# Introduction

*Youth, Hope, Stratification, and Time*

I n the mornings and evenings, when the sun does not burn with such an extreme intensity, the street corners of Jimma, Ethiopia, are crowded with unemployed young men. They stand with their hands in their pockets sharing gossip, cracking jokes, and occasionally tossing out a mild insult at a passerby. These young men often joke that the only change in their lives is following the shade from one side of the street to the other with the passing of the sun. In neighborhoods with more commercial activity, the unemployed share the streets with young men working as shoeshines, barbers, bicycle mechanics, minibus touts, and petty traders. These two populations, working and unemployed young men, both negotiate a situation in which their aspirations for the future do not fit with economic realities.

In Ethiopia, it is common to use the Amharic equivalent of the word *hopeless* (*tesfa qoretewal*) to describe the condition of urban youth. Like in other Ethiopian cities, in Jimma, a city of approximately 150,000 located about two hundred miles southwest of Addis Ababa, the unemployment rate for youth with a secondary education is estimated to be close to 50 percent (Serneels 2007). Young men claim that a lack of available work is the most significant barrier to attaining their aspirations. To be hopeless, one must have previously had hope. The Amharic phrase *tesfa qoretewal* expresses this clearly.[1] It literally means "hope is cut." The notion of hope being cut evokes an image of hope existing as a thread linking the present to the future. Hope is necessarily temporal in the sense that it is always fulfilled in the future. Progress is the process of moving toward hope with the passage of time. When hope is cut, one's relationship to the future changes. Progress no longer takes place. The connection

to the future is severed, and one's future becomes indistinguishable from the present.

Modernization and development are hopes. They are powerful beliefs in the possibility of reaching a better world by following a specific series of steps that connect future hopes to the present. To some extent, narratives of modernization have structured the hopes of young men in urban Ethiopia. Capitalist and socialist models of industrial modernization that dominated the twentieth century attempted to bring about utopia at both the individual and collective levels (Buck-Morss 2000). The Ethiopian state sought to enact specifically local versions of these models during the latter half of the twentieth century. Revolutionary socialism touched lives in remote areas of the country during the 1970s and 1980s (Donham 1999b), and a slow process of economic liberalization has done the same beginning in the early 1990s (Ellison 2009).

James Ferguson's work (1990, 1999, 2006) represents perhaps the most extensive investigation of issues related to modernity, development, progress, and capitalism in an African context, and I engage with his ideas throughout this book. Ferguson has argued that in a context of economic globalization, narratives of progress and development in Africa have been derailed. During the past thirty years, dropping life expectancies, stagnant economic growth, and crumbling government infrastructures have become common across the continent. The magic of the free market that was intended to bring about modernization through structural adjustment policies has failed. Ferguson (1999) uses the terms *abjection* and *disconnection* to describe the experience of this process. Like the cutting of hope, disconnection implies the loss of something that was previously present.

If Africa has been derailed from a modernist narrative of progress, then this experience is especially acute for young people. Jean and John Comaroff have argued that youth is "the historical offspring of modernity," in the sense that youth represents a stage in an inevitable process of development. The Comaroffs write that youth is the "essential precondition and indefinite postponement of maturity" (2005: 19). The concepts of youth, development, and modernity are based on linear conceptions of time. Just as maturation from child to adult involves attaining a specific set of biological and social markers, becoming modern requires movement along a linear track that permits little variation. In this sense, to be a youth and to aspire to change are in some ways inseparable.

The difficulty of attaining aspirations and taking on the normative responsibilities of adults is a condition that anthropologists have identified among youth across the continent. Young men in Niger cannot access the funds to make bridewealth payments (Masquelier 2005). Youth in Zambia have little chance of finding work and obtaining economic independence (Hansen 2005). In East Africa, young men often experience their inability to take on the responsibilities of adults as crises of masculinity (Silberschmidt 2004; Weiss 2004b). In urban Senegal, underemployed young men pass their time drinking

endless rounds of tea and discussing possible futures (Ralph 2008). On the basis of her study in urban Madagascar, Jennifer Cole (2005) has argued that the social category of youth is no longer a transitional stage associated with the transformation from child to adult. When that transformation becomes impossible, then one's existence as a youth has the potential to become indefinite.

