 1974

Shimelis Bonsa

This paper gives an account of the process of Kistane migration to Addis Ababa and other urban centres between *circa* 1840 and 1974. The mid-nineteenth century is chosen as a starting point because it was around this time that much of the land formerly inhabited by the Kistane was occupied by incoming Oromo. The discussion ends in 1974, when the Ethiopian revolution had a dramatic impact on patterns of migration. An attempt is made to identify and analyse the most important elements and processes involved in Kistane migration including its causation, forms, and direction. It is intended to locate the history of Kistane urban migration in the broader context of Kistane history, and, more significantly, the history of Ethiopia and its modern capital Addis Ababa. This is important, considering that the phenomena under discussion were either generated or profoundly affected by national factors. The study is based on a careful utilisation of both written (primary and secondary) as well as oral sources. Information obtained from written sources was supplemented and counterchecked against oral evidence from Kistane men and women from all walks of life in both Addis Ababa and Kistaneland between 1997 and 1998. Oral sources, in fact, formed the backbone of the research, in view of the almost total absence of any written material on the earlier history of Kistane migration.

The paucity of reliable data on migration in Ethiopia has meant that few in-depth studies on the form and nature of internal migration in the country have been conducted. Those that do exist tend to be general in scope and limited in their database, they also tend to lack a historical perspective.[1] McCann has attempted to trace the historical pattern of migration in the Ethiopian highlands, although his focus is not solely on increasing urbanisation.[2] Meanwhile, geographers such as Alula have analysed rural–urban migration in Ethiopia and have identified this as the principal factor contributing to the long-term growth of urban areas.[3] However, there exists no historical treatment of rural-urban

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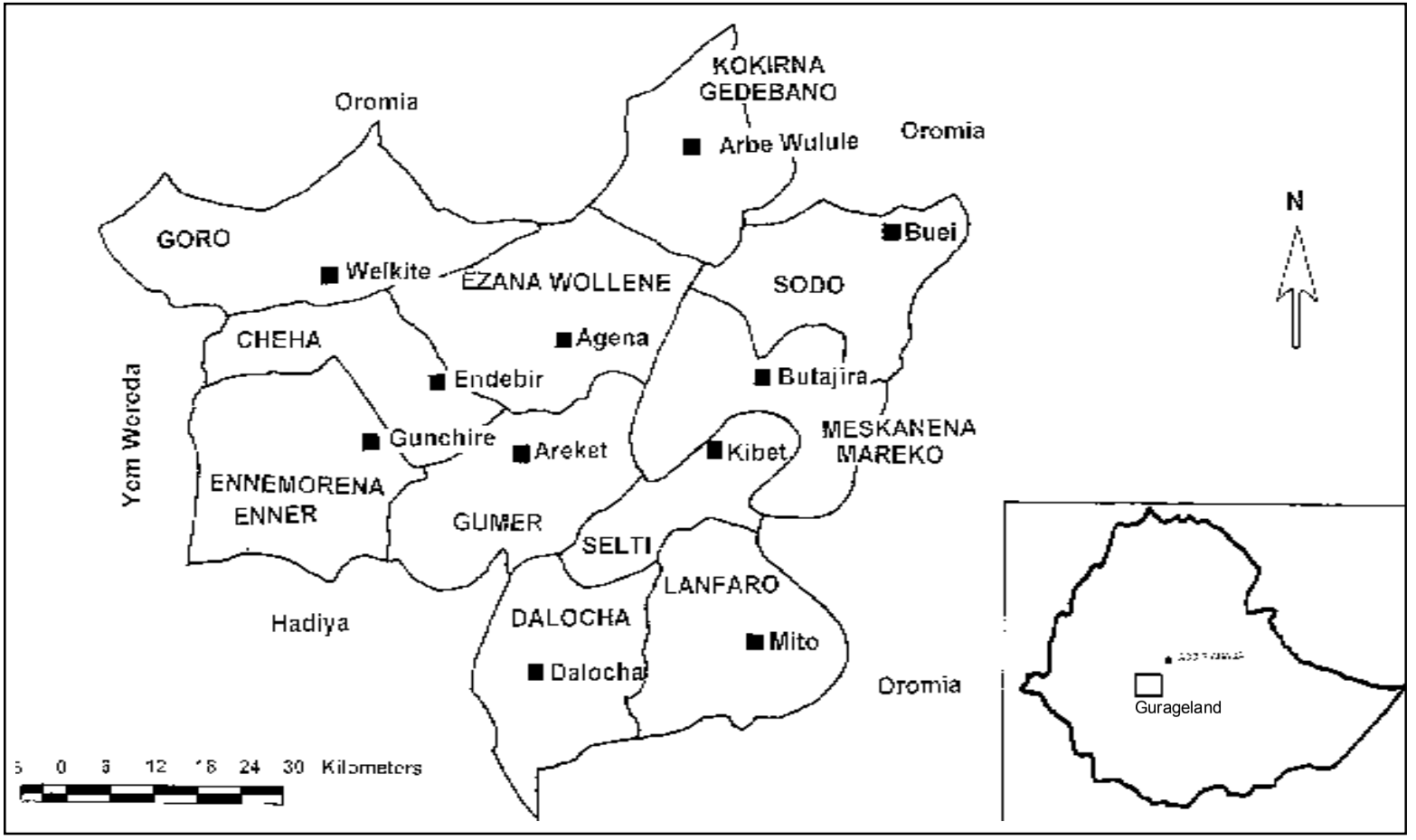
1 Almaz Amine, 'Differentials and Correlates of Internal Migration in the Arsi Region of Ethiopia', MA thesis, Addis Ababa University (1990).

2 McCann, J. ' A Great Agrarian Cycle: A History of Agricultural Productivity and Demographic Change in Highland Ethiopia, 1900-1987', *Working Paper in African Studies*, No. 31. Boston: Boston University African Studies Center (1988).

3 Alula Abate, 'Internal Migration and Urbanisation in Ethiopia,' *Proceedings of the Conference on Population Issues in Ethiopia's Development*, Addis Ababa: Population and Development Planning Unit, Office of the National Committee for Central Planning (1989).



Map 10.1. Gurageland, showing its location in Ethiopia

migration in Ethiopia. This paper seeks in part to fill this gap by describing the experience of the Kistane, an Ethiopian ethnic group who over the past century, for various have reasons, have opted to move to the towns in ever-increasing numbers.

The Kistane (also known interchangeably as Aymellel, Gordanna, and Soddo) constitute the northern branch of the Gurage ethnic group. The Gurage are speakers of a variety of related Semitic dialects. They occupy the south central part of the Shoan plateau, some 125 kilometres south of Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. Kistaneland covers an estimated 966 square kilometres, a largely temperate highland area cut by chasms and gorges (Map 10.1). Subsistence agriculture characterises the rural economy, and it is dominated by the cultivation of a single root crop called *aset* (*ensete ventricosum*). High population density, shortage of land and the resulting fragmentation in holdings, and a very low degree of occupational specialisation have been some of the major features of rural Kistane society. Almost all Kistane are Orthodox Christians; a handful being adherents of Islam. In terms of social structure, Kistaneland is characterised by a patriarchal family system, agnatic descent groups, and in the past by its acephalous political organisation.

One of the prevalent themes in Kistane history since the late nineteenth century has been migration. Between the 1890s and the early 1970s it is estimated that about 100,000 Kistane migrated permanently to almost half of the 215 registered towns in Ethiopia.[4] According to the 1994 census, the Gurage as a whole were the fifth largest ethnic group in the country but the third largest in Addis Ababa, with 17.5 percent (370,157) of the city's population – outnumbered by only the Amhara (48.3 percent) and the Oromo (19.2 percent). Kistane-Gurage constituted 4.1 percent, numbering 87,430 (42,990 male and 44,440 female).[5] A further 100,000 Kistane resided in areas outside the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR – in which Kistaneland is located), the majority (80,027) concentrated in Oromiya region.[6] The various factors responsible for Kistane migration changed over time. Four distinct, but interrelated, phases are discussed below: pre-1875 migration; conquest and integration, 1875-1935; the Italian occupation period, 1936-1941; and the post-occupation period, 1941-1974.

[4] This figure is only an estimate by Fecadu and cannot be considered as giving a correct picture about the exact size of Kistane migrants in those early years. See Fecadu Gedamu, 'Ethnic association in Ethiopia and the maintenance of urban/rural relationships with special reference to the Alemgana-Wolamo Road Construction Association,' Ph.D. thesis, University of London (1972), p.133.

[5] There has been disagreement over what some say is the artificially low number of Kistane recorded in the 1994 census, during which a section of the Kistane registered themselves as Soddo. (Federal Republic of Ethiopia, Central Statistical Authority, *The 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 1998). In the census, Soddo were not counted as Kistane but as belonging to the Oromo ethnic group because of their bilingualism (Kistanigna and Oromiffa). The Soddo originally belong to the Oromo ethnic group. However, in the 19th century a section of them moved into and settled down in many parts of Kistaneland. This was followed subsequently by intermarriage and intermingling with the local population. In the process they could be said to have become partly "Kistane-ised" (my own term – in the context of highly-politicised ethnicity prevailing in the country at present, this could easily be misconstrued), whereas a larger section of the Soddo living in the surrounding areas stuck to their Oromo identity. With the institution of ethnic politics in Ethiopia in the 1990s a small number of partially "Kistane-ised" Soddo tried to revive their links with the Soddo outside of Kistaneland.

[6] In SNNPR itself there were 191,331 Kistane, of whom just 119,695 lived in Kistaneland proper. Kistane were the fifteenth largest out of the eighty or so ethnic groups included in the national census. Within the Gurage they formed the second largest sub-division after the Sebat Bet and before the Siltie.

Phase one: migration before 1875

By the nineteenth century the Kistane, and their Gurage neighbours, had asserted control over a small and compact highland area. They subsisted on a mixed economy of *aset* cultivation and some cattle herding, with little variation in either the terrain utilised or the agricultural techniques employed. The technological or crop diversity required for the emergence of an internal market was largely non-existent.[7] Meanwhile, pressures of over-population and the shortage of land for cultivation and settlement were prevalent. Harris, a British visitor to Kistaneland in the 1840s, noted that Gurage areas were 'swarming with population'[8]. As a result of these pressures competition over scarce resources led to the polarisation of culturally similar Gurage groups. In facing external threats, different groups occasionally coalesced to form a united front for defensive, and at times offensive, operations. However, this occurred only sporadically, and these alliances soon disintegrated once the threat subsided. The independent status and mutual rivalry of Kistane districts in the end undermined any potential for unity. Defence of territory thus became the paramount responsibility of each district. Such a situation left the Kistane vulnerable to external aggressors, notably the neighbouring Oromo, more specifically, the Soddo and Jille sub-divisions of the Oromo.[9]

In contrast to the sedentary Kistane, the Oromo engaged in a transhumant pastoral economy that necessitated periodic mobility to the Kistane highlands in the dry season, and down to the lowland areas under Oromo and, to a lesser extent, Libido[10] control in the wet season. The Oromo, the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, are believed to have come originally from south-central Ethiopia. Between the 16th and 18th centuries they occupied parts of west, east, central and northern Ethiopia. Despite differences in their modes of subsistence and in their local social organisations, the various Oromo groups share a relatively unified culture. They developed an egalitarian form of government called *gada* and believed in a supreme deity called *waqa*. Both institutions declined in importance and gradually disappeared due partly to the successful inroads of the Ethiopian government and of Christianity and Islam since the 19th century.[11] Nevertheless, in the 1840s the Oromo were characterised by a greater degree of unity than the Kistane.

By the mid-nineteenth century competition over land resulted in ongoing conflict between the neighbouring groups. For Kistane, acquisition of fertile lowland areas currently occupied by the Oromo for settlement and cultivation was essential to relieve population pressure in the highlands. Meanwhile, the Oromo coveted Kistane occupied highland areas as ideal grazing land for their growing herds.[12] Enjoying military superiority and strategic support from other Oromo groups near and far such as the Becho, Chebo, Gimbitchu and Liben, it was the Oromo who succeeded in gradually infiltrating almost all of the Kistane

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7 Fecadu Gedamu, 'Traditional Social Setting of the Kistane (Soddo) in Central Ethiopia,' *Paideuma* **32**: (1986), p.22.

8 Harris,W.C., *The Highlands of Ethiopia* (London: Longmans,1844), p.318. Cecchi puts the entire Gurage population at 40,000 in 1878 whereas on Merab's estimate the figure rose to 350,000 souls at the beginning of the twentieth century, see Cecchi, A., *Da Zeila alle Frontiere del Caffa* (Roma: 1886), p.70 and Merab, A., *Impressions d'Ethiopie,L'Abyssinie Sous Menelik,*vol.I.pp.322-4 and vol.II. p.196.