In Ethiopia, widespread urban unemployment has meant that the period in which young men exist as neither child nor adult has been extended. Young men I knew in Jimma were approaching age thirty, still living at home with their parents, unable to marry and start a family of their own. The cutting of hope for young men implies a failure to attain the social responsibilities of an adult male. This should not imply, however, that young people lack goals and aspirations. Despite the difficulty of achieving their aspirations, young men in Ethiopia wish to own a house and car, support a family, and become a respected member of the community. While changing economic conditions are acknowledged, the expectation that young people will take on the responsibilities of adults persists. In the eyes of many, to be a youth is to aspire to and dream of a better life. As one mother of an unemployed young man in Jimma put it, "Today's generation is different. They are educated, and they have knowledge about the world. Today they want so many things." Youth are perceived as both being hopeless and possessing unprecedented aspirations. These conditions are mutually constitutive rather than contradictory. It is partially the elevated ambitions of young men that cause hopelessness.

In a context characterized by both economic decline and increasing access to education and international media, this peculiar combination of hopelessness and lofty goals is common among much of the world's growing population of youth (Amit and Dyke n.d.; Jeffrey 2008). Particularly in relation to young men, anthropologists have argued that the contrast between aspiration and opportunity leads to involvement in political unrest and violence (Cruise O'Brien 1996; Diouf 2003; P. Richards 1996). If young men have no chance of obtaining employment and economic independence, then they have little to lose and everything to gain from participating in political movements. Unemployed, educated, young people were the driving force behind the 2011 political uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa. In Ethiopia urban young men are often referred to with the Amharic term *fendata*, which translates roughly as "explosive." Young men's explosions may take a variety of different forms. Students in Addis Ababa were a key force behind the 1974 revolution (Balsvik 1985; Donham 1999b). More recently, following the 2005 national election, political protests erupted into riots among primarily unemployed young men in Addis Ababa. More than ten thousand young men were arrested and detained in camps outside the city.

Eruptions of political violence such as this are certainly important, but they are also episodic. These spectacular events often attract the attention of journalists and academics, and as a result the day-to-day lived realities of youth are ignored. This book examines less visible, but no less important struggles

of young men to find work, attain economic independence, and raise a family. These quotidian experiences shed light on why youth have been at the center of recent political turmoil, but they are also important in their own right. At the core of this study is the basic question of what happens when young people are unable to attain their desires for the future. What happens when hope is cut? The struggles of young men to attain their hopes for the future are wrapped up in issues of class, status, and reciprocity, as well as space, time, and modernity. In this chapter I examine some of the connections between the particular case of young men in Jimma, Ethiopia, and broader theoretical questions. First, however, it is necessary to briefly explain the basic dynamics of youth unemployment, both in Ethiopia and in the global South more generally. The "global South" as an analytical category certainly obscures a great deal variation, but I believe it also highlights important similarities between the experiences of youth in different world areas.

## Cutting Hope: Youth and Unemployment in the Global South

For urban youth in Ethiopia, the most important barrier to the attainment of aspirations is finding employment. Among young people in urban Ethiopia, unemployment is the norm. Most are first-time job seekers, and the average length of unemployment is between three and four years (Serneels 2007). I sometimes asked youth if there is any shame associated with long-term unemployment. They were usually surprised by this question. They explained that a condition shared by so many people could not be considered shameful. At the same time, young people felt that a lack of work was at the root of their problems. Taking on the social responsibilities of adults depended on finding work. In the absence of work, long-term unemployed young men sometimes spoke of bouts of depression, asking themselves, "Why don't I work? Why do I still live with my family? For how long will this condition continue?" One young man even claimed that he had considered suicide after more than five years of unemployment.

    A stark contrast between aspirations for the future and economic opportunity is common among young people throughout much of the world, but it is particularly acute among urban youth in the global South, and as in Ethiopia, unemployment is often a primary barrier to attaining aspirations. The gap between unemployment and youth aspirations has been exacerbated by the spread of formal education that generated expectations among youth and their parents that they will find high-paying, white-collar positions after completing their education. When these jobs are unavailable, young people often choose to remain unemployed rather than take on low-status and low-paying positions. In Ethiopia, unemployment rates are actually highest among those who have completed a secondary education.

    Craig Jeffrey (2008: 743–744) divides the youth population in the global South into three broad categories that work well for the Ethiopian case. The

first category consists of youth, primarily young men, who have acquired high levels of education and are well positioned to find desirable jobs. In the Ethiopian case, youth who have completed a four-year postsecondary degree are generally able to find secure, well-paid work in the field of their training. The lack of private education in Ethiopia has meant that historically, for the successful few, education has been a means for young people to achieve rapid economic mobility. Beginning in the early 2000s high-quality private primary and secondary schools have opened in urban centers, meaning that the few young people who can afford to attend these expensive institutions are much more likely to advance to the university.

A second category of youth consists of those who do not advance to secondary school. In urban areas these young people often work for little or no pay as domestic workers or manual laborers. In urban Ethiopia, there are a disproportionate number of women in this category. They work for less than a dollar a day in positions with little or no job security. Although I examine the lives of young men working in the informal economy, for the most part the participants in my research had at least some secondary education and therefore fit better within Jeffrey's third category.

Young people with at least a secondary education but no work are increasingly common in Ethiopia and elsewhere in the global South (Cole 2004, 2005; Demerath 2003; Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffery 2008; Weiss 2009). The gap between expectations for the future and economic realities is particularly acute for these young people. Globally, among these youth there is a great deal of diversity in class background (Jeffrey 2008: 744). Despite coming from a wide range of ethnic and religious backgrounds, all but a few of the young men in my study had at least some secondary education. Most of them had finished secondary school and were unable to advance further in their education because of low scores on the national school leaving examination. Nearly all of these young men were born in Jimma, but for the most part, their parents had moved from elsewhere. None of the working young men in my study were from families that could be considered upper or middle class. The unemployed young men, however, ranged from those with wealthy parents and extensive social networks to the sons of single mothers who scrape out a living from baking bread or brewing beer. This difference in family background means that there is a great deal of variation in the long-term life trajectories of the educated unemployed.

A brief visit to one of the spaces within the city where young men gather to pass the time illustrates the diverse backgrounds of unemployed and working young men in Jimma. In the afternoons there was usually a good crowd at Haile's house. Young men sat on stools and benches in the cool shade in front of the house. Haile's family was poor, and his house was simple—a tin roof and floors and walls made of mud mixed with straw. This was the norm in urban Ethiopia, and Haile's friends, even those from wealthier families, were comfortable here. Inside the house, his sisters relaxed doing handcrafts and

sometimes making deliciously strong coffee for Haile and his friends. The area around Jimma is said to be the birthplace of coffee, and like much of Ethiopia, in the afternoon it is difficult to find a house where a clay pot of coffee is not being brought to a boil on a small charcoal stove. Coffee, however, was not the only stimulant being consumed. Outside, the young men sat in a semicircle around a pile of branches covered in green leaves. Most but not all of the young men were here to chew *khat*, a mild stimulant. The chewers occasionally grabbed fresh branches from the communal pile. They pulled off the leaves and stuffed them into their mouths, adding to the massive green ball that they were already masticating. Khat was only half of the attraction at Haile's house; young men also came for the *chewata*, literally "play," the joking conversation that is a favorite pastime for Ethiopians of all ages.

Ethnic and religious difference is a major theme in studies of Ethiopia (Donham 1986; Jalata 1993; James et al. 2002; Mains 2004), but among young men in Jimma, a number of different ethnicities and religions were usually present at any gathering.[2] On a typical afternoon at Haile's, young men of Oromo, Amhara, and Dawro descent were all present, although Amharic was always the language used for conversation. The crowd was divided almost evenly between Muslims and Orthodox Christians, but the emphasis on khat chewing meant that fewer Protestant Christians, who usually abstain from all intoxicants, were present. Class divisions often structure where young men pass their time, especially in the afternoons when khat is chewed, but perhaps because of Haile's unusual personality and the location of his mother's home in an economically diverse neighborhood, on most days, the young men I found at Haile's came from very different backgrounds.