9 Interview, *Ato* Balcha, Addis Ababa, May 1997 and *Ato* Sima, Kistaneland, June 1997.

10 Another Cushitic speaking group, also known as Mareqo.

11 Baxter,P.T.W. et al., *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and anthropological enquiries* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet,1996), p.7.

12 Interview, *Ato* Balcha, *Ato* Bekele, Addis Ababa, May 1997.

occupied highlands (with the significant exception of Wogeram district). Oromo *balabbat* (local officials) were installed in all the districts conquered by force. For the Oromo, military victory brought both economic wealth and political power.[13] By contrast, amongst the Kistane the invasion resulted in considerable hardship. A breakdown in civil order occurred as social control mechanisms were seriously eroded. Lawlessness reigned and an existing traffic in Gurage slaves expanded significantly.[14] Meanwhile, Oromo seized the most productive land, confining the Kistane to rugged and infertile areas. As a result, congestion amongst the Kistane intensified. With population pressure and land shortage becoming ever more critical, many were forced to migrate.[15]

It is estimated that several tens of thousands of migrants left Kistaneland for areas near and far searching for avenues of survival.[16] The pioneers of the exodus were mostly young men who had fought the Oromo and whose villages had been conquered. Some migrated on a permanent basis. Others returned after the conquest of Kistaneland by Menelik. This early migration was overwhelmingly rural-rural, to such favoured areas as Gejja, Ada, Becho, Meqi, Zway, Minjar and Menz (all located about 60 to 300 kms to the east and north of Kistaneland). At this stage only a handful made their way to towns, with Ankober being the principal urban destination.[17] While this 'exodus' acted to some extent as a safety valve, congestion in Kistaneland remained a serious problem.

Phase two: conquest and integration, 1875/76–1935

The mid-nineteenth century witnessed the beginning of closer contact between Kistaneland and the Shoan kingdom[18] culminating in its incorporation into the wider territorial and political framework of Menelik's empire state. Both oral tradition and written sources recount that some Kistane leaders had already established links with the Shoan king during the reign of Sahle Sillassie (r. 1813-1847). Isenberg and Krapf, two German travellers, refer to the gradual extension of the jurisdiction of Shewa to 'Aimellela', a mountainous site in Kistaneland, some of whose leaders, including Keroo and Aminoo, accepted a position of vassalage to Sahle Sillassie.[19] This and similar actions by subsequent leaders conditioned Kistane for peaceful submission to Menelik in the 1870s. The absence of any strong political authority to unite the people and resist incorporation discouraged resistance against a clearly

[13] Interview, *Ato* Balcha, *Ato* Bekele, *Ato* Damesa, Kistaneland, June 1997, *Ato* Wolde, Addis Ababa, April 1997.

[14] Menelik himself is said to have paid part of tribute to Emperor Yohannes IV in the form of Gurage (including Kistane) slaves in the 1880s. Such slaves were often used as domestic servants. See Harris, *The Highlands,* p.318 and Bahru Zewde, 'The Aymallal Gurage in the Nineteenth Century: A Political History,' *Transafrican Journal of History* **II** (1972), pp.22-4.

[15] Bahru,'The Aymallal,' pp.23-4; Fecadu, 'Ethnic Association,' 1972, p.117.

[16] Fecadu, 'Ethnic Association,' p.117.

[17] Bahru, 'The Aymallal,' p.24.

[18] This polity was located in central Ethiopia with its core in present day northern Shoa. It was more or less independent of the control of the Ethiopian kings based in their capital, Gondar, to the north. The Shoan Kingdom, which produced such prominent personalities as Menelik II, King of Ethiopia (r. 1889-1913), was established towards the end of the 17th century. See Darkwah, Kofi, *Shewa, Menilek and the Ethiopian Empire, 1813-1889* (London: Heinemann, 1975).

[19] Isenberg and Krapf, *The Journal of Rev. Messrs. Isenberg and Krapf, Missionaries of the Church Missionary Society, Detailing their Proceedings in the Kingdom of Shoa and Journeys in other parts of Abyssinia in the years 1839, 1840, 1841 and 1842* (London, 1843).

superior enemy. Meanwhile, already pressurised by the Oromo, and with Kistane's geographical proximity to and religious affinity with Christian Shewa, Kistane were disinclined to resist Shoan incursions.[20] Kistaneland's peaceful submission saved it from the depredations that befell the other Gurage areas as a consequence of their opposition to Menelik.

Between the 1870s and 1900 Menelik, who reigned first as the Shoan king (1865-1889) and later as king of Ethiopia (1889-1913), presided over a process of territorial expansion (*c.*1870s-1900) that was to culminate in the creation of modern Ethiopia. From 1875 the urge to control resource rich and commercially strategic regions led Menelik to turn his attention to the south. By 1889 the entire Gurage region had been incorporated in the emerging modern empire state of Ethiopia.[21] Menelik's conquest profoundly affected the basic structures of Kistane society. The disintegration of the old order, population growth and shortage of land were now exacerbated by the imposition of new and onerous tribute and labour obligations. However, in contrast to the destructive conflict with the Oromo earlier in the nineteenth century, Menelik's occupation could be said to have caused not just the exodus but also an enhanced capacity to cope with population growth. Shoan overrule provided opportunities for active participation in the administration and the economy of the empire.

Push factors in Kistane migration, 1875–1935

Kistane was spared a policy of large-scale land expropriation under Menelik. However, the conquest imposed new forms of economic relationships through the introduction of different types of surplus appropriation. The bulk of Kistaneland (over 85 percent), where *aset* cultivation predominated, was declared to be *gebbar* (tribute paying peasant) land. The area's limited economic potential, coupled with land scarcity among the Kistane, seems to have saved this part of Kistaneland from being appropriated by Menelik's generals. Peasants in this zone retained perpetual rights to land inheritance. Local administrators could withdraw the right to cultivate the land only if the peasant failed to pay the appropriate dues.[22] The situation was somewhat different in areas located mostly in the western (highland) and eastern (lowland) parts of Kistane (constituting less than 15 percent of Kistaneland), where the land was relatively fertile and agriculture was based on marketable crop cultivation. Some isolated pockets in this zone were surveyed and redistributed among church and state functionaries which led to the emergence of a class of Kistane tenants.[23]

The administration of the *aset*-growing highland areas was performed by two layers of officials. Menelik's generals, who had participated in the conquest of the area, provided the senior ranks. However, real power was in the hands of more junior officials; the state representatives called *melkegna* and the *balabbats*. The *melkegna* was a local administrator appointed by the central authorities, responsible for the maintenance of law and order, the collection of tribute on behalf of the state and the levying of troops in times of crisis. He

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[20] Bahru, 'The Aymallal,' p.25.