Two of the young men I often encountered at Haile's illustrate differences among the unemployed. Habtamu lived across the street from Haile, but his house was completely different. Habtamu's house had tile floors, block walls, and a sturdy compound fence and was surrounded by a number of "service" apartments that were used as rentals or housing for domestic workers. Habtamu's father was a retired policeman, and his family's wealth was a result of three siblings living in the United States. Habtamu's brothers and sisters sent money often, and he was never without cash in his pocket. Mulugeta lived down the street from Haile and Habtamu, just a couple of minutes by foot. Mulugeta's father was a laborer at a government sawmill, and his mother worked in their home. Although his family was probably slightly better off than Haile's, in general their economic situation was the same. Both could generally be assured of having food on the table, but beyond that they had little or no access to significant economic resources. The economic differences between Habtamu and Mulugeta were not apparent at first glance. They both dressed neatly in a way that reflected their aspirations to be employed in a government office. Differences based on family wealth and social connections were, however, quite significant in structuring the economic decisions of young men,

and the intersection between class, status, and employment is one of my major areas of exploration.

## Constructing Hope: Modern Aspirations, Temporal Problems, and Spatial Solutions

Haile was a master of *chewata*, especially after he had been chewing khat. He was a strange figure in Qottebe Sefer, the neighborhood where I resided for eighteen months while conducting research in Jimma, Ethiopia. I am not sure how old Haile was, but I would guess he was in his midthirties, making him the oldest of the young men who regularly gathered on his porch in the afternoons. Unlike the other young men who generally wore clean button-down shirts or sports jerseys over loose-fitting jeans, Haile cared little for his appearance, and his clothes were often full of holes. I do not know of anyone else who was both as popular and as universally disdained among young men as Haile. It was said that he used to be a hard worker, but now he devoted his life to khat. For Haile mornings were spent under the shade of a tree waiting for a friend to pass who might lend him the money he needed for his daily bundle of khat branches. Afternoons were spent at home chewing. Haile's father was not present, and his mother was very poor. Everyone in the neighborhood agreed that Haile should be married with a family of his own and helping his mother instead of spending his time and money on khat and cigarettes. If Haile was a model that young men sought to avoid, that did not prevent them from visiting him every afternoon. His jokes, stories, and access to a shaded space out of the burning afternoon sun nearly always attracted a small crowd.

Although the young men who visited Haile in the afternoons were often critical of his lifestyle, there was a sense that they were seeing their future lives in him—unemployed, unmarried, and dependent on their parents. Many of these young men were in their late teens or early twenties. They had recently finished secondary school, and they had expected to find a good job or further education. Instead they were passing each day in the same manner as the last, moving ever closer to becoming another Haile.

The talk at Haile's house usually jumped quickly from topic to topic. On one occasion, Haile gave a detailed account of a film he had watched in the morning, offered up an analysis of differences between Ethiopian and American dogs, and then recited a proverb intended to illustrate the relationship between the rich and the poor. Haile and his friends never tired of grilling me about life in the United States. Sometimes they wanted me to confirm things they had seen in films, but most often they wanted to know how I could help them enter the United States. A young man whom I had not met before was present. He proudly showed off a receipt he carried with him that he explained was for the expenses associated with travel to an unspecified "Arab country."

This instigated a long conversation about the relative value of moving to different countries, such as Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Australia, and the United States. Everyone seemed to agree that this young man's family would have seen a far greater return on their investment by sending him elsewhere.

The young men at Haile's noted the calculus of wages versus transportation costs in relation to migration, but more importantly, they said, leaving Ethiopia was the key to experiencing "progress" (*lewt*).[3] Progress was desired above all other things, and progress be had only outside Ethiopia. Progress, put simply, is improvement over time, but there is more to it than this. Progress occurs gradually, and improvement is divided into stages. These stages are organized in a linear manner, and progress involves movement from one stage to the next. Ideally, the young men felt that life should be a series of incremental improvements, but most saw themselves in the future living with their parents and unable to marry or start a family of their own. As usual, Haile was a dissenting voice. He pointed out that the day-to-day pleasure he received from chewing khat was far more valuable for him than any long-term prosperity he might achieve by saving his money. Other young men generally denigrated Haile's prioritization of the present over the future. They argued that temporary happiness is not comparable to the value of experiencing progress with the passage of time.