[21] Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1974*, (London: James Currey 1991), pp.60-61.

[22] Interview, *Ato* Balcha, *Ato* Bekele, *Ato* Deyu, Jimma, June 1997, *Ato* Feyisa, Shashemene, June 1997, *Ato* Sima, Kistaneland, June 1997.

[23] Markakis, John, *Anatomy of a Traditional* Polity (Addis Ababa: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp.112-3 and Mahteme Selassie Welde Mesqel, *Zekre Neger (Remembrance of Things)* (Addis Ababa: 1968), p.233.

personally also received tribute and services from *gebbars*.[24] Given the scarcity of resources and the limited capacity of the state, however, Ethiopian officials were highly reliant on the *balabbats*. In Kistaneland, as we have seen, the *balabbats* were Oromo who owed their position primarily to military supremacy in the early nineteenth century. One of the principal duties of the *balabbat* was to facilitate the extraction of dues and services, the nature of which was determined by the central authorities or the *melkegna*. Ordinary residents on unsurveyed land in Kistaneland, as in other parts of the conquered territories, were made to pay tribute in form of *kutre gebbar*.[25] Tribute was theoretically based on the number of families and animals and the quality of the soil. It was paid in the form of honey, butter, salt, grain or flour, *gesho* (a condiment used in the preparation of beer and mead), *biqil* (malt) and sometimes sheep. The peasant also performed tributary labour. Later, following the introduction of fixed money rent in 1929, Kistane peasants were forced to pay dues in cash.[26]

The destabilising influence of tribute appropriation was particularly evident in these *aset*-cultivating areas. As producers of grain and some cash crops, tenant farmers in the cereal cultivating areas were able to pay the tribute demanded by the landholders. By contrast, no market existed for the *aset* grown by the *gebbar*, and *aset* was alien to the consumption patterns of northern officials. Attempts to generate cash, such as exchanging *kocho* (food made from *aset*) for crops produced by the farmers in the grain-cultivating areas, failed to offer a lasting solution.[27] Kistane were likewise faced with the persistent problem of land shortage and population pressure. Farmland was becoming ever scarcer and subsistence farming alone was failing to satisfy the needs of an expanding population. Meanwhile, the importance of individual ownership of land in Kistane society was resulting in a growing problem of the sub-division of existing plots. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that the most fertile land was controlled by the Oromo *balabbats* and their Kistane accomplices.[28]

The Kistane farmer was ready to exploit every available means of getting by. Some entered into share cropping arrangements in Kistaneland and further afield (without abandoning their *rist* [hereditary] lands at home). Meanwhile, the gradual extension of the Ethiopian state provided diverse income-earning opportunities. Large numbers of Kistane, for instance, joined the Ethiopian military as *neftegna* (soldiers).[29] However, first and foremost

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[24] Tesfa Gebreyes, *Aymellel* (in Amharic), (Addis Ababa: 1994), pp.6-7; Amare Kassa, 'The Kistane community of Addis Ketema,' BA thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1985, p.18; Mantel-Niecko, Joana, *The Role of Land Tenure in the System of Imperial Government in Modern Times* (Warsawa: Wydanictwa Uniwersyteut Warszawkiego,1980), pp.162-163.

[25] A system in which government officials were assigned for their maintenance a certain number of peasants (*gebbars*) commensurate with their rank.

[26] Getnet Bekele, 'Ecology and Society: The dynamics of social and economic development in Gurage society, 1889-1984,' MA thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1992, p.101; Esete Kebede, 'A history of the Kistane (Aymallal Gurage): 1800-1941,' BA thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1982, p.22.

[27] Interview, *Ato* Dinqu, Addis Ababa, May 1997, *Ato* Mengistu, Kistaneland, July 1997.

[28] Interview, *Ato* Balcha, *Ato* Mengistu.

[29] Kistane soldiers serving under Menelik's Gurage generals such as Balcha, HabteGiyorgis and to some extent Gobena were rewarded with land in conquered territories, where many settled permanently. Sidamo, the governorship of Balcha, was, in fact, the most important destination for most Kistane. Land grants were not, however, limited to the provinces. Menelik's top officials (and by extension their close retainers, including some Kistane) were the greatest beneficiaries of imperial land grants in the capital. The relatively large concentration of Kistane in the *sefers* (settlements) of Balcha, Habte Giyorgis and Aba Koran is partly a consequence of this. Interview, *Ato* Balcha, *Ato* Denboba, Addis Ababa, April 1997, *Ato* Feyissa.

Kistane turned to labour migration as a solution to their predicament.[30] The decision to migrate was contingent upon a number of factors: the nature of land holding in the area, the qualities of the *aset* plant, and the relationship between a migrant and the rural community that he left behind.[31] The fact that the *gebbar* owned land fostered mobility. His property rights were inalienable, irrespective of whether or not he lived in, or had even visited, the community in which the land was located. As a result, migration was common amongst owner-cultivators, and by contrast, insignificant among tenant farmers. Mobility amongst *aset* cultivators was facilitated further by the unique qualities of the plant itself.[32] *Aset* is highly resistant to short-term weather fluctuations such as drought, hailstorms and frost. In addition, the plant is not damaged by a few years of negligence or postponement of labour: an *aset* plant abandoned for three or four years can be revived in one year's time with intensive work and fertilisation.[33] *Aset* was also highly durable after being harvested. It can be preserved for many years (in some cases for more than twenty) without spoilation as long as the pit in which it is deposited is opened once a year and it is refreshed with newly processed *aset* annually.[34] The nature of village social structures also had an important role to play in migration. Where kinship organisation, cooperative work societies and other village institutions played an important role in production, the migrant's family tended to benefit from mutual aid. The vitality of cooperative work arrangements and the degree of economic resilience they provide for the village economy is particularly evident in patrilocal societies such as the Kistane, where the wife takes up residence with the husband in his village. Here, the absent migrant was connected more tightly through kinship and social obligations with other men in his village, which made cooperation and aid to his family more dependable.[35] Work groups were formed between able-bodied men of neighbouring households (*gebo*) for agricultural labour, land clearing and house construction. Women's work groups (*wusacha*) were organised to process the *aset* into useful products. Hired labour was also increasingly used thanks to urban remittances. Meanwhile, leasing of land to landless kin was not uncommon.