Discussions about progress and international migration at Haile's house provide a glimpse into the nature of young men's aspirations for the future. The ambitions of youth are generated within specific times and places. In the Ethiopian case, policies of structural adjustment associated with neoliberal economic restructuring have drastically shifted the context in which young men seek to attain their goals. At the same time, the values that guide the aspirations and economic behavior of youth have changed with urbanization, engagement in education, and exposure to international media. The values of young men in urban Ethiopia are often constructed in relation to a specific notion of what it means to be modern. Particularly in the global South, desires to be modern are often closely related to discourses of development and an acute sense that life is better elsewhere. At the national level, in relation to infrastructural development, the future is often conceived of in terms of passing through stages that the United States and Europe have already left behind. Most Ethiopians are well aware of their nation's status as one of the poorest countries in the world, and many told me their precise ranking on recent development indexes. Young men in Jimma often claimed that Ethiopia is "backward" and that a "bad culture" prevents the progress that is found in other more developed cities and nations.

Beginning in the 1990s, *modernity* has become an important topic of discussion within anthropology. Anthropologists have critiqued linear notions of development and described multiple ways of being modern, using such terms as "parallel," "other," and "alternative" modernities in order to address this diversity (Larkin 1997; Rofel 1999; Knauft 2002a). Donald Donham describes

"vernacular modernisms" as "attempts to reorder local society by the application of strategies that have produced wealth, power, or knowledge elsewhere in the world" (1999b: xviii). Descriptions of how people living in different areas produce and engage with these strategic reorderings have proliferated, as anthropologists document the production of vernacular modernism. In response to academic analyses concerning modernity, James Ferguson (2006) has cautioned against allowing a celebration of multiple modernities to distract from issues of economic inequality and the ways that different world areas continue to be less "modern" than others in terms of economic infrastructure, health care, access to education, and the prevalence of famine and disease. He explains that although deconstructing linear models of modernization is useful, this should not obscure the lived realities of being without "modern" education or clean drinking water.

Ferguson's critique is certainly useful, but it is also important to keep in mind the importance that local understandings of being modern continue to have for the construction of values in many world areas. Ferguson is correct that anthropological analyses of alternative modernities are frequently detached from developmentalist hierarchies of status (2006: 188). However, young men's notions of what it means to be modern are based on locally specific modes of evaluation, and this has implications for the construction and attainment of aspirations. For example, the notions of occupational status that cause young men to reject certain types of work are influenced by a desire to be modern, as it is defined locally. In this sense, local modernities are key to young men's economic behavior and the reproduction or subversion of stratification. The prevalence of multiple modernities is partially responsible for shaping the specific dynamics of inequality, both locally and internationally.

In Ethiopia, the history of formal education is particularly bound up with notions of modernity and relations with the West (Zewde[4] 2002b). The expansion of government education as a means of modernization is a point of continuity across the regimes of Haile Selassie (1930–1974), Mengistu Haile Mariam's Marxist Derg (1974–1991), and Meles Zenawi's Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolutionary Front (1991–present). All have agreed that education is essential for the future of the country and devoted significant resources to the construction of schools. A belief in the transformative power of education also exists at a popular level and extends across boundaries of ethnicity, religion, gender, and class. On the basis of the experiences of earlier generations, youth who complete their schooling have specific expectations about their future employment and economic status. The process of education instills youth with a progressive, or developmentalist, sense of time. Hopes for the future are often structured in terms of a linear notion of progress—gradual improvements that follow a particular series of steps. Hope is cut when the realities that youth encounter after graduation differ from their expectations.

Like education, increasing flows of global culture have generated new imaginative possibilities for living through which youth construct aspirations

and notions of what it means to be modern (Appadurai 1996). In the African context, cinema provided a link with Europe and the United States during colonialism (Powdermaker 1962; Larkin 2008). More recently, the proliferation of cheap and easily accessed films and international television shows has had an important relationship with changing identities, spatial imagination and aspirations for the future (Fuglesang 1994; Larkin 2008; Masquelier 2009). In Ethiopia young men are the primary consumers of films, some of which are produced locally but most of which come from Hollywood and Bollywood. Conversations about films, such as those that I observed at Haile's house, are often fueled by khat. It is also quite common for the men to chew khat while watching movies. The everyday activities of consuming khat and watching films are intertwined with a particular style of conversation in which possibilities for the future are thoroughly discussed and evaluated. An examination of these day-to-day activities reveals how aspirations are constructed and how youth negotiate the gap between desires for the future and economic realities.

Young men's aspirations and their conceptions of temporal change provide the grounds for an exploration of the relationship between time, space, and neoliberal capitalism. Changing notions of time and progress in relation to industrial capitalism have been well analyzed within the social sciences (Postone 1993; Thompson 1967). It has been argued that under conditions of capitalist production, time is increasingly abstracted and rationalized. Conditions of widespread unemployment among youth in urban Africa provide the opportunity to approach this topic from a new perspective. Struggles with time among urban youth have been documented across the African continent (Hansen 2005; Ralph 2008; Schielke 2008; Weiss 2004a). The heightened aspirations associated with increased access to formal education and global media coupled with severe economic decline causes many young people to be unsatisfied with their day-to-day lives and unable to construct progressive narratives for their future. Young people in places as different as Lusaka, Dakar, Arusha, and rural Egypt speak about "simply sitting," "killing time," and having "too many thoughts." In urban Ethiopia, young men use these same idioms to describe the experience of time as an overabundant and potentially dangerous quantity.

In Ethiopia, solutions to young men's temporal problems are often conceived of in spatial terms. Although they approach the topic from different perspectives, David Harvey (1990) and James Ferguson (2006) have both argued that in a context of late capitalism, spatial strategies are increasingly prioritized over temporal processes. For example, among urban young men in Ethiopia, migration, especially to the United States through the Diversity Visa (DV) lottery, is thought to solve the problem of progressing through time. In this sense, spatial movement takes the place of temporal change. A close analysis of young men's hopes and discursive practices for migration provides insights into the relationship between space and time, but I seek to move beyond only examining space and time in relation to each other. On the basis of the Ethiopian

case, I argue that both space and time must be evaluated at least partially in terms of their implications for social relationships. Movements through time and space are important largely because of how they reposition one within relations of exchange, status, and dependency.

## Struggling for Hope: Unemployment, Class, and Status

Perhaps because of my interest in unemployment, when I was present, the conversation at Haile's house often turned to work. The consensus was usually that there was no work and therefore there was no progress or change—often stated simply as "*sira yellem, lewt yellem.*" Sometimes when I pushed this point, asking about other youth who were working, they claimed that it was impossible to work in Ethiopia because of *yiluññta*. To have *yiluññta* is to experience an intense shame based on what others may say or think about oneself and one's family (see Poluha 2004: 147). The presence of *yiluññta* is like a mosquito faintly whining in the ear. It is a reminder that others are watching and judging. One young unemployed man explained, "We would never work as a porter here. There is *yiluññta* here, and that kind of work is not respected. People will shout orders at you, and you are expected to obey. If we go abroad, we can work without being insulted. We don't care about seeing other countries, but we want to be free to work and help our families." Young men desperately wanted to work and earn an income so that they would not follow the same path as Haile, but they felt that it was almost impossible to do so because of the social pressure associated with *yiluññta*.

Understanding unemployment in Ethiopia requires exploring the balance between accumulating material wealth and prestige. Max Weber's analysis of class and status provides a useful foundation for examining the Ethiopian case. Weber defines a class situation as one in which "a large number of men have in common a specific causal factor influencing their chances in life, insofar as this factor has to do only with the possession of economic goods and the interests involved in earning a living, and furthermore in the condition of the market in commodities of labor" (1978: 43). A Weberian conception of class may include all factors that influence one's economic chances in life including education, occupation, and status. This perspective also takes into account ways of acquiring economic goods that are only indirectly related to production, such as sharing and gifts. In stark contrast to a Marxian conception of class, for Weber class is not necessarily based on relations of production.

Urban youth that I spoke to consistently expressed a desire for government employment. In his study of consumer culture in Kathmandu, Mark Liechty (2003) draws on Weber to argue that with the rise of government work, a middle class emerges in which consumption plays a greater role than one's position in the process of production in defining identity and relations of power. The growth of the middle class is associated with the movement of a large section of the population toward constructing "their social identities more around the

goods and property they own[] than the kind of work they [do]" (Liechty 2003: 15). The instability of the middle class's relationship to production means that expressing status through consumption takes on a heightened degree of importance (Liechty 2003: 18). The Ethiopian case illustrates an interesting variation on the dynamics that Liechty describes. Government employment expanded significantly as a source of work in urban Ethiopia during the twentieth century, and this represents a movement away from directly making a living through the production of goods. A Weberian conception of class is valuable in part because it is flexible enough to analyze both unemployed youth who aspire to government employment and self-employed entrepreneurs.