Kistane labour migration, 1875-1935

Prior to the 1870s, movement of Kistane was predominantly local, and was principally motivated by the desire to seek land for cultivation. Menelik's conquest and attendant developments revolutionised the scale, length and form that Kistane migration took. This could occur through direct interventions by the state. For example, due to the absence of a cash crop in the *aset* cultivating areas, soon after the incorporation of Kistaneland in 1875-1876 tribute was converted into a period of labour in the Ethiopian capital.[36] Similarly, in 1929, when new tax borders were imposed, demands for ready cash redoubled and many Kistane engaged in urban petty trade or obtained wage employment in the capital.[37] However, it was the longer-term factors of land scarcity and population pressure – becoming ever

[30] Fecadu, 'Ethnic Association,' p.118; Garretson, Peter P., 'A history of Addis Ababa from its foundation in 1886 to 1910,' Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1974, p.110; Bahru, 'The Aymallal,' p.26.
[31] Interview, *Ato* Mengistu, *Ato* Taddesse, Addis Ababa and Kistaneland, July 1997.
[32] Fecadu, 'Ethnic Association,' p.23.
[33] Such neglect was rare – urban migrants usually had village kin tending the *aset*.
[34] Fecadu, 'Ethnic Association,' pp.23-4; and his, 'Traditional Social,' p.18; Getnet, 'Ecology and Society,' p.125.
[35] Fecadu, 'Ethnic Association,' p.140.
[36] Bahru, 'The Aymallal,' pp. 26-7.
[37] Interview, *Ato* Denboba, *Ato* Wolde.

more serious as time passed – that were the principal causative factors behind Kistane migration.

A clear geographic pattern of migration emerged during this second phase that persisted little changed throughout the twentieth century, with Addis Ababa, after its foundation in 1887, attracting the vast majority of migrants.[38] After having worked off their labour obligations (the required tax amounted to about 52 work days per year – one day per week) migrants were expected to return to their village. However, frequently the opportunity was taken to earn additional income in the capital. The Kistane year was divided between *aset* harvesting months in the countryside (October-February), and the Ethiopian summer (June-September), when there was little work and almost no communication with Addis Ababa due to heavy rains in both areas. Mid-February to mid-June was a slack period, when little agricultural work was conducted. During these months Kistane went to the capital to earn income. Even during the harvesting months, a combination of proximity to the capital and village cooperative work arrangements enabled many Kistane peasants to work in Addis Ababa.[39] J.G. Vanderheym, who visited Addis Ababa in 1894 indicated that Gurage (predominantly Kistane) seasonal labour migration to the capital was institutionalised as early as the 1890s. 'With the arrival of the harvest', Vanderheym observed, 'the Gurage return to Shoa, and hire themselves out by the day as unskilled workers, diggers or labourers.'[40] Similar references are to be found in the memoirs of other early twentieth century European visitors.[41]

On arrival in the capital, migrants engaged in petty trade involving the sale of food items, household utensils, firewood and cloth. [42] Others were employed as porters, quarry workers and as labourers. Indeed, by the early decades of the twentieth century manual labour in Addis Ababa had become synonymous with Gurage migrants. According to Charles Rey, a British traveller to Ethiopia in the 1920s:

> So much have they [the Gurage] become associated with the idea of manual labour in people's minds that their very name has come to be used as synonymous with "porter". And anyone wanting men for work has only to go into the street and shout "Gourage-Gourage," for a number of these useful individuals to appear.[43]

However, as time passed Kistane increasingly concentrated on trading opportunities and avoided waged employment and by the 1940s few Kistane were engaged in manual labour.[44] Kistane migration remained overwhelmingly seasonal. Most migrants preferred

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[38] Interview, *Ato* Chaka, Kistaneland, April 1997, *Ato* Feyisa, *Ato* Wolde.

[39] Garretson, 'History,' p.201; Interview, *Ato* Balcha, *Ato* Chaka, *Ato* Geda, Kistaneland, April 1997.

[40] Vanderheym, *Une Expedition avec le Negus Menelik*, p.153. The original reads: 'La saison des récoltes achevée les Gouragues se rendent au Choa [Shoa] et se louent a la journée comme manoeuvres, térrassiers ou laboureurs.'

[41] Vanderheym, *Une Expedition*, p.153; Montandon, George, *Au Pays Ghimira,1909-1911* (Paris: A Challamel,1913), p.64; de Castro, Lincoln, *Nella Terra dei Negus II* (Milan:1915), vol. II, p.320; Pankhurst, Richard, 'The Foundation and Early Growth of Addis Ababa to 1935,' *Ethiopia Observer*, 6,1, 1962, p.52.

[42] Interview, *Ato* Balcha, *Ato* Merga, April-May 1997; Vanderheym, J.G., *Une Expedition* (Paris: Librairie Hachette et cie.,1896)), p. 153.

[43] Rey, F. Charles, *Unconquered Abyssinia as it is Today*, London: Steeley Service and Co. Ltd. (1923), p.57.

[44] Fecadu,'Ethnic Association,' p.119; Pankhurst, Richard, *Economic History of Ethiopia, 1800-1935*, (Addis Ababa: Haile Selassie I University 1968), pp.49,170, 262.

to work temporarily in the town at low points in the agricultural cycle. According to Christian Sandford:[45]

> Gurage migrants usually came at the end of the rains and stayed for several months in the capital, living in groups under a chosen leader on next to nothing. At the first sign of rain they left with their earnings to till their fields, the agricultural season in their country coinciding with the slack period in the capital.

Kistane were at this time reluctant townsmen. Income earnt through petty trade or urban employment did not compensate for potential losses in agricultural output. The structure of the city also discouraged permanent settlement. Urban land ownership was highly concentrated in the hands of a small number of proprietors: state officials and property owners with close links to the imperial palace or to the aristocracy through either kinship ties or patron-client relations.[46] Thus a large proportion of the city's population, including migrants, were excluded from holding tenure. Meanwhile, living conditions for migrants in Addis Ababa were harsh – significantly worse than in the rural areas. This was principally a result of the high cost of living in the city, as reported by many European visitors. Complaining of inflation in 1906 (as reported to him by LeRoux) Martini observed that 'it was once possible to get 150 eggs with one *thaler*: now only 40, for the same price it was once possible to get 60 chickens, now only 10.'[47] High prices impacted severely on the lives of poor migrants, many of whom subsisted on no more than two or three thalers a month.[48] Accommodation was basic and over-crowded, with between six to ten – and at times as many as twenty – men sleeping in a hut the approximate size of which is said to have been not more than $4m^2$. Migrants subsisted on roasted grain, and/or on reserve *kocho* that they brought from Kistaneland, often getting by on this for weeks.[49] Despite the harsh conditions, though, Kistane continued to go to Addis Ababa. The city was not considered a home, but a place of temporary residence where tribute obligations were worked off and/or cash was earnt for use in the rural areas (to pay tax and to buy such necessities as salt, clothing and coffee).[50] In this second phase of migration, 'push' factors encouraging Kistane to leave their rural homes substantially outweighed any urban attractions luring them to the city.