Weber's analysis of occupational status is helpful in understanding the often conflicting aspirations of young men in Jimma. Weber argued that occupational status is an important area of study because the status of the worker is frequently associated with the occupational lifestyle instead of the position in the process of production (1978: 54). Given the very different context in which Weber worked, his insights are surprisingly useful for understanding the Ethiopian case. He explains that "it is very often the case that all rational employment of a gainful kind, especially entrepreneurial activity, is regarded as disqualifying a person from high status" (1978: 52–53). In Ethiopia, urban young men were certainly interested in earning money, but they feared the status implications of taking on available work. On one hand, money is necessary to consume, to attract a girlfriend or wife, and to support one's family. In the sense that it shifts one's position within social relationships from one of dependence to offering support to others, money is necessary for young men to become an adult. On the other hand, discussions of *yiluññta* at Haile's house demonstrate that regardless of earning power, the symbolic dimensions of one's occupation, as a government employee or otherwise, are a key factor for construction of identity.

The relationship between class and status is well developed in the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1984). Bourdieu introduces the concept of cultural capital to explain the relationship between taste, prestige, and the reproduction of class. Put simply, cultural capital consists of signifiers of class, such as taste in music, fashion, or style of speech. Possessing cultural capital allows individuals to create social networks that provide access to economic capital. For Weber and Bourdieu, status, or distinction, is associated with elites. Economic capital is secured through the possession of cultural capital.

A variety of ethnographic studies support an elaboration of Weber and Bourdieu's work through examinations of disjuncture between class and occupational status (Bourgois 1995; Freeman 2000; Kondo 1990; Paules 1991; Willis 1977). This work presents detailed examinations of how prestige or non-material advantages lead individuals to accept or even seek out occupations in which their class position is compromised. For example, in Paul Willis's (1977) classic study of working-class young men ("the lads") in 1970s England, "the lads" desired factory jobs because this type of work supported the fulfillment of locally valued masculine norms. In other words, working-class jobs gener-

ated status within the lads' subculture. Cultural capital did not translate into economic capital; rather, it led working-class young men to take working-class jobs.

An interesting variation on the relationship between status and class has been documented among unemployed young men who move between urban Congo and Paris (Friedman 1994; Gondola 1999; MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000). These "sapeurs" invested a great deal of time and resources in acquiring signifiers of prestige in the form of high-fashion clothing. Cultural capital is accumulated through clothing, and in contrast to "the lads," this capital is recognized beyond the subculture of La Sape and appreciated globally. The cultural capital of high fashion does not, however, translate into significant economic gain. Although the sapeur becomes a CEO in his dream world, this does not translate into concrete shifts in his class position (Gondola 1999). These studies demonstrate that cultural capital may constitute an intrinsic source of inequality and need not be translated into economic capital.

I build on these studies by examining the construction of hierarchies of class and status as both independent and interrelated sources of inequality. In urban Ethiopia, young men avoid stigma by remaining unemployed, and they earn money by accepting the stigma associated with particular occupations. The experiences of urban youth demonstrate the continued importance of work as a source of identity. In contrast to many recent analyses of contemporary youth cultures that place great emphasis on consumption, a close examination of unemployed young men and those working in the informal economy demonstrates the importance of the symbolic dimensions of work for positioning one within relationships and the formation of young people's identities.

## Hopeful Exchanges: Reciprocity, Development, and Emerging Forms of Stratification

The balance between class and status may be partially conceived of as an exchange. Unemployed young men exchange the potential income they could earn through working in stigmatized occupations for the maintenance of prestige. Although this conception does provide some insight, such a simple divide between status and income is quickly complicated by the concrete realities of reciprocity in urban Ethiopia. All young men were embedded in complex networks of reciprocity, but unemployed young men received particularly valuable gifts in the form of cash handouts and invitations for khat, meals, and other small items. In some cases the value of gifts received by unemployed young men actually exceeded the incomes of young men working in the informal economy. The Amharic proverb "*Sew be sew teshome*" demonstrates the importance of social relationships for attaining one's aspirations. The proverb literally means that one person improves by another person and implies that the fulfillment of hope is inseparable from social relationships.