Kistane migration during the Italian occupation, 1936–1941

The Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935-6 and the subsequent imposition of Italian rule in Ethiopia had a significant impact on both Kistane society and on Kistane patterns of migration and settlement. In the immediate aftermath of conquest, the breakdown of law and order in Addis Ababa initially discouraged migration to the capital. Indeed, many Kistane residing in the city, frustrated by the reigning anarchy and uncertain of the conqueror's plans, returned

[45] Sandford, *Ethiopia Under Haile Selassie* (London: 1946) quoted in Pankhurst, *Economic History*, p.49.
[46] Pankhurst, 'The Foundation,' p.52; Garretson, 'A History of,' p.208; Interview, *Ato* Balcha, *Ato* Dames.
[47] Martini, Ferdinando, *Il Diario Eritreo*, vol. IV (Vallechi Editore, n.d.), p.454. The original reads 'Una volta per un tallero si avevano 150 uova: se ne hanno ora 40, si avevano per 10 stesso prezzo 60 galline, se ne hanno ora 10.' The editor is most grateful to Giacomo Macola for this translation.
[48] Merab, *Impressions*, II, p.117.
[49] Interview, *Ato* Balcha, *Ato* Bekele.
[50] Merab, Impressions, 1922, vol. II, pp.8,13,117.

to the countryside. However, fierce resistance to the colonial administration in Kistaneland, after its introduction in 1937, destabilised the area and led to vicious reprisals that only served to enhance Italian unpopularity there.[51] It was not long before increasing numbers of Kistane once again began to make their way to the capital, where colonial order had now been asserted.

Italians were responsible for a dramatic re-organisation of space in the capital that improved the outlook for rural migrants. Widespread confiscation of property from the land-owning class occurred and the city was arranged into a number of well-defined residential and commercial zones. Rigid segregation was imposed – in line with Fascist discriminatory ideology – that resulted in separate European and Ethiopian areas.[52] Nevertheless, many resident Kistane who previously had no land rights in the capital, as well as more recent immigrants, were able to build their own houses on land allocated them in areas reserved for the indigenous population. Urban – and to a lesser extent, regional – trade boomed, and many young and energetic Kistane were attracted to Addis Ababa by the possibilities for advancement.[53] In the capital, trade was facilitated by the allocation of a large central open space to act as a market. Shops were constructed here and allocated to Ethiopian retail traders, including Kistane. Meanwhile, regional commerce was boosted by the construction of an extensive road network, providing positive linkages with the urban economy, and benefiting those indigenous merchants who dominated retail trade (notably Gurage).

Improving conditions in the capital, coupled with the disruption accompanying resistance to colonial rule in the rural areas, resulted in a substantial increase in the urban population. In 1935 there were 100,000 inhabitants in the city. Just three years later, in 1938, the number had trebled to over 300,000. Although brief, the Italian period had radical consequences for patterns of urban growth in Ethiopia.[54] In the case of the Kistane, the foundation was laid for a phenomenal increase in rural-urban migration, dictated to a large extent by the desire to exploit the enormous commercial potential of the capital, as well as, to an increasing extent, other resource rich areas of the country.[55]

The post-liberation period, 1941–1974

Following the defeat of the Italians in 1941, a substantial escalation in rural-urban migration led not only to the growth of the Kistane population in Addis Ababa, but also to the emergence of Kistane communities in towns throughout Ethiopia. By the 1950s forty-five Ethiopian towns were listed as having a major concentration of Kistane residents (first, second or third in numerical status in a given urban centre).[56] A demographic and

[51] Interview, *Ato* Bekele, Corporal Regassa, Addis Ababa, April 1997.

[52] The 'native quarter' was broken down further still into communities of Copts (Orthodox Christians), Muslims, Catholics, Eritreans, Somali and Gurage among others.

[53] Konovaloff, T.E., 'The Konovaloff Manuscript,' (Stanford: The Hoover Institution, n.d.), pp.350-51.

[54] See eg., Richard Pankhurst, 'Developments in Addis Ababa During the Italian Fascist Occupation (1936-1941), *Proceedings of the International Symposium on the Centenary of Addis Ababa*, November 24-25, 1986 (Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, 1987).

[55] Bahru, *History*, pp.164-5; Johnson Martin Eric, 'The evolution of the morphology of Addis Ababa,' Ph.D. thesis, University of California,1974, p.334.

[56] This was a loose definition used by the management body of the Alemgana-Wolamo Road Construction Association in the selection of sites for installment of its sub-committees, see Fecadu, 'Ethnic Association,' Figure III.

housing survey conducted between 1964 and 1968 reported the presence of 'Gurage-speaking' migrants in 103 out of the 201 urban centres surveyed.[57] Although in the country as a whole Gurage were significantly outnumbered by Oromo and Amhara,[58] they ranked first numerically in 6 towns (Butajira, Indibir, Meki, Teferi Kella, Welkite and Yirga Chefe – all located outside of Kistaneland), second in 12 towns (Aiysha, Alaba Kulito, Aleta Wendo, Arbe Gona, Chencha, Dilla, Dejen, Kofele, Leku, Robe, Sodo, and Zway), third in 69 towns and fourth in 15 towns. Outside of Addis Ababa 'Gurage-speaking' migrants were mainly Kistane. Fecadu attributes this Kistane preponderance to the fact that they already had well-established migration channels, and to a flourishing Kistane commercial network that provided a base from which inter-urban trade to new urban centres was launched.[59] The 1964-68 survey indicated that Kistane migration was overwhelmingly to the capital and to other resource-rich and commercially buoyant areas of the country.[60] Social factors also shaped the course and character of migration. The in-flow of migrants occurred along a chain established by early urban pioneers. Relatives, friends and neighbours would join these pioneers, obtaining accommodation and often work through them, as well as a powerful mechanism of adjustment to the unfamiliar urban context. It was not uncommon for a Kistane migrant to travel between various different towns where relatives or friends were present, until he finally settled down in a major urban centre.[61]

In the post-liberation period a complex interdependent mixture of pull and push factors was responsible for accelerating Kistane migration. Social, political, and cultural factors can be identified, although economic causes remained predominant. The long-standing problem of population pressure, coupled with a shortage of arable land, became particularly acute. While there was a significance increase in the Kistane population there was no accompanying rise in food production. The situation was exacerbated by the increasing fragmentation of landholdings, as plots were subdivided amongst relatives *ad infinitum*.[62] The Gurage region was – and remains – one of the most densely populated parts of Ethiopia. By the 1950s and 1960s there were between 150 and 240 inhabitants per square mile.[63] High population density and the nature of the land provided obstacles to agricultural innovation, such as

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[57] Imperial Ethiopian Government, Central Statistics Office, *Survey of Major Towns in Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 1968).

[58] The closest reliable census, conducted in 1984, put the Gurage population at 1,855,905 (4.4 percent): outnumbered by the Oromo at 12,387,664 (29.1 percent), the Amhara at 12,055,250 (28.3 percent), and the Tigrawai (from Tigray and Eritrea) at 4,149,697 (9.7 percent). Office of the Population and Housing Census Commission, *Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia, 1984*, (Addis Ababa 1987).

[59] Interview, *Ato* Balcha, *Ato* Bekele; Fecadu, 'Ethnic Association,' pp.141-2.

[60] For instance, no 'Gurage-speakers' were found to reside in Adwa and Assab and there were only 20 at Aksum, 150 at Gondar and 270 at Dessie constituting just 0.1, 0.5 and 0.7 percent of their urban populations respectively. These towns were located far from Kistaneland – or Addis Ababa where many Kistane resided – and, significantly, provided few commercial or employment opportunities. By contrast, there were 2930 Kistane found to be residing in Dilla, 320 in Shashemene and 1160 in Assela, representing 27, 17.5 and 8.7 percent of the urban populations respectively. These were towns rich in resources and commercial potential, which, moreover, had strong links with pre-existing long-distance Kistane trading networks. Imperial Ethiopian Government, *Survey of Major Towns*.

[61] Interview, *Ato* Bekele, *Ato* Feyisa.

[62] Fecadu, 'Traditional Social,' p.132; Interview, *Ato* Huluqa, Kistaneland, June 1997.

[63] Shack, William A. 'Urban ethnicity and the cultural process of urbanisation in Ethiopia,' in A. Southall, et al (eds), *Urban Anthropology*, (New York: Oxford University Press,1973), p.263.

crop diversification and the adoption of more intensive animal husbandry, which might have resulted in the necessary increase in productivity. *Aset* remained the principal crop for the majority of the Kistane. Whilst it was well suited to the terrain and was thus a valuable subsistence crop for rural households, *aset*'s disadvantages became increasingly clear over time. Market demand for *aset* was negligible. Even if greater commercial demand had existed, difficulties in *aset* cultivation prevented the production of a surplus for sale to meet money requirements. And as the cash nexus continued to penetrate Kistane society, these were becoming ever more onerous.[64]

The fiscal demands of the rural administration were the first of these requirements. Kistane peasants were, in the period between 1941 to 1974, paying at least four different forms of tax: the land tax proper; the tithe, which was replaced in 1967 by a graduated tax on agricultural income; the education tax; and the health tax.[65] Many migrants sought work in the urban areas to meet these demands; others moved to the towns in order to avoid payment of tax altogether (urban tax demands tended to be both lower and more easy to evade). In other areas of rural life the need for money was becoming increasingly prevalent. Commodities, which could not be produced locally, such as mass-produced clothing or household utensils, were increasingly viewed as everyday necessities and had to be bought with cash.[66] Meanwhile, social imperatives in Kistaneland were coming to require greater expenditure than could be supplied by local resources. In Kistane society accumulated wealth was periodically expended through lavish public feasts on the occasion of weddings, the acquisition of traditional titles such as *abegaz* (military commander) and *azmach* (administrator), or of holidays such as *ahirami* (the new year) and *mesqel* (the finding of the true cross). Meanwhile, the individual Kistane was expected to offer gifts (in cash, in goods or in both) to his parents and relatives (or even to friends) on several occasions during the year. Such social exigencies entailed ever-larger cash requirements.[67] Similarly, marriage payments increasingly entailed the exchange of cash, or of bought commodities such as cloth or ornaments, in place of the traditional forms of payment – *aset*, butter, grain and sheep. In the past it was the parent's responsibility to cover all marriage expenses. Increasingly, though, prospective bridegrooms were encouraged to migrate to towns to earn income.

Alongside these economic causes, the impact of social and psychological factors on Kistane rural-urban migration was also significant. For individuals whose position in the rural community had become difficult or untenable because of debts, crimes or quarrels with relatives, the city served as a refuge. Meanwhile, urban centres offered a freedom from social demands and restrictions that made rural life intolerable for many young Kistane. In the village, Kistane were forced to fulfil onerous tribute and labour requirements. By moving to town, migrants were free to choose to occupy themselves as they saw fit and thanks to their urban incomes could easily fulfil their rural obligations.[68] Urban migrants had greater occupational choice in the city. Some of the jobs available in the urban centres were not condoned in village society. In Kistaneland occupational roles were classified along the lines

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[64] Fecadu, 'Traditional Social,' pp. 19-20; Interview, *Woisero* (Mrs) Aynalem, Kistaneland, July 1997, *Woisero* Kuli, Addis Ababa, April 1997, *Woisero* Tadelech, Kistaneland, July 1997, *Woisero* Zenebech, Kistaneland, July 1997.

[65] Markakis, *Ethiopia: Anatomy*, pp. 119,121, 129.

[66] Interview, *Ato* Mengistu.

[67] Interview, *Ato* Argaw, Addis Ababa, April 1997, *Ato* Desalegn, Addis Ababa, April 1997.

[68] Interview, *Ato* Balcha, *Ato* Deyu, *Ato* Huluqa.

of the traditional highland and Christian societies of northern Ethiopia. They disdained – and at times even excluded – those engaged in low-status occupations such as smiths, tanners and wood workers. In the urban areas Kistane migrants were liberated from such restrictions, allowing them to approach all sectors of economic life with dynamic flexibility,[69] and although Kistane continued to pursue opportunities to engage in commerce most assiduously, some Kistane were still employed as blue-collar workers in small to medium-sized crafts and industries.

The urban centres also offered the opportunity for accelerated social mobility.[70] Ostentatious displays of wealth (large houses, cars and expensive clothes) and conspicuous consumption by those migrants who had made good demonstrated the benefits of migration to young and enterprising Kistane.[71] Individual success promoted inequality among the Kistane – in Kistaneland, in the urban centres, and between the two – which also indirectly influenced the rural-urban flow. Those who prospered on moving to town not only acquired urban property but also accumulated rural land holdings at the expense of poor peasants, thereby exacerbating land shortages.[72] Meanwhile, urban remittances heightened the standard of living as basic household requirements became more elaborate, increasing the cost of living in cash-poor rural communities.

Changing socio-economic conditions in the rural areas also came to have a significant impact on Kistane women, increasing numbers of whom made their way to the towns in the post-liberation period. In the early years female migration was rare. The situation changed gradually as male migrants, enjoying increasing prosperity through their commercial activities, began to opt for permanent urban settlement and brought their wives and families to the towns.[73] However, up to the Italian occupation independent migration by Kistane women remained insignificant. The absence or under-development of urban networks prior to the 1940s limited or discouraged female migration. In the post-1941 period, though, similar factors to those influencing mobility among Kistane men were also resulting in more lone (barren, divorced, unmarried and young) women making their way to the town, though not on the same scale as their male counterparts. Deteriorating social conditions in the rural areas, alongside restrictive and burdensome social roles, the consolidation of urban-rural kinship networks, and the expansion of education and transport networks all contributed to significant female out-migration to the towns. Barren women were particularly prone to desert the rural community, as without children they occupied a precarious position in village society. Widows, abandoned wives, and single women also flocked to the city, dissatisfied with the prospects of village life and attracted by relative freedom and potential prosperity in the urban centres. In the towns, migrant women engaged in petty-trading, and to a lesser extent were employed as household servants and in bars and restaurants. Others were taken as (first or second) wives by migrant kin.[74]

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[69] Interview, *Ato* Balcha, *Ato Bekele, Ato Sima.*

[70] Fecadu, 'Ethnic Association,' p.135.

[71] Interview, *Ato* Feleke, Addis Ababa, May 1997.

[72] Interview, *Ato* Asfaw, Shashemene-Addis Ababa, April-May 1997, *Ato* Moges, Shashemene-Addis Ababa, April-May 1997, *Ato* Teshome, Shashemene-Addis Ababa, April-May 1997.

[73] Interview, *Woisero* Birzo, Addis Ababa, May 1997, *Woisero* Kibnesh, Addis Ababa, May 1997, *Woisero* Tadelech.

[74] Interview, *Woisero* Gudetu, Addis Ababa, April 1997, *Woisero* Kuli, *Woisero* Muletu, Addis Ababa, May 1997.

Conclusion

Work on internal migration in both Africa and the wider developing world over the past few decades has indicated that rural-urban migration is influenced by a complex set of economic and social factors and that economic factors dominate over non-economic ones.[75] Woods and Todaro, for example, argued that the decision of individuals to migrate is the function of two variables, the gap in the level of income between city and the countryside and the probability of being employed in the town.[76] Meanwhile, Lipton observed the advantages urban dwellers (especially those in primate cities) enjoyed as a result of 'urban bias'.[77] By contrast, population pressure upon land resources has been identified as a potent 'push' factor leading to migration from many rural areas.[78] Meanwhile, demographic characteristics are also vital elements in the analysis of rural-urban migration patterns. Urban migrants in the Third World tend mostly to be young, and, in addition, disproportionately single males.[79]

Analysis of Kistane migration bears out these findings. A mixture of social, economic, and demographic push *and* pull factors resulted in increasing rural-urban migration from Kistaneland. The root cause of this phenomenon perhaps lies in increasing population density and resulting land scarcity, which appeared first in the 19th century and has been an ongoing problem ever since. However, a combination of other factors soon came to influence growing numbers of Kistane to move to the towns, not least the opportunities for economic betterment that the urban centres offered. Above all, the Kistane case demonstrates the complexity and interdependence of the causative factors behind urbanisation in developing countries.

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[75] Hanna, J. and Judith I. Hanna, *Urban Dynamics in Black Africa* (New York: Aldine Publishing Company, 1985) and Aynalem Adugna and H. Kloos, 'Settler migration causes, patterns of development and some demographic impacts,' *Workshop on Famine Experiences and Settlement in Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Institute of Development Research, Addis Ababa University, 1988).

[76] Woods, Robert, *Population Analysis in Geography* (London: Longman, 1979) and Todaro, M.P., 'A model of labour migration and urban unemployment in less developed countries,' *The American Economic Review* **59** (1): 138-48, and his, 'Internal Migration in Developing Countries: A review of theory, evidence, methodology and research priorities', *A WEP Study*, (Geneva: ILO, 1976).

[77] Lipton, Michael, *Why Poor People Stay Poor: Urban bias in world development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).

[78] For West Africa, see Little, Kenneth, *Urbanisation as a Social Process: An essay in movement and change in contemporary Africa* (London: 1974).

[79] Byerlee, Derek, 'Rural-Urban Migration in Africa: Theory, Policy and Research Implications,' *International Migration Review* **8**; Caldwell, J.C., *African Rural-Urban Migration: The movement to Ghana's towns* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1969); Rogers, A. and J. Willekens, *Migration and Settlement: A multi-regional comparative study* (Paris:1986), and Udo, R.K., 'Migration and Urbanisation in Nigeria,' *Population Growth and Economic Change in West Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press,1975). The prevalence of male migration in Africa and in other parts of the Third World has been characterised as the Afro-Asian pattern of sex selectivity. Interestingly, Ethiopia as a whole does not fit this pattern. A 1967 survey (Imperial Ethiopian Government, *Survey of Major Towns*) found that in every major town in the country except Addis Ababa there was a predominance of female over male migrants. Meanwhile, by 1978 even in Addis Ababa female migrants outnumbered their male counterparts. Curiously, though, the Kistane experience was more akin to other parts of the developing world, in that significantly more men than women opted to move to the towns. Explanations to account for this apparent anomaly include the geographical proximity of Kistaneland to Addis Ababa, the principal destination node, and to differing marital practices amongst the Kistane and other Ethiopian ethnic groups. However, more comparative research is required to shed light on this interesting question